Convocation 2021 - USAWC class like no other

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USAWC Commandant Maj. Gen. Steve Maranian congratulates the Class of 2021 resident students and fellows, and challenges them to use resources and time to prepare wisely for future assignments of greater responsibility, at Convocation 2021, Aug. 7.

Col. Shari Bennett, president of the Army War College Class of 2021, represented at Convocation "66 exceptional international fellows from across the globe, 33 talented federal civilians, Active, Guard & Reserve officers from each military branch and

Provost Dr. Jim Breckenridge introduced to the Class of 2021 the USAWC honorary chair holders as icons of USAWC faculty expertise: on stage (l to r) Dr. Tami Biddle, USAF Col. Mickey Evans and Prof. Doug Douds, at Convocation, Aug. 7 in Bliss Hall.

In a rare turn, Convocation 2021 was live-streamed to the resident class and AWC Fellows, represented in Bliss Hall by the student leadership in socially distanced and masked conditions, Aug. 7, 2020.

A class like no other in the 100-plus years of U.S. Army War College history, the Class of 2021 formally opened the academic year with the Convocation Ceremony, livestreamed from Bliss Hall Aug. 7, with a socially-distanced audience of student leaders, representing the class of 361 resident students and 79 Army War College Fellows.

Provost Dr. Jim Breckenridge welcomed the class and formally presented the faculty. Given that faculty, too, were watching remotely, Convocation was specially designed this year to recognize some of the institute's top faculty. Teaching and research professors were singled out for excellence in scholarship, and for selection to academic chairs or promotion [see related article]. Faculty awardees for excellence in teaching are honored each year at graduation ceremonies.

Commandant Maj. Gen. Steve Maranian set the tone and command intent for this academic year.

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I challenge you to see your future self as an enterprise-level, strategic-level problem solver, said Maranian.

“This is an invaluable period of intense reflection and application to prepare for assignments of greater responsibility. We have created an environment that enables you to do so,” he said.

“Your achievements will be your own [but] you will have been helped along the way by a team of teams. Our outstanding faculty - your success is their success. Your family - their support is a vital asset of strength, purpose and well-being,” he said. “Your fellow students will become teammates and friends. Every seminar is shaped to maximize diverse experience. You will learn from one another (and) question, critique and encourage one another.”

“Much is at stake for the United States, our allies and our partners,” said Maranian. “The return of great power competition raises the stakes for readiness and for innovation. In the Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision for Professional Military Education and Talent Management, the Chiefs emphasize that critical and creative thinking are fundamental to effectiveness in developing and applying multinational joint warfighting across all domains in the support of national objectives.

“Each of you will be called upon to lead in a future crisis yet unknown,” said Maranian.

“For many of you, your greatest test has yet to come. And when you are tested, you will have a responsibility to not only lead the women and men of our Armed Forces’ next generation, but to think critically and creatively. To utilize your skills to develop and communicate advice; to solve the hardest of problems; and to execute complex strategies. To work collaboratively to create intellectual overmatch against our adversaries. To honor our national interests and to lead in a multi-lateral international environment to further our shared interests and values.”

USAWC Resident Class President Col. Shari Bennett spoke for the student body.

“We do not take this selection lightly,” she said. “This experience will prepare us to serve as future strategic leaders, competent and confident in our abilities to impact our department, federal agencies, and our country.

“Our diversity is our strength. The Class of 2021 is composed of 66

exceptional international fellows from across the globe, 55 talented federal civilians with a multitude of experiences; Active, Guard and Reserve officers from each branch of our military and the Coast Guard," she said.

"We are here to challenge ourselves," said Bennett.

"In order to succeed … we must be comfortable being uncomfortable. We must push the boundaries, dissect problems from all angles, be open to new concepts and ideas, ask questions and seek answers through multiple venues and spirited dialogue.

"Building strategic leaders and thinkers within our governmental institutions has never been more important than today," said Bennett, who addressed the COVID environment in which the academic year begins like no class before. Uncharted territory creates unknowns, potential stressors, and changes to traditional approaches for learning, team-building, and social activities, said Bennett. Yet, these are balanced by opportunity, the faculty and staff here to guide an amazing year of professional development, and a short commute, she said with a smile.