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Students and professors at Marine Corps Command and Staff College currently have the option to support the service's objectives but it is not a requirement. Some special projects tap into the intellectual capital of the student body with isolated working groups but are irregular and only leverage small portions of the student body and faculty. Marine Corps University and the Naval War College used their professional military education students to complete priority projects for their respective services. This approach benefitted the service by leveraging significant unconstrained manpower. The students also benefited from a real assignment that naturally motivates students and is highly applicable to follow-on assignments. Civilian educational theories like experiential learning and cooperative education demonstrate the value added to students with this type of approach. Marine Corps Command and Staff students should be used as a workforce for assignments that align with service priorities to ensure the Marine Corps achieves appropriate return on investment and meets the Commandant's intent of increasing the rigor of professional military education.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

Using Marine Corps Command and Staff Students as a Workforce

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**AUTHOR:**

Major Douglas S. McDonough

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Using Marine Corps Command and Staff Students as a Workforce

**Author:** Major Douglas McDonough, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The Marine Corps should directly task Marine Corps Command and Staff College with priority projects as a portion of the curriculum. This would ensure an immediate and measurable return on the investment made in resident professional military education while providing a realistic and challenging educational experience for the students.

**Discussion:** Students and professors at Marine Corps Command and Staff College currently have the option to support the service's objectives but it is not a requirement. Some special projects tap into the intellectual capital of the student body with isolated working groups but are irregular and only leverage small portions of the student body and faculty. Marine Corps University and the Naval War College used their professional military education students to complete priority projects for their respective services. This approach benefitted the service by leveraging significant unconstrained manpower. The students also benefitted from a real assignment that naturally motivates students and is highly applicable to follow-on assignments. Civilian educational theories like experiential learning and cooperative education demonstrate the value added to students with this type of approach.

**Conclusion:** Marine Corps Command and Staff students should be used as a workforce for assignments that align with service priorities to ensure the Marine Corps achieves appropriate return on investment and meets the Commandant's intent of increasing the rigor of professional military education.

## DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## *Preface*

During a tour as a course director for a career-level intelligence officer course, I noticed the limitations of fake scenarios during practical application. The instructor cadre had to pull the students through the assignments only to discard all of the work at the completion of the assignment. I recalled sitting in the same classroom and trudging through similar assignments as a company-grade officer. Scenario depth and realism are always a challenge with fake scenarios but they are easily repeatable and read well in curricula because they are deemed a more advanced approach than lectures. During my time as an instructor, the primary practical application in the course shifted from a fake scenario to the development of relevant sections of a real operational plan. This approach greatly complicated the coordination and preparation for the instructors but resulted in an immediate change in student interest. We switched from pulling the students through the work to forcing them to leave late at night after voluntarily extending their academic day to dig deeper into the project. The students and instructors alike were surprised to see the value the resulting project had on operational forces. Rather than discard their work, it was presented to the units responsible for developing that operational plan. Those overtasked units expressed their overwhelming appreciation for the work. The 30 career-level students could produce impressive results in a couple weeks that would take an operational unit with competing priorities months or years to replicate. With significant effort, I believe this model can be replicated across other intermediate and advanced courses to the benefit of the service and the student.

I would like to thank my wife, Lilli, and son, Ryan, for all the support and understanding they have given me during this eventful year.

## Introduction

Professional military education is a common target when critiquing any of a number of failures within the U.S. Marine Corps. Indeed, the 38<sup>th</sup> Commandant, General Berger, highlighted the need to improve the Marine Corps' education system as a priority in his planning guidance. The Commandant specifically hopes to make Professional Military Education (PME) more "rigorous" and "rewarding" for the student.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the significant investment in time and money associated with resident PME programs. Measuring the return on investment is difficult because the only potential barometer would be to compare individual capability before and after attendance at PME. The PME graduate is, of course, improved following PME but it is unclear to what degree. The most obvious initial adjustment to Marine Corps Command and Staff College aimed at meeting the Commandant's intent to increase rigor is requiring students to complete a Master of Military Studies thesis. While this is a tangible increase in workload for the student, it does not necessarily benefit the service. This leads to the research question that is the focus of this paper: How can Marine Corps Command and Staff College improve the educational experience for its students while also benefitting the service?

Students and professors at Marine Corps Command and Staff College currently have the option to support the service's objectives through selection of a thesis research topic or participation in the Gray Scholars Program, a group of elective courses with varying topics. The relevance of research topics and Gray Scholars Program topics to service priorities varies and is merely coincidental. This is because loyalty to unrestricted, civilian learning methodology that prioritizes student interest in a topic over the needs of the service. Some special projects tap into the intellectual capital of the student body with isolated working groups but are irregular and only leverage small portions of the student body and faculty. This demonstrates recognition of

the value of that intellectual capital, but an unwillingness to fully leverage it. While civilian universities offer much to emulate for advanced military courses, they fail to capture the value inherent in an organization owning the university that educates its members. Therefore, the military should not directly imitate the practices of civilian universities that serve an entirely different purpose.

The history of Marine Corps University and its predecessor organizations demonstrates an ability to adapt to funding, personnel, and prioritization issues. The subject matter, instructional methods, and goals of the school have changed to meet the environment. One of the most significant adaptations to PME was during the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. PME adapted in a way that would meet the current Commandant's objectives by using the student population to complete real-world assignments that the service used to great benefit during World War II. Similarly, the Navy used its students to develop war plans during the interwar period that were crucial to its success in WWII. This model was an efficient use of personnel for the services that also provided a fulfilling educational experience for the student. The Marine Corps should adopt a similar model today and directly task Marine Corps Command and Staff College with priority projects as a portion of the curriculum. This would ensure an immediate and measurable return on investment while providing a realistic and challenging educational experience for the students.

Critics of introducing work projects into the educational experience may be concerned with devaluing the education experience by reducing the university to a replicated work environment. The strength of this argument depends on the degree to which professional military education transitions. The author does not recommend a substantive change in mission, educational objectives, or staffing but rather an inclusion of an educational method for a portion

of the curriculum that meets its mission while directly benefitting the service and providing a realistic, rigorous, and engaging experience for its students. The author would not support a multi-month project that forces out existing study areas and narrows the breadth of subject matter presented to students.

The methodology for this study is a review of the history of Marine Corps Command and Staff College's curriculum since its inception, an examination of two interwar case studies, and a review of relevant educational theories. The two case studies of professional military education students completing priority projects for their service offer insights into the benefit to the service. The educational theories demonstrate the benefits to the students. The author acknowledges the nature of military professional military education that is complicated by the inclusion of international and sister service students and the many competing inputs from stakeholders in military education.

### Literature Review

#### Amphibious Doctrine

There are many historical accounts regarding the development of amphibious doctrine by the Field Officer's Course in the 1920s and 1930s. These accounts track the process from the recognition of the need for amphibious doctrine to the creation of the Tentative Manual for Landing Operations over multiple course iterations. The bulk of the history focuses on the value of that doctrine to the Marine Corps during World War II and does little to address the value of that experience for the students.

One of the most recent and comprehensive studies on amphibious operations is Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman's, *On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare*.<sup>2</sup> Published in 2020, this study attempts to document amphibious

operations across multiple conflicts and actors. In a chapter focused on the Marine Corps' development of amphibious doctrine prior to World War II, Heck and Friedman concentrate on the leadership of the Marine Corps Schools in the interwar period and their efforts to improve professional military education. The authors highlight the decision to cancel some courses to allow students to develop amphibious doctrine. The authors' primary conclusion for this chapter is that the Marine Corps' professional military education during this period prepared its students effectively for World War II and other potential conflicts and benefitted the service by leveraging a large pool of talent.

In *Ideas and Direction: Building Amphibious Doctrine*, Richard Moore focuses on the creation of amphibious doctrine from a service perspective.<sup>3</sup> The author highlights the role of the Commandant in increasing collaboration between Marine education and operational units. The author attributes the successful amphibious assault at Guadalcanal to the doctrine developed by PME students. This theme of crediting Field Officer Course students for the success of amphibious operations in WWII is further supported in Raymond O'Connor's *Amphibious Warfare and Doctrinal Updates* and Henry Shelton's *Professional Education: The Key to Transformation*.<sup>4</sup> O'Connor focused on the significance of developing doctrine for one of the most intricate problems of modern warfare, amphibious operations. Shelton claims all three military services relied upon their respective schools to develop doctrine, test emerging concepts, and work on war plans. In a specific reference to the Marine Corps' limited size and budget, Shelton determines that this approach was especially necessary and beneficial. The author concludes that there is an important connection between advancing a military service and how they educate their service-members.

All of these accounts focus their assessment of the effectiveness of amphibious doctrine development on the value of the resulting product but do not evaluate the value of the educational experience for the students. Many of these accounts speak to the preparedness of the students when they later engaged in the conflicts that they worked on in school. They do not, however, address the value of the educational approach more broadly to determine if professional military students would benefit from this type of educational experience if the school chose topics that proved to be less predictive than amphibious operations in the period prior to World War II.

#### War Plan Orange

The literature that discusses the use of Naval War College students in the development of war plans during the same era is also primarily focused on the resulting product. Many senior officials within the Navy and historians specifically praise War Plan Orange and its importance in defeating the Japanese Navy during World War II. While many in the military subscribe to Helmuth von Moltke's edict that "no plan survives contact with the enemy," War Plan Orange is an apparent exception.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Edward Miller, in *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, attributes the overall success of the World War II to War Plan Orange.<sup>6</sup> The immense value of the plan is attributed to the accuracy and realistic nature of the plan. Admiral Nimitz, in a lecture to the United States Naval War College, also lauded the accuracy of War Plan Orange and claimed that the U.S. Navy was rarely surprised by the Japanese Navy.<sup>7</sup> The only exception being the Japanese use of suicidal attacks towards the end of the war.

In *Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of Naval War College*, the authors discuss the college's important role in developing War Plan Orange, a plan for war with Japan.<sup>8</sup> The authors highlighted the college's ability to keep pace with the Navy's development of new

capabilities within the fleet. This ensured that the students had a realistic educational experience. The college was deeply engaged in war planning and focused on areas within the plan that could be accomplished in an educational environment.

### Educational Theories

The military is in a unique position relative to civilian organizations because they own the university in which their employees are educated. Therefore, any attempt to directly apply an educational approach of a civilian institution to a professional military institution will be insufficient. The vast majority of educational theory naturally does not consider the distinct relationship between military services and their internal schoolhouses. The theories of cooperative education and experiential learning, however, have relevance to professional military education.

Cooperative education combines the educational experience with job training in partnership with a business. Because this comes at an obvious cost to a business, many researchers have studied the effectiveness of this technique. Some of their findings regarding hiring opportunities and economic benefits for the business lack relevance for the military, but the researchers' conclusions about benefits for the students have consequence for professional military education. In regards to student motivation, Nevison and Pretti assert in, *Exploring Cooperative Education Students' Performance and Success: A Case Study*, that students are more self-motivated in this type of educational environment.<sup>9</sup> These university-based researchers found students worked longer hours and were more intrinsically motivated to complete assignments. In another university-based study, *Linking Cooperative Education and Education for Sustainability: A New Direction for Cooperative Education*, Nathan and Taylor

assert that cooperative education is highly successful for students and employers.<sup>10</sup> The authors suggest that cooperative education should extend beyond business and manufacturing sectors.

Business-focused researchers found similar benefits. Robert Kozelka in, *Resolved: Cooperative Education is Best*, found an increased sense of commitment among cooperative education students.<sup>11</sup> Kozelka attests that students are more likely to seek out additional literature because of the relevance to the student's future career. Psychologists from multiple countries also concluded in their collaborative study titled, *Psychological Attributes and Work-Integrated Learning: an International Study*, that students in a cooperative education environment experience higher levels of motivation.<sup>12</sup> The researchers also determined these students to be better prepared for their follow-on work environment.

None of these studies apply cooperative education to the military or an organization that controls a university. Cooperative education benefits can be directly applied to the military student, though. Organizational benefits of cooperative education to a businesses also have application to the military when economic benefits and hiring abilities are disregarded.

The concept of experiential learning is also applicable to professional military education. This approach requires the student to apply classroom knowledge to real problems. Research on experiential learning demonstrates that the method is successful in undergraduate and graduate programs. A study by Dundes and Marx examined students who held part-time jobs related to their academic study.<sup>13</sup> The researchers found an increase in many categories including performance and graduation rates. In another study focusing on scientific fields of study, education researchers Thiry, Laursen, and Hunter found the technique of experiential learning allowed for students to have greater ownership of their projects.<sup>14</sup> This led to enhanced collaboration skills and career success.

The research associates the success of experiential learning to its similarity with real work experience. Adult learning experts, Freeman and Rossignol, distinguish experiential learning from traditional practical application. In *Taking risks—experiential learning and the writing student*, the authors describe the necessity to create truly immersive environments to replicate the workplace.<sup>15</sup> Generic practical application approaches do not produce the same benefits because the premise of the contrived assignment may detract from the experience and create a less natural understanding of the material.

In sum, sufficient literature exists to document the history of PME and the case studies where students developed amphibious doctrine and War Plan Orange. There is little debate about the success of those products. There are also numerous educational studies that suggest that type of learning experience is highly valuable to the student. There is a lack of literature, however, that applies the educational theories to the unique environment of PME to fully explain the success of the two case studies and establish a model for current PME.

#### History of Marine Corps Command and Staff College

Marine Corps Command and Staff College began teaching field grade officers in 1920.<sup>16</sup> While the methods of instruction and missions of the Marine Corps have varied significantly since then, the purpose of the college has remained consistent – to prepare field grade officers for elevated positions within the service. While the curriculum underwent many changes, it has primarily focused on the operational level war and amphibious operations. The school's history demonstrates an ability to adapt to the needs of the service and a willingness to adjust teaching practices. Command and Staff College evolved from a hastily parroted Army course into an accredited school with direct interest from each Commandant and the joint service.

Modeled primarily after U.S. Army schools, Command and Staff College began with an infantry focus.<sup>17</sup> The Marine Corps heavily borrowed from the Army in educational materials and also in instructional technique. The Army was a natural model due to the Marine Corps' role in World War I that included far more interaction with the Army than the Navy. The Army primarily used the applicatory method of instruction that required students to develop mission orders based on a fictitious scenario.<sup>18</sup> Since America's next conflict and next enemy was unclear, the fictitious exercises offered little realism for the students. The scenarios also lacked the necessary depth to provide practical experience for the students.<sup>19</sup> The college advanced as the Marine Corps altered its identity and sought relevance as part of the joint force. Soon after its inception, the college incorporated a naval focus to its curriculum and specifically emphasized amphibious operations.

During the 1930s, the instructional method shifted to almost entirely to lecture method with the exception of three exercises, and some demonstrations.<sup>20</sup> Amphibious operations would remain a central focus of the course through World War II as the service gained practical experience in the mission type. Following World War II, the school moved away from lectures and prioritized exercises in the field. This included a two-week culminating exercise with the Fleet Marine Force that allowed students to apply their knowledge.<sup>21</sup> In the 1950s, Command and Staff College adopted the seminar method of instruction in place of most lectures.<sup>22</sup> As the conduct of war changed, Command and Staff College adapted to appropriately prepare its students for potential future combat. In the 1960s, for example, the school added instruction on counterinsurgency and computer instruction.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the curriculum underwent three significant curriculum updates. These updates were aimed at broadening the educational experience to create a better-rounded

graduate. Rather than preparing the student for a specific conflict or specific mission type, the school aimed to educate the student in a way that primed them for a wide-ranging list of potential futures. Command and Staff College included subjects like history, communication, and leadership.<sup>24</sup>

The most recent substantive revisions to the curriculum occurred in 1990, 2005, and 2013. The 1990 revision followed the Goldwater-Nichols Act and creation of Marine Corps University. The college oriented the curriculum to meet joint and civilian accreditation requirements. In 2005, Command and Staff College incorporated lessons learned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The course revision in 2013 reoriented the college upon recognition that the counterinsurgency wars were ending and students needed to be prepared for a broader set of challenges.

#### Tentative Manual for Landing Operations

One of the most unique periods in Marine Corps Command and Staff history was the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, the Marine Corps' continued existence was in doubt and the service searched for an identity. That search led to the examination of amphibious operations as a specialization for the Marine Corps. The U.S. military had not fully analyzed amphibious operations and no doctrine yet existed. With limited funding and large reductions in personnel, the Marine Corps looked to its schools to research and develop ideas. General John Lejeune, the 13<sup>th</sup> Commandant, created the Division of Operations and Training to coordinate the education of Marine students with operational units.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1920s, students were directly involved in service innovation and received direct tasking to study and report on new ideas. The most visible result of this effort came in the 1930s when

Commandant General Ben Fuller directed Marine Corps Schools to produce a manual for landing operations.<sup>26</sup>

General James Breckinridge, the commander of Marine Corps Schools, deemed General Fuller's task so critical to the future of the Marine Corps that he chose to halt the school's curriculum in 1933 to focus the efforts of students and faculty entirely on the manual.

Breckinridge directed Command and Staff students to research different topics under the supervision of the faculty. The students regularly presented their findings to their classmates. Their conclusions were critiqued by their classmates before continuing their research. In just six months, the students and faculty of Command and Staff College produced the Tentative Manual for Landing Operations.<sup>27</sup>

Following the 1933 class that focused entirely on the manual, subsequent classes reviewed the manual and provided updates. The Marine Corps also provided the manual to the Fleet Marine Force for operational testing and coordinated with the Naval War College. The resulting doctrine was the authoritative guide to amphibious operations during World War II. The Marine Corps' use of its professional military education students was an efficient method for innovation in a time of limited funding and personnel that prepared a generation of Marine officers for the complexity of amphibious landings in World War II.<sup>28</sup>

### War Plan Orange

The Naval War College had similar success in using its students to complete priority projects during the interwar period with the creation of War Plan Orange. Following World War I, the Department of Defense began to create a series of war plans in preparation for potential future conflicts. These "Rainbow Plans," consisted of multiple plans distinguished by potential adversary. Each potential adversary was designated by a color. War Plan Orange represented a

war plan for a fight with Japan that eventually was applied during World War II with great success. War Plan Orange is unique in its accuracy in predicting a future conflict and also in its comprehensiveness and widespread understanding by its executor, the U.S. Navy. While this plan originated like many at the senior levels of the military service, its expansion and testing happened largely at the Naval War College. This facilitated years of consistent development of the plan while also familiarizing a generation of Navy officers to the plan.

The use of the Naval War College to complete service assignments was not new. Since its inception in 1884, the Naval War College participated in the development of doctrine for the Navy.<sup>29</sup> The Naval War College assisted heavily in the development of war plans by conducting war games using real-world scenarios. The war games facilitated the educational objective of teaching strategic problem-solving while allowing students the opportunity to evaluate actual threats.<sup>30</sup> The college focused heavily on the Pacific theater during the interwar period correctly predicting the next large naval battle with Japan. Naval War College students initially developed a plan for war with Japan in 1910 and 1911.<sup>31</sup> Students during the 1920s continued to adapt the plan to incorporate evolving naval capabilities. After decades of improvements and testing, students had created “the most detailed of war plans written in the interwar years.”<sup>32</sup> This effort included one of the college’s largest war games in 1933 that tested War Plan Orange, Operations Problem IV.<sup>33</sup> Naval War College students developed multiple solutions to the complicated problem of a naval fight with Japan. The students then tested each solution using realistic parameters and identified flaws. The results continued to modify the plan to include contingencies. The resulting plan used during World War II was so comprehensive that Admiral Nimitz proclaimed in a Naval War College Lecture, “when the war in the Pacific actually started,

nothing that happened surprised us at all except the kamikaze attacks, the suicidal attacks, the Japanese fired towards the end of the war.”<sup>34</sup>

Another benefit of War Plan Orange was the shared understanding possessed by a generation of Navy officers. Decades of Naval War College students studied a naval fight with Japan and critiqued the strategic plan. The students gained in-depth knowledge of the complicated issues and worked through solutions. When the Navy executed the plan in the 1940s, many of the participants had a familiarity with the problem and potential options. This allowed for quick absorption of the plan across the Navy that would not have existed if students had only focused on fictitious scenarios during their professional military education.

#### Supporting Educational Theories

The tangible benefit the naval services received in the above case studies is clear. The use of students as a workforce resulted in useful products for the execution of World War II. Less obvious is the benefit to the individual students that participated. Naval officers that participated in the operations they planned for as students certainly had some practical knowledge because of how predictive their focus was. If the events of the 1940s played out differently, the students may not have had as directly beneficial of an experience. If the predictions about the need for amphibious operations and the impending naval battle with Japan, were incorrect, the students would still have benefitted from the educational experience. The realistic nature of their study and its correlation to their future jobs is supported in the adult educational theories of experiential learning and cooperative education.

Experiential learning involves “using projects or work-based activities that are very similar to or replicate workplace experiences.”<sup>35</sup> Studies of civilian undergraduate students in experiential learning environments have found an increase in student ownership of assignments,

motivation, and teamwork skills.<sup>36</sup> This is due to an increased emotional and intellectual involvement when compared to traditional forms of education.<sup>37</sup> The Navy and Marine Corps students in the interwar period were clearly beneficiaries of this approach. A fictitious scenario for exercises or historical examples would not have generated the same levels of ownership and motivation. Those students were provided with a higher purpose in producing needed doctrine and war plans and were not just completing an academic assignment to pass the course. An important factor in the experiential learning environment during the interwar period was the understanding of the significance of the work the students were doing. While most educational assignments are discarded immediately following completion, the professional military students during the interwar period knew their work had lasting consequence. Adult students are expected to understand their responsibility in the educational experience and display effort in every assignment. Real assignments with real implications naturally increase the effort given to each assignment.

Similarly, cooperative education is “a strategy for combining classroom learning with on the job training.”<sup>38</sup> Businesses partner with universities to create an educational experience that combines classroom instruction with real work experiences. This approach allows the student to continuously apply classroom lessons to a work environment rather than waiting years to complete a degree program before having that opportunity. In studies commissioned primarily by businesses, cooperative education has demonstrated benefits for educators, students, and their employers. These studies show increased levels of intrinsic motivation, classroom performance, and commitment to their organization.<sup>39</sup> The challenge in most university settings is partnering with business or businesses that match their subject areas. This challenge is simplified for military professional education because the employer also oversees the university. The Marine

Corps has a simplified coordination effort to link university students with the workforce. The service and its university do not have to be concerned about profits or developing partnerships. Marine Corps University and operational units can be tasked to coordinate on priority projects with a need for additional personnel or contract negotiations. The Marine Corps should take advantage of this distinction from civilian education institutions and create a more direct link between students and project owners.

#### Challenges to Adopting this Model

Marine Corps Command and Staff College has numerous barriers to introducing real work projects into the curriculum. Marine Corps University receives direction from many stakeholders to include the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Headquarters Marine Corps, and civilian accreditors. Command and Staff College must meet certain military and civilian education requirements to maintain joint professional military education accreditation and civilian education accreditation.<sup>40</sup> Also, CSC has a diverse student body comprised of international officers from around the world and sister service members with limited experience working with the Marine Corps. While these characteristics may make real-world projects more difficult, they do not prevent the school from including more relevant and rewarding assignments in the curriculum.

The CJCS establishes policy for the execution of joint professional military education which is informed by federal law.<sup>41</sup> All programs seeking joint PME accreditation must, for example, include the subjects of national military strategy, joint planning at all levels of war, joint doctrine, joint command and control, joint force and joint requirements development, and operational contract support.<sup>42</sup> The CJCS policy also directs certain outcomes to PME that focus on the PME graduate's ability to think critically, plan, and innovate in complex environments.

Along with these standing requirements, the CJCS publishes Special Areas of Emphasis (SAEs) annually to ensure currency in the curriculum to cover emerging subjects. The Joint Staff J-7 reviews and evaluates PME programs for compliance and effectiveness in meeting the standing requirements and SAEs.<sup>43</sup> The J-7 certifies and provides accreditation to PME programs that meet the standard. Marine Corps University is also subject to similar review from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) for civilian accreditation to award masters degrees.<sup>44</sup> These requirements limit flexibility for Marine Corps University by creating subject areas, outcomes, contact hours, and assignment type that must be accomplished leaving little discretionary time remaining.

The easiest way for CSC curriculum to be successful during accreditation inspections would be to maintain a static curriculum with events that have been inspected in previous years. Fake scenarios work well in inspections because they do not introduce the unknowns that would be inherent with work projects that change every academic year. Doctrine development, concept testing, and realistic wargaming can still meet the educational requirements levied on CSC, but would require additional staff work to effectively communicate that to an inspection team.

The international officers at CSC inhibit the ability for the school to conduct school-wide classified projects. While many of the officers originate from countries with intelligence sharing agreements with the US, some inevitably will not. The university cannot single out certain international officers from participating in a school-wide project because of the diplomatic implications. Many real-world projects can be completed in an unclassified environment. Doctrine development, for example is typically unclassified. Concept testing and wargaming are more likely to require classification. These projects can be split into smaller parts that reduce the need for classification. Also, the university can choose to conduct classified assignments during

periods when the international officers are not present. This can be accomplished during the school year if concurrent assignments or trips are planned for the international officers. This is already done with certain elective courses and the Gray Scholars Program. To avoid the potential of offending international students, the US students could also be held at the conclusion of the academic year to conduct the assignments after the departure of international officers.

### Why the Gray Scholars Program Is Not Enough

In 2013, Marine Corps University created the Gray Scholars Program (GSP) in an effort to use applied learning to address contemporary military challenges.<sup>45</sup> The program is for volunteers that seek additional study outside of the standard curriculum and is available to a small portion of the student population. The students involved in GSP tackle projects similar to what is advocated in this paper and often partner with outside organizations. The results of each iteration of the program are often published in military journals or provided to military organizations that can benefit from the work.<sup>46</sup> There is flexibility in the program that allows faculty to alter topics with each academic year. There are, however, limitations in the program that prevent CSC from meeting the Commandant's intent of introducing more rigor into PME. The limited available participation in GSP prevents the benefit of a shared understanding within the operational force that comes with an entire class's participation. The limited participation also reduces the depth and breadth of the resulting outputs from the students. Finally, the subject areas addressed by GSP are driven by faculty interest which may not align with service priorities.

The GSP lines of study are generally limited to about 4-12 participants each.<sup>47</sup> With five or fewer lines of study, the participation does not effectively leverage the manpower available in a class of CSC students. As demonstrated with the development of War Plan Orange and the creation of the Tentative Manual for Landing Operations, the use of a large student body can

create substantial bodies of work. The detailed testing, rewriting, and updating that made both of those case studies successful would not be possible with only a dozen students. Also, the service loses the benefit of a shared understanding of the subject area in its operational forces. In the case of War Plan Orange, a generation of students fully understood the plan and were able to execute the plan because of their collective exposure during their time at the Naval War College. The impact of less than a dozen participants returning to the operational forces following participation in GSP lacks the service-wide impact of a class of students with the same type of study.

The subject areas selected for inclusion in GSP are created by the faculty of MCU. While these often align with modern priorities of the service, it can be heavily influenced by the faculty's personal areas of interest. Since these projects are not the result of direct tasking from the service, there is no guarantee that the outputs will appropriate to garner pact to the service. In both case studies mentioned above, the PME students worked on the highest priority mission that the service could assign. The outputs those students produced had national impacts during the interwar period and during World War II.

To benefit the service and each student, Command and Staff College can use many aspects of the GSP model and apply it to the entire student body. Marine Corps University should, however, be tasked with subject areas and outputs to ensure alignment with service priorities. During the 2020-2021 academic year, one of the GSP subject areas focused on a China wargame. At the conclusion of the academic year, many students remained at Marine Corps University to conduct an additional wargame focused on Force Design 2030. Both of these projects fit the recommendations of this paper if broadened to include the entire student population.

### An Option for Implementation

While there are many different approaches to introducing realistic assignments into CSC, the following model provides one option. To maintain relevance, the subject matter of the assigned project would change with each academic year. The exact placement within the curriculum and the associated learning outcomes could adjust also. The common themes that should exist each year are the inclusion of a real project that meets service needs, leverages a large portion of the student body, and produces a useful output.

Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) tasks Training and Education Command with a list of topics to be completed by various schools within the command. MCCDC also tasks the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL), as the supported unit, to conduct coordination with the schools. During the break in the academic year, Command and Staff College coordinates with MCWL about the execution of the project. Command and Staff faculty should align the project with learning outcomes to ensure the school retains accreditation. If the assigned project can meet similar learning outcomes as an existing scenario-based practical application, then the practical application should be replaced. If the project is classified, then the faculty should adjust the schedule to allot an appropriate amount of time to allow the US students to complete. MCWL should remain involved throughout the project and determine appropriate outputs. At the conclusion of the project, the students should receive feedback from a suitable stakeholder. Students would be graded for their contributions to the project as they would for any practical application.

### Conclusion

The commitment the Marine Corps makes when selecting over 150 field grade officers to attend resident Command and Staff College is immense. Those officers conduct a permanent

change-of-station move and are removed from the workforce to study for a year. The 38<sup>th</sup> Commandant, General Berger, is not confident that the Marine Corps is achieving an appropriate return on that investment. A commercial organization would have difficulty justifying losing a large portion of their mid-level management for an extended period without a clear long-term advantage. The Marine Corps has a unique opportunity to benefit from the continued education of their workforce without completely sacrificing the time lost while in an educational status. Since the Marine Corps operates its own university, it should not be directly mirrored off of civilian universities. It should reflect the needs of the service by simultaneously educating its members and leveraging their time to support service objectives.

Due to the location of Marine Corps University and the experience of Marine Corps Command and Staff Students, the school is ideal contributor to the development of new concepts, doctrine, and force development. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab is the lead for the Marine Corps in these areas and should remain so. Marine Corps Command and Staff College should be tasked to support MCWL by completing a priority project every academic year. Due to the size of the student body and faculty, the dedicated time does not need to extend to months to be beneficial for MCWL and the service. A two-week project could fast forward the modernization efforts of MCWL and also the Marine Corps. This is not at the expense of the education of the Command and Staff College students, but in support of it. The Gray Scholars Program is an effort to meet these objectives but is limited to a small portion of the students. This reduces the depth of the resulting product while inhibiting the educational experience for the majority of the students.

As demonstrated in the interwar period by Marine Corps University and Naval War College, students can learn while completing real-world work projects. In fact, many adult

students display a higher level of motivation when this type of learning methodology is applied. Adding a work project into the curriculum would require a significant coordination effort to ensure that Command and Staff College can still accomplish its learning objectives. It does not require an overhaul of the curriculum or faculty and can help meet the intent of the Commandant.

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<sup>1</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps. *Commandant's Planning Guidance*. 2019, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman. "On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare." Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA (2020), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Richard S. Moore, "Ideas and Direction: Building Amphibious Doctrine." *Marine Corps Gazette* (November 1982), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond G. O'Connor, "The U.S. Marines in the 20 Century: Amphibious Warfare and Doctrinal Debates." *Military Affairs* (Oct 1, 1974), 100; Shelton, Henry H. "Professional Education: The Key to Transformation." *Parameters* (Carlisle, Pa.) 31, no. 3 (Sep 22, 2001): 4. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/198167153>.

<sup>5</sup> Corelli Barnett, "The Swordbearers : Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War" (1963), 35.

<sup>6</sup> Edward, S. Miller, "War Plan Orange, The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan 1897-1945." Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Chester, W. Nimitz, *The United States Naval War College Lecture*. Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> John Hattendorf, Mitchell Simpson and John R. Wadleigh. "Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College." Naval War College Press, Newport, RI (1984), 141.

<sup>9</sup> Colleen Nevison and Judene Pretti. "Exploring cooperative education students' performance and success: A case study." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education* (2016): 326.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Subhashni and Neil Taylor. "Linking Cooperative Education and Education for Sustainability: A New Direction for Cooperative Education?" *AsiaPacific Journal of Cooperative Education* (April 2013): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Kozelka. "Resolved: Cooperative Education is Best." *College Journal* (November, 1964): 75.

<sup>12</sup> Maureen Drysdale et al. "Psychological attributes and work-integrated learning: an international study." *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning* (Vol. 6 No.1, 2016): 21.

<sup>13</sup> L. Dundes and Marx, J. (2006). Balancing work and academics in college: Why do students working 10 to 19 hours per week excel? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8, 107.

<sup>14</sup> H. Thiry, Laursen, S. L., & Hunter, A. (2011). What experiences help student become scientists? A comparative study of research and other sources of personal and professional gains for STEM undergraduates. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82, 357.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Freeman and Karen Le Rossignol. "Taking Risks-Experiential Learning and the Writing Student." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (Vol. 50, Number 1, April 2010): 82.

<sup>16</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" *History and Museums Division* (1988): v.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman. "On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare." Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA (2020), 169.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman. "On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare." Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA (2020), 171.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman. "On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare." Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA (2020), 173.

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- <sup>20</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" History and Museums Division (1988): 36.
- <sup>21</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" History and Museums Division (1988): 39.
- <sup>22</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" History and Museums Division (1988): 42.
- <sup>23</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" History and Museums Division (1988): viii.
- <sup>24</sup> Donald F. Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988" History and Museums Division (1988): viii.
- <sup>25</sup> Richard S. Moore, "Ideas and Direction: Building Amphibious Doctrine." Marine Corps Gazette (November 1982), 51.
- <sup>26</sup> Richard S. Moore, "Ideas and Direction: Building Amphibious Doctrine." Marine Corps Gazette (November 1982), 56.
- <sup>27</sup> Richard S. Moore, "Ideas and Direction: Building Amphibious Doctrine." Marine Corps Gazette (November 1982), 57.
- <sup>28</sup> Timothy Heck and B.A. Friedman. "On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare." Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA (2020), 167.
- <sup>29</sup> Raymond G O'Connor, "The U.S. Marines in the 20 Century: Amphibious Warfare and Doctrinal Debates." Military Affairs (Oct 1, 1974): 100.
- <sup>30</sup> Michael K Doyle, "The US Navy and War Plan Orange, 1933-1940: Making Necessity a Virtue." Naval War College Review, (May-June 1980), 52.
- <sup>31</sup> John Hattendorf, Mitchell Simpson and John R. Wadleigh. "Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College." Naval War College Press, Newport, RI (1984), 78.
- <sup>32</sup> Raymond G O'Connor, "The U.S. Marines in the 20 Century: Amphibious Warfare and Doctrinal Debates." Military Affairs (Oct 1, 1974): 100.
- <sup>33</sup> Michael K Doyle, "The US Navy and War Plan Orange, 1933-1940: Making Necessity a Virtue." Naval War College Review, (May-June 1980), 52.
- <sup>34</sup> Chester Nimitz. The United States Naval War College Lecture. Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1961.
- <sup>35</sup> Robin Freeman and Karen Le Rossignol. "Taking Risks-Experiential Learning and the Writing Student." Australian Journal of Adult Learning (Vol. 50, Number 1, April 2010): 82.
- <sup>36</sup> Brandi L. Gilbert and Simon J. Rhodes. "Student Development in an Experiential Learning Program." Journal of College Student Development (Oct 2014): 707.
- <sup>37</sup> Robin Freeman and Karen Le Rossignol. "Taking Risks-Experiential Learning and the Writing Student." Australian Journal of Adult Learning (Vol. 50, Number 1, April 2010): 82.
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- <sup>40</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Officer Professional Military Education Policy. CJCSI 1800.1F. 15 May 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Officer Professional Military Education Policy. CJCSI 1800.1F. 15 May 2020, A-1.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, A-7.
- <sup>44</sup> Marine Corps University. Accreditation. Accessed 7 March 2021. <https://www.usmcu.edu/About-MCU/Accreditation/>
- <sup>45</sup> Benjamin Jensen. "Diverging From the Arbitrary: The Gray Scholars and Innovation in the U.S. Marine Corps." War on the Rocks. Accessed 7 March 2021.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Marine Corps University. Gray Scholars Program Catalog 2021. Accessed 7 March 2021.

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