

AWC Distance students learn about topics of interest and national security impact in Advanced Study courses

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 26 July 2022



Students in the “Security in Europe: NATO and the EU” Advanced Study course focused on understanding Europe’s security environment and how it relates to U.S. national security issues, July 18-20.

During their two-week, in-person Carlisle experience, students in the Distance Education Program pursued topics that not only interest them but that also impact national security. All completed an Advanced Study course, a three-day, four lesson deep-dive into issues ranging from strategic leadership to regional and global security issues.

Students in the “Security in Europe: NATO and the EU” Advanced Study focused on understanding Europe’s security environment. That is, how it relates to U.S. national security interests, and how various states and organizations wield various instruments of power in Europe. Their particular focus of the class, July 18-20, was how the United States pursues its national security interests in its relations with two of the

region's key security organizations: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

Mary Foster, an instructor in the Distance Education Program who has spent much of her life living and working in Europe and Asia, led the course. Her prior service for the U.S. government included being a speechwriter for the U.S. ambassador to NATO in Brussels, and a U.S. Army Reserve military intelligence officer, with duty in Iceland and Germany.

"The main thing we want students to leave this study with is a broadened perspective of how different security interests conflict or coordinate in a region of vital interest to the United States," said Foster. "We want students to have an appreciation for how these interests are pursued across the DIME [diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of power]."

The first day of the Advanced Study focused on Europe and its security, discussing its complexities and nuances. What is in it for American security? Who or what threatens or may threaten Europe? Will United States forces still be needed over in Europe in 2050?

"Just being cognizant of all the complexity there makes one aware of some questions to ask," said Foster. It is not just the military component the students need to think about anymore."

Day two was dedicated to NATO, to understanding its origin, organization, functioning, core tasks, and security contributions. This included examining how the U.S. pursues its national security interests via NATO's political and military fora.

The study next examined the EU. Students learned about its history, role, and partial overlap with NATO. Framing questions included, what are the implications of the EU mounting a more robust military, in terms of resources and troops, what is the future of the EU, and what are the second and third order effects of Europeans' doing more for their own defense?

"Europe is a vital market for America... and having a whole, free Europe that's at peace helps America accomplish its national security interests, which include preserving the U.S. economy and reinforcing Western values," said Foster.

During the final lesson of the study, students applied what they learned in the previous lessons for a robust debate on the future of European security and how it could affect global security.

Student perspectives

“I think by attending this course here, I have enhanced my knowledge, and I have been able to talk to international officers and exchange our ideas, contributing in that way to our common global security, said Brig. Gen. Alexandros Antonopoulos, AWC student from Greece.

Antonopoulos is a staff officer at the Hellenic National Defense General Staff at Defense Policy Directorate. He has prior experience working in NATO Rapid Deployable Corps in Italy and the European Union Military Staff in Brussels.

“It expands the way I can see the international environment... especially in the decision-making process,” said Antonopoulos, reflecting on what he has learned over the last two years in the distance education program.

“When you are in front of a computer, one must be in line with the rules to write perfectly what you want to say,” he said. “Here [in residence at the War College], you are freer to express your ideas, and whatever you say stays here, which is important.”

“In light of recent events, I wanted to take this class to gain background and deeper knowledge of the potential impacts of decisions we may make at our command,” said Marine Reserve Lt. Col. Nicolas Johnson.

Johnson is currently assigned to Marine Forces Europe as the Fixed Wing Aviation Plans Officer, working to determine where to position aircraft, what types of aircraft to deploy, and what they will do once they get there, for both multi-national exercises and real-world situations.

Students in the distance education program, like the students in the resident program, have opportunities to tailor their educational experience. Johnson also chose to focus on Europe in the core regional studies course.

“The most interesting thing I learned is how we got to where we are in Europe, not just the borders, but also the relationships and issues that exist within NATO and the EU, said Johnson. “This class is given me a proper education and the historical mindedness needed to approach the problems that arise.”