

Dr. Anthony Pfaff examined new territory in ethics, and earned honors for Excellence in Scholarship from Army War College

By Elena Patton 25 October 2021



Dr. Anthony Pfaff, Army War College professor, explores new territory in ethics by examining the process of acquiring new military technologies.

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Exploring new territory in ethics, Army War College professor Dr. Anthony Pfaff was honored for excellence in scholarship for academic year 2021.

Pfaff received the Madigan Award for his article “The Ethics of Acquiring Disruptive Technologies: Artificial Intelligence, Autonomous Weapons, and Decision Support Systems” published by the National Defense University Press (linked on this page).

“Awards like this help realize the full research and scholarship potential of an institution,” said Pfaff.

Studies have examined the ethics associated with deploying autonomous weapons, human enhancements, and cyber operations for military purposes, but there is not a lot on the ethics of acquiring these technologies in the first place, said Pfaff.

“Acquiring new military technologies requires one to integrate ethical considerations upfront during their development,” said Pfaff, about the argument in his award-winning essay. In it, he examined: What is disruption? How is it measured? What are ethical considerations and when are they applicable.

Since 2016, Pfaff has served as a research professor for Strategy, the Military Profession, and Ethics at the Strategic Studies Institute.

Pfaff is specifically focused on how senior leaders can make good ethical policies and teaches the Ethics and Warfare elective to help prepare students for the senior leader assignments where they will advise senior leaders on ethical decision making.

“Our students are going to find themselves in these positions where they are advising senior policy makers,” said Pfaff. “These ethical questions come up all the time for them. Their advisors need to understand the vocabulary and logic of ethical reasoning so they can make good ethical decisions.”

Prior to coming to the War College, Pfaff served as the Senior Military and Army Advisor to the U.S. Department of State’s Policy and Planning staff.

Pfaff earned a bachelor’s in Philosophy and Economics from Washington and Lee University, a master’s in Philosophy from Stanford University, and his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Georgetown University. He also holds a M.S. National Resource Strategy from Eisenhower School.

The USAWC Madigan, otherwise known as the Award for Excellence in

Scholarship Award, recognizes the best in faculty scholarship and is named after COL John J. Madigan, former longtime editor of *Parameters*, the U.S. Army War College Quarterly.

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