

APR External Evaluation Committee Report
Department of Defense Analysis

The GSOIS Dean charged the external evaluation committee of three with the responsibility to analyze the educational and research programs in the Department of Defense Analysis focusing on academic quality, the uniqueness of the program in comparison with educational opportunities at civilian universities, and on the characteristics and outputs of the curricula and research programs, faculty, support staff, and other resources provided for instruction and research. During its two-day tenure, the committee was further charged with analyzing how well the Defense Analysis Department interacts with its sponsors and to determine whether NPS is organized appropriately to adequately support the Department and if the strategies of NPS and the Department are congruent.

The committee, consisting of Drs. Carnes Lord, Victor Davis Hanson, and Patrick Geary, visited the Defense Analysis Department 16-17 April 2012. Previously the members had reviewed the Department's self study and the report of the team from the Naval Special Warfare Command prepared in 2011. During the review the committee members met with leadership, faculty, and students of the Department. The committee's unanimous conclusion is that the Department is an outstanding teaching and research unit providing a unique and cutting-edge education to NPS students. No civilian or military entity even begins to compete with it in its primary specialty, irregular warfare and special operations.

This report will divide its findings as per the Dean's Charge into Strategy, Academic Programs, Faculty, and Resources and Organizational Support. It will conclude with a series of recommendations.

Strategy

The mission of the department is to arm select US and international military professionals and interagency personnel with the critical thinking skills and specialized knowledge that they will need for waging and prevailing in the complex irregular conflicts currently under way—and those to come.

The Department's strategic plan is straightforward:

First, it seeks to recruit and sustain a diverse, high-caliber faculty educated in leading civilian universities, to evaluate and develop their teaching skills through a combination of student evaluations, in-class observations, and active mentoring; to link them to the principal department sponsors (SOCOM and USD/P) as well as other appropriate funders; and to structure their work load such that they can sustain high levels of scholarly activity, measured by regular contributions to peer-reviewed journals, authored and/or edited books, and official reports and other writings and publications. The committee appreciates the paradox that, while the criteria for evaluating department faculty are analogous to those in civilian universities, the Department of Defense

affiliations of the department, the often classified nature of its work, and the special circumstances of teaching a student body of military officers often present unique challenges for faculty in both teaching and scholarship.

Second: its goals for its students are to create a scintillating, diverse, relevant environment by regular curriculum review and updating; by actively seeking ways of diversifying and improving the quality of its student body, while maintaining a class average of between 150-170; and by maintaining high standards of academic achievement, culminating in the production of a thesis that can often exceed 100 pages. There can be no question that these students earn their MS degrees.

The department has set a series of specific goals in order to meet these strategic objectives, including growing the Joint Information Operations curriculum by encouraging more Navy, Marine and international student participation; deepening ties to sponsors, combatant commands and other field organizations by the development of short-course instruction and classified level support of field activities; and by continuing networkbuilding activities. ~~The Department has determined, rightly in our view, that initiatives such as a PhD or Distance Learning options are not consistent with its strategic goals.~~

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The committee found the mission statement exactly appropriate for the premier graduate program designed for the Special Operations Community, and strongly supports the strategies that it has selected to carry out this mission. As an institution of higher learning, the essential component of the program must be education rather than training, imparting to its students and modeling in its faculty the highest level of critical thinking that is facilitated by rigorous instruction in research, analysis, and problem solving.

In particular, the committee members were impressed with both the diversity and the quality of faculty as measured by their educational backgrounds and broad records of research and publication. The committee also found the close relationship between the Department and its sponsors, particularly SOCOM, to be a valuable way to push out the results of rigorous analysis and innovation into the field.

At the same time, the committee regrets that some of the objectives stated in the strategic statement, specifically the introduction of Marines into the program, have not yet been realized, even as it recognizes that resolution of this issue is out of the hands of the Department itself. The committee also wishes to encourage a wider diversity of international students in the program, particularly from major European allies such as France and the United Kingdom, and perhaps other countries that have had considerable experience in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations such as Australia and Israel. In this regard, the committee appreciates the reality that such decisions are often in the hands of the Department of Defense and the foreign militaries in question, but suggests that the department might wish to explore more effective avenues of lobbying and outreach to ensure a wider foreign student participation.

Academic Programs

To fulfill its mission the department includes two graduate curricula, one in special operations and irregular warfare (SO/IW) and the other in joint information operations (IO). It also houses Senior Service School-equivalent resident fellowships, two from the Army and one from the Air Force, a National Intelligence Chair filled by a CIA officer, and a Special Operations Chair filled by an active duty Colonel assigned to SOCOM with duty at NPS. The fellows participate in courses and in addition may offer directed study opportunities to students, while pursuing their own research agendas. The National Intelligence Chair and the Special Operations Chair teach in the regular curriculum. The Department also runs the Common Operations Research Environment (CORE), a laboratory in which advanced network analysis methodologies are developed for application in irregular warfare, and research is pursued both in open and in classified environments.

The committee was uniformly positive about the breadth and diversity of courses offered in the two curricula, as well as the quality of instruction being offered. Interviews with students confirmed that they are extremely pleased with the education they are receiving and with the patience and dedication that they experience in all of their instructors. The committee also strongly supports the Fellows Program, and would like to see this expanded to Navy and Marine officers.

The committee's evaluation of the academic programs reached the following conclusions:

First, the degree requirements are extremely heavy and rigorous. Students must complete 24 courses as well as a thesis within 18 months. There are four required courses: a three-course math sequence and a required course in research methodology. Actually, for virtually all of the students, four more PME courses are required for their career development, limiting the room in their course of study for electives or concentration. It should be noted that two of these PME courses must be taken as overloads.

Second, the committee noted some faculty discontent about the math sequence. Some expressed concern that the courses stressed the mathematics of modeling and game theory over the kinds of analysis needed to support the CORE lab. Others more generally pointed out that in spite of the commitment to three math courses, very few theses incorporated any quantitative research. However, discussion with the students provided a different perspective: students reported that the introductory math courses are in fact beginning to incorporate study of the methodologies (such as multivariate regression analysis) needed to support network analysis. In addition, students confirmed that even if they did not intend to apply mathematical tools in their thesis research, these courses taught them to think more analytically and systematically and were therefore valuable tools, particularly when returning to the classroom years after graduation from undergraduate studies. The committee had some concern that those students who were not college math and science majors, and in some cases do not employ math in their present billets, would find the immersion into college-level math inordinately difficult. A

few students voiced such concerns, but apparently not to the degree that might necessitate a two-tier track system for the mathematically prepared and those less so.

Third, the committee noted the small number of students enrolled in the IO curriculum, and in particular the absence of Navy students there. The problem appears to the committee to lie in the Navy's different and more limited understanding of IO and the lack of a fully developed IO career track, and thus the perception that such an IO curriculum will not prepare graduates for future assignments. The committee shares the Department's sense that this curriculum provides valuable education, and hopes that the Department will succeed in its efforts to educate the Navy about the importance of full-spectrum IO for future war fighting.

Fourth, the committee noted problems in the supervision and structure of theses. Theses range in length from 50 to 200 pages – often turning into enormous and excessive burdens on students. At the same time, thesis teams have grown to as many as four or five students, making evaluation of individual effort and contribution difficult. Finally, there is a wide disparity in the number of theses directed by individual faculty: some, particularly the mathematicians, direct very few if any; other faculty may find themselves directing as many as ten. Lastly, there seems to be some tendency for faculty who are less productive scholars to direct more theses. The committee strongly recommends that a maximum length be set for the MS thesis. It applauds the recent decision of the Chair to reduce the size of teams to two students per thesis; and it supports the determination by the Chair to require his permission for faculty who wish to accept more than four thesis supervisions. It notes that those faculty who are the busiest and more productive often are precisely those advisors most critical for student scholarship, both because they understand best the nature of publication, and de facto become the most valuable in aiding students' subsequent academic efforts.

Faculty

The faculty is a superbly selected group of diverse men and women with national and international reputations in their professional fields who share a dedication to the mission of the Department. We consider this department's faculty superior on the whole to that of any other military institution, including the Naval War College, and while there may be individual faculty in similar fields who are comparable at civilian institutions, there is no department in any institution that combines this rich mix of specializations. We reach this evaluation based on:

1. Education. Their doctorates are from the leading institutions of higher learning in the country. None are in-house PhDs.
2. Publications. The faculty publishes regularly in standard peer-reviewed journals and produces an impressive number of highly regarded and widely noted books, both specialized and of broader interest to those outside the field of special operations.
3. Senior faculty members carry great weight with the leadership of SOCOM and other key military organizations, and thus their research and analysis reaches the specialized audience that is most important for its implementation. There is a real

sense that faculty scholarship is not just theoretical, but is seen as pragmatic and of real-time utility by all branches of the military.

4. Faculty are absolutely committed to students. All of the DA faculty teach; many readily take on directed studies groups which can amount to additional courses; and, regardless of their work-load or other obligations, students report that they are always available and always willing to assist them. Student satisfaction with the faculty is uniformly high.

Nevertheless, the committee did note some problems with the faculty that may increase the challenge of completing their mission and projecting their mission into the future.

The most important challenge is the excessive work load. At NPS the average class size is 12-15 students; in some courses and departments the number hovers even lower. The average class size in DA, however, is 24 students. This is simply unacceptable given the demands on faculty for research, advising, and other professional obligations. The committee notes that the Department does not have a significant number of part-time or adjunct faculty, so the teaching load affects permanent faculty a great deal. It also observes that most civilian institutions that offer graduate degrees regularly utilize research and graduate students from the graduate student body; the Department, however, given the nature of NPS, is in a paradoxical position of asking faculty to read Master theses--some of them as long as many PhD dissertations in other universities—without commensurate graduate student support for teaching and research.

Second, as noted above, the advising workload is not uniformly distributed. While all faculty teach and all are available to students, some areas of study naturally draw more students. A greater effort should be made to distribute the work load.

Finally, the demographics of the department are such that if there are not a regular series of hires of younger and mid-career faculty, the Department could face serious shortfalls as the founding generation moves toward retirement. The committee appreciates the present desirable ratio between permanent and adjunct faculty, but worries that without steady hires, greater reliance on part-time hiring will be inevitable.

Resources and Organizational Support

The NPS has provided a supportive environment for the Department since its inception, and has regularly allowed a modest expansion of faculty as its role in the Special Operations Community has grown. The department is now arguably the most profitable and fastest growing in the School and, in addition to educating and graduating its 170 students per year, draws many more students to its courses -- students whose presence in DA courses is not adequately reflected in the Department's statistics. The Department's contributions to the educational mission of NPS are thus twofold: it is a rapidly growing major program, but it is also a service department providing important instruction to students from other departments at NPS.

The committee is concerned that some structures and policies, deriving both from NPS administration as well as from its sponsors, adversely affect the Department's ability to meet its goals. In this regard, the committee again emphasizes that in the post-9/11 decade of greater emphases on counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, asymmetrical warfare, and new threats from cyberwarfare, the Department's mission is extraordinarily relevant to the current security of the United States, and will probably grow even more so in the ensuing decades when unconventional warfare and IO will become even more complex and ubiquitous.

The briefing by NPS administration emphasized the Navy-centric nature of its forthcoming mission statement. Currently Navy personnel make up less than 50% of enrolled students, and even with Marines the number remains below 60%. A department such as DA, which serves a joint command and draws its students largely from the Army, international friends and allies, and the Air Force, does not seem sufficiently accounted for under such a mission statement. This may simply be a problem of rhetoric, but the paradox does seem to have echoes in the unusually high course sizes in its curricula, as noted above (average class size over twice that of the NPS norm). The committee was also concerned that the roughly 30% of classified research conducted by DA faculty be given proper weight in decisions concerning tenure and promotion as well as in the allocation of NPS resources. It was further concerned that the structure at NPS for funding research remains an engineering model ill-suited to the kind of long-term research conducted by DA faculty.

Beyond the level of NPS, the committee was concerned that although the Department of Defense Analysis is the preferred masters' program for educational development of SOF officers, to date no Marine officers have ever entered the program. Nor have the Navy or the Marine Corps participated either in the Senior Service School-equivalent resident fellowship program or provided an active duty SOF officer as instructor. Finally, the number of SEAL students remains relatively low. While the committee recognizes the extraordinary demands of the current operational tempo on elite forces, it is concerned about the depth of commitment of the Navy and the Marine Corps to this program.

Recommendations

The committee offers a few specific recommendations:

1. Additional FTE should be provided to reduce average class size.
2. The Department should ensure that the advising load is more equitably distributed.
3. Consideration should be given to new approaches to mitigating the burdens on faculty generally and facilitating faculty research. This might include, for example, a sabbatical program, perhaps based on a system of compensation for overloads in teaching or advising (one way to deal with the unequal distribution of thesis advising).
4. More international students, particularly from NATO allies such as France, should be recruited and funding streams should be developed to cover tuition.

5. The math curriculum should continue to reflect both training in analytic thinking and the needs of developing areas such as the CORE lab.
6. The committee strongly urges the Department to institute a regular polling of graduates four or five years out of the program to determine what aspects of the educational experience they found most useful or where positive changes might be made in curriculum.
7. The committee applauds the addition of the 18A MILFAC position on the faculty. However, given that this officer must complete his doctoral dissertation while teaching, he or she should not be expected to carry a full eight- or even six-course load, and, in turn, this reduced course load should not negatively impact the Department's FTE allocation.

Respectfully submitted

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