I. Recommendations

1. NPS leadership must establish institutional policies that define the scope and nature of student barriers to learning and identify roles and responsibilities for determining and implementing appropriate accommodations at each level of responsibility, e.g., Office of the Dean of Students, Program Officers, and faculty. These policies should include points of contact, established processes, record-keeping, and outcome evaluation.

2. NPS leadership must provide necessary manning and funding for the Dean of Students’ office to hire a Student Support Manager who will act as a single point of contact to advise on and implement NPS policy regarding the accommodation process; monitor student progress; maintain appropriate records for institutional knowledge; and evaluate policy effectiveness. Position and resource recommendations can be found in Appendix B.

3. The Student Support Manager, as part of the Dean of Students’ office, must conduct further research into the nature and scope of difficulties students may be experiencing as they adjust to the demands of academic, family, and ordinary life while studying at NPS.

4. The Provost must develop policies, including training as necessary, to support faculty who work with students who need learning accommodations, special tutoring in subjects such as math and statistics, and other kinds of academic support. Faculty support and, therefore, funding for faculty will be required for tutoring services. Resource recommendations can be found in Appendix B. Students who are returning from deployment may require particular kinds of help that faculty are not trained to offer. The current ad hoc nature of accommodation puts an undue burden on faculty and program officers to adjudicate student needs and determine adequate accommodation.

5. The Human Enhancement and Research Group (HERG), established in the Defense Analysis department by COL John Crisafulli specifically for Special Forces officers, is a viable model for evaluating, assisting, and accommodating students who have recently returned from deployment (see Appendix A). Under such a program, the Dean of Students’ POC for student accommodation (as recommended in item 3) would consult with HERG to find the right resources for each student who requires special support.

6. The growing body of international students at NPS represents another sector that often struggles to meet NPS’s rigorous academic environment while also adapting to an unfamiliar culture and English as a second language. The International Graduate Program Office must establish regular policies and procedures for faculty and POs who work with international students seeking accommodation and academic support.

II. Project Overview

NPS has a stake in the success of its students in terms of both the NPS education and training mission and the DoN force enhancement mission. To promote an inclusive campus and
reduce barriers to working and learning for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities, we initially proposed a multi-part project that would focus on members of our community who identify as having a disability and/or who may require certain accommodations to succeed in their work. The overall goal was to develop a better sense of the scope of accommodation needs, understand how NPS currently supports these individuals, and identify what can potentially be done to provide better support, if needed.

Because the term “disability” covers a very broad range of physical limitations, emotional challenges, and learning difficulties, and an equally broad range of possible solutions, we anticipate that this will be a multi-part project. This report summarizes the approach used in the first phase of the project and the results.

We chose to focus the first part of the study on the NPS student population. Due to the majority of NPS students being active-duty military, they are not expected to have a diagnosable disability. However, during our research, it became clear that many of them experience barriers to learning that would benefit from some type of accommodation in order to be successful in their academic work.

We identified three primary goals for our research, outlined below.

III. Research Methodology

1. Understand the Scope of the Problem
   a. We initially planned to develop an anonymous survey for the current NPS student body and consulted with the Dean of Students to develop such a survey. However, it became apparent that we were likely to get more accurate information from interviews with Program Officers (POs) and other staff and faculty who deal directly with student needs. These individuals have historical knowledge as well as first-hand experience with students facing barriers to learning. Many of them also know about current policies and procedures. We also considered the potential hesitation of students to self-report learning obstacles, even in an anonymous survey.
   b. At the invitation of the current Dean of Students, CAPT Brandon Bryan, we attended a regular Program Officers’ meeting, facilitated by CDR Michael Hooten, Deputy Dean of Students, to discuss common barriers to learning, processes for addressing student needs, and the difficulties POs face in their efforts to find accommodation.

2. Determine What Policies and Procedures Currently Exist to accommodate students with barriers to learning
   a. We reviewed the available NPS policy and procedure documentation to see where we could identify gaps and potential needs.
   b. The Special Needs and Reasonable Accommodation webpage appears on the Graduate Writing Center website. [https://nps.edu/web/gwc/special-needs-reasonable-accommodation](https://nps.edu/web/gwc/special-needs-reasonable-accommodation) The resources listed under the various headings are
DoD or national-level websites. The only NPS-based resource relates to technology enhancements from ITACS.

3. **Determine Who are the Primary Points of Contact** for students who seek accommodation, and how those individuals or offices help students meet their academic requirements.
   a. We consulted on Teams, over email, and in person with experts and officials on campus, between February 2021 and May 2022 to better understand the scope and nature of student barriers to learning at NPS, and to learn what policies, procedures, and programs currently exist to accommodate student needs. While we began the interview process with a list of people, such as the Dean of Students, who play a clear role in or have direct knowledge of how student needs are met, the choices of whom to consult developed organically, as one discussant pointed to others who could potentially be useful sources.
   b. Primary Consultants
      - CAPT Markus Gudmundsson, former Dean of Students
      - CAPT Paul Rasmussen, former Program Officer, National Security Affairs
      - CAPT Brandon Bryan, Dean of Students
      - Dr. Sandra Leavitt, founder and director of the Graduate Writing Center
      - Col. John Crisafulli, former SOF Chair, Department of Defense Analysis, and Eric Stone, POTFF/HERG

IV. **Findings**

1. **Scope of the Problem**
   a. Over the course of our conversations with staff, faculty, and program officers, some common themes emerged:
      - Too many students are not prepared for the NPS environment
      - Life events and family issues are the most common obstacles to learning
      - NPS does not have standards or policies for faculty response: POs can request accommodation for a student, but the response is up to the individual instructor
      - If faculty are approached with a request for accommodation, they do not have any guidance on adhering to that request
      - POs have no policy or system to rely on when they seek to assist a student in identifying the student’s need and finding accommodation
      - International students can face an even greater degree of isolation and uncertainty than US students
   b. There are common, significant barriers to learning across the NPS student population. The need may be undercounted and unrecognized. The need for accommodation is much less than it would be for a non-military university, but it is still significant. Former Dean of Students CAPT Markus Gudmundsson noted that “in my three-plus years here [at NPS], we have supported hundreds of students with specific challenges. No two are exactly alike.” Common barriers include health issues (e.g., undiagnosed/undisclosed trauma, PTSD), life events (e.g., pregnancy), and family difficulties (e.g., lack of secondary caregiver,
marital stress). These difficulties are often not anticipated by incoming students and may not appear until their second or even third quarter at NPS. Responsibility to communicate needs rests entirely with the students, who may have concerns about these issues being formally documented in their record.

c. Unanticipated educational demands at NPS can magnify existing challenges and increase student stress to concerning levels. Other commands that send students to NPS often don’t have a clear understanding of what NPS does and what it requires of students. Some students are assigned to Monterey following deployment, on the assumption it will be a “rest and rehab” billet for them and their families. As a result, many students arrive unprepared for the rigorous academic demands of the graduate programs.

d. Despite the official expectation that all students arrive at NPS physically fit and equally ready and able to learn, this is not the case, according to some of our interviewees. This expectation also makes it difficult for students to request help. At least one consultant reported that “mental health issues are common” in their department. Others noted that some incoming students may not have the social and/or educational background they need to succeed; this may not be clear at first. Many concurred that “family life” issues are a frequent source of stress for students and can lead to academic failure. Isolation was a word that came up in several conversations.

2. Policies and Procedures
   a. POs have no official policy, process, or system to rely on, and typically address student needs ad hoc. They work with the student, faculty members, and Dean of Students’ office on a case-by-case basis, relying on shared knowledge rather than institutional knowledge. In the absence of established policies, they have no official guidance on how to address student needs, nor do they have authority to compel faculty members to accommodate students. As a result, individual students’ experiences can vary widely depending on the Program Officer and faculty members they are working with.

   b. International students can face the same obstacles that US students do, in addition to the unique challenges that come with being in a foreign country and are often even less likely to seek help. Many aren’t familiar with US military institutions and may not know where to go for support.

   c. It is notable in this context that the NPS official webpage for Special Needs and Reasonable Accommodations (SNRA) appears on the Graduate Writing Center website: (https://nps.edu/web/gwc/special-needs-reasonable-accommodation). The coaches of the Graduate Writing Center have emerged as a frontline resource for students, and often take on the role of supporting students who have barriers to learning. This is not an official responsibility of the Center, however. Although the staff do their best to help students find needed support, these efforts often encroach on their work as writing coaches.

   d. The Resources section of the SNRA webpage does not include any resources provided directly by NPS, other than technology.
e. The unique status of NPS as a military facility and a largely civilian-run educational institution leads to gaps between expectations and support. The fact that NPS has no formal policies and procedures in place for accommodating students with barriers to learning reflects this unusual status.
Appendix A: Human Enhancement and Research Group (HERG) as a Model for Student Evaluation, Support, and Accommodation

POTFF was founded by COL Crisafulli in the Defense Analysis department to assist special operations officers who have recently returned from deployment in integrating, or in some cases, reintegrating into academic and family life. Services include personal counseling, physical training and rehabilitation, and assistance with barriers to learning. There is apparent interest in expanding this program outside DA. Funding currently is the main barrier. Excerpt from the 21 July 2021 Memorandum for Record:

“The function of the HERG is to serve as a center for research and innovation in the field of human enhancement. This directly supports OPNAVINST 5450.210E, directing NPS to provide research programs to increase the combat effectiveness of commissioned officers. As a medium to provide the highest quality, defense focused programs of education and research, the HERG emphasizes on applied research within the domains of behavioral, cognitive, physical, ethics of war, moral and cognitive dissonance, organizational psychology, and personal leadership development.”

One purpose of the HERG is to “facilitate student physical, cognitive, and behavioral enhancement.” While this program is designed specifically for Special Operations personnel who join the DA department post-deployment, aspects of it could potentially serve as a model for accommodating the needs of other members of the NPS student body who are dealing with service-related and other barriers to learning.

The HERG proposes a Life Strategy Counseling Center, whose primary mission is “to produce future leaders with advanced cognitive and behavioral agility/resiliency, identify ethics of war, and prevent/decrease mental health challenges beyond NPS.” Programs would include “action-oriented, educational, cognitive and behavioral/training/coaching/counseling,” and “Individual and family counseling/coaching addressing academic and family adjustments, marriage dynamics, parenting, academic advising, peer tutoring.”
Appendix B: Resource recommendations associated with positions for student support

- Student Support Manager
  - Based on research of like positions and consultation with the NPS Human Resources Office, recommended funding requirements for the Student Support Manager is $126,000 per year. It is necessary to note that this position and pay grade has not been established, and “Student Support Manager” is only a proposed title.

- Faculty support for special tutoring
  - Faculty could be a resource to provide special tutoring, but labor funds would be required. Recommendation would be to provide one-class equivalent per quarter for tutoring that could be split between faculty members. At the maximum faculty rate, this would be approximately $32,500 per quarter.