

Army Strategists support the Army and the Joint Force

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Masked BASP Graduate Maj. Cole Livieratos accepts his certificate from USAWC Provost James Breckenridge, Aug. 21.



Masked BASP Graduate Maj. Brian Vaeni accepts his certificate of completion from USAWC Provost James Breckenridge, Aug. 21.



USAWC Provost James Breckenridge stands with BSAP Graduate Maj. Christopher Grauel as he accepts his certificate of completion during BSAP graduation, Aug. 21

While the Army War College is best known for preparing the next generation of strategic leaders, 13 officers in the 16-week long Basic Strategic Art Program are becoming the Army's newest strategic planners to help those strategic leaders.

“A strategist is an Army officer who can bridge policy, strategy, operations, and tactics in order to inform commanders and develop strategies and plans,” said Lt. Col. Roy Kempf, BSAP Director, about the strategic planners in Functional Area 59. Without Army strategists, the officers who would be advising leaders would be tacticians with ‘down and in’ understanding. Army strategists, in contrast, “understand out and up and how to factor in multi-national, domestic and legal implications to inform their commanders,” he said.

Kempf was a Special Forces team leader before deciding to become a strategist. With two tours in Iraq, he realized that his personal questions

were unanswered: why he was there in Iraq and how to make sense of it all.

“Searching for the answers to those questions got me looking for other things to do,” said Kempf. “And it just really got me interested in how our national security decisions are made, how strategy is made. When I saw what the FA59 Army Strategist field does I said ‘Wow, this looks like something to now challenge me in a different way,’” he said.

“Returning [as director of BSAP] has been great,” said Kempf. “Just working with up-and-coming strategists, seeing the look in their eyes of trying to understand things -- just like I was -- and helping them along that path has been great.

“Some of the differences in today’s students are the academic credentials and the backgrounds that students come in with,” said Kempf, who described the selection process that considers Graduate Record Exam scores, writing ability and evaluations. “The selection process to become an FA59 has become more rigorous and as a result, we are getting incredible talented individuals,” he said. “We want people that want to military strategists, we ask them why they want to be strategists.

“But what doesn’t change is the passion they have coming into the program, and the hunger to understand what is going on and to help inform the strategy making and national security decisions making the process for the better of our country,” he said.

The BSAP curriculum – more depth, more breadth

The Army War College Basic Strategic Art Program introduces students to strategy and to the unique skills, knowledge, and attributes that provide the foundation for their progressive development as Army strategists. Case studies challenge students to dissect and discuss the strategic aspects of the example throughout each of the six modules.

- Strategic theory
- Strategic art
- Joint and Army Systems
- National security decision-making
- Contemporary strategic challenges, and
- Joint and Army planning.

The evolving BSAP curriculum now incorporates more experiential learning, like gaming, staff rides, and a capstone planning exercise, said Kempf. “We have added diplomacy, a Civil War Game, and tactical decision games into the curriculum. These force students to wrestle with

the material which I believe makes them learn it better,

War gaming is incorporated into many of the decision-making modules. Students compete against each other in teams representing a country. But, to execute a strategy they must write a strategy first [and] in the end, they must assess their strategy and those of others to see where they went wrong or made the incorrect assumptions, he noted.

“Tactical decision gaming is part of our Gettysburg staff ride,” said Kempf. “As we are standing on the ground at Gettysburg talking about command decisions, students are given scenarios – this again forces them to think through situations. The operational and strategic context is brought in so students can understand it’s not just who wins this battle, but the setting up of conditions to win a campaign – win a war. How are you solving that problem?”

Over the last two years, BSAP has taken a set of steps, a concerted effort to add nuclear operations and planning to the curriculum. BSAP faculty have participated in nuclear planning operations courses. With in-house expertise, BSAP has incorporated nuclear theory and planning considerations throughout every course module. “It’s inappropriate to think of nukes as a thing of the past,” said Kempf. “We have taken this on to prepare this coming generation of strategists to re-understand nuclear deterrence, nuclear operations, nuclear planning.”

What’s next for strategists after BSAP?

Kempf shared three lessons that students should carry with them – ones he wishes he had as he started his strategist assignments.

1. Build your conceptual tool kit. “Keep track of your thoughts on strategy and operations, keep track of key products that are useful and applicable, it gives you a starting point for how to think and how to build tools to communicate.”
1. Built your networks. “Join the networks of strategists, said Kempf. “This helps you build your own network so you can reach out to people and when you have that inkling of an idea but need help you know exactly where to reach out.”
1. Know that other strategists are just a phone call away. “Reach out. We have strategist embedded throughout the national security framework. The right strategist who can help you work through a problem is out there.”

The program now conducts three courses per year, graduating an average total of 45 officers. FA 59 officers serve throughout the Army and joint force, from division through combatant command. Graduates of the program occupy key positions within the broader defense community,

serving on the National Security Staff, the Department of State, the Joint Staff, the Army Staff, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. A large portion of the class will work in combatant commands, or in the Army component of the Combatant Commands and defense agencies, according to the BSAP Director.

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