

Naval Community College: First Major Step to Improve Learning as a National Security Priority



Naval Postgraduate School students walk in formation during the university's winter quarter graduation ceremony in this 2013 photo. Now the Navy is starting the U.S. Naval Community College, under the Education for Seapower Strategy. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Grant P. Ammon

The U.S. Navy Department's Education for Seapower Strategy is on track to roll out its first major project in 2021, a community college to improve intellectual development and military professionalism among enlisted personnel.

The U.S. Naval Community College (NCC), aimed at turning enlisted members of the sea services into critical thinkers as well as better warfighters, is preparing to launch a pilot program in January with upwards of 500 Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen.

The pilot will work with civilian universities and colleges to deliver distance learning in subjects such as nuclear engineering, cybersecurity, data analytics, ethics and leadership. Eventually, the NCC will offer a common core of Naval/Maritime studies to provide participants with a similar grounding to the standardized naval science courses taught at the U.S. Naval Academy and Naval ROTC programs, according to NCC President Randi Cosentino.

"The idea is that we will deliver the naval and warfighting components of our academic programs, and we will partner with top colleges and universities that deliver exceptional online programs and outcomes in the program areas in which they

excel,” Cosentino explained in a recent email exchange with Seapower.

More than 100 institutions have expressed interest in working with the NCC. The goal is to narrow that down to six to 10 core college and university partners, explained Cosentino, who was appointed NCC’s first president in April. Prior to that, she was chief academic officer at Guild Education, which works with Fortune 500 companies like Disney and Walmart to provide college-level education and training to their workforces.

Cosentino, who has a doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.B.A from Harvard University, said the pilot has two purposes, first to place naval students in the best online programs in the country delivered over modern learning systems. Secondly, to learn about successful course and program completion as the USNCC matures.

A second pilot, with as many as 5,000 students, is planned for 2022, with classes to begin in the Summer/Fall timeframe. That pilot will enroll students in targeted associate degree programs at several partner institutions. Feedback from that pilot will help finalize NCC’s approach to student support, partnerships with colleges and universities and delivery mechanisms to make sure the new school can achieve its mission.

That mission “is to produce graduates steeped in naval traditions and values, who have sound ethical decision-making abilities, possess improved critical thinking skills, and possess a deeper understanding of the complex global maritime environment in which they operate,” Cosentino told Seapower.

Following the lead of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which declared professional military education has “stagnated,” both Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger’s Planning Guidance and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike

Gilday's January 2019 Frago (fragmentary change) order stressed the need for learning as a warfare enabler.