

## Distance Class 2019: Army War College students' 'take' on preparing for senior leadership

By Robert Martin 19 July 2019



*The USAWC Distance Education Program consists of a series of eight core courses, electives, and two resident courses, taken over a two year period.*

“In the course of the last two years the distance education I have received has given depth to my perspectives. I see things at the strategic level,” said Lt. Col. Rhonda White of the 88<sup>th</sup> Readiness Division at Fort McCoy, Wis. “When I hear something presented, now I think ‘what is the message behind these words that are trying to be conveyed?’ I take more of a critical look in assessing the information now than I have ever had before.

“A great help to me has been the perspective of other people,” she continued. “My seminar brings a vast breadth of experience. Having [officers of] civilian agencies like the Department of State in my seminar has helped me look outside the military window.”

White will next be assigned to the Defense Health Agency, where senior

leaders will guide organizational change. "What I have learned here is invaluable to me looking forward. Everything I do is going to be a strategic thought or action and learning how to operate in a joint environment is what this course taught me," she said. What I have learned here will be invaluable, she concluded.

The USAWC Distance Education Program consists of a series of eight core courses, electives, and two resident courses, taken over a two year period. Course performance is evaluated through writing, forum participation, and exercise requirements. Through the combination of core subjects, the program provides an atmosphere conducive to broad intellectual and personal growth for each officer in professional knowledge and understanding; in creative, critical, analytical, and verbal capacities; and in personal development.

This course of study requires you to be flexible, to really engage in discussions, have an open mind and think critically," said Air Force Reserve Lt. Col. Dan Upstal who works in the Pentagon/J2 Joint Reserve Intelligence Support Element. "Sometimes it's hard to leave your arena behind, and it's important to absorb all the different connections and people you meet."

"I was very impressed with my seminar," said Upstal, referring the group of 16 or so students who study, discuss, and work together. "We had a professional engineer who knew joint planning and operations from a totally different perspective and was really good at laying out all the logistical pieces for a plan to work. We had lawyers, National Guard officers serving as battalion commanders, and an International Fellow from Lithuania who was able to provide good insights during our Baltic exercise."

"The importance of relationships built here is incalculable -- you really can't put a value on it, it's that important. Getting to know people and understanding new perspectives is really important and the way our seminar has gelled is really powerful. These are the people I can relate back to later in life," said Upstal.

"Until you experience [the war college program], you don't have any idea of how significant it is with regard to strategic outlook, staff processes, writing, communications skills and level of attention to detail.'" said Lt. Col. Woody Groton, commander of the 195th Regiment Regional Training Institute of the New Hampshire National Guard.

"It really does prepare you to be a senior leader," he said, noting that the program has helped him do his job better throughout the two years.

“Moving away from the tactical level to a strategic level increased my confidence in my ability to move forward by taking on more responsibility,” said the cyber officer, who is completing the Joint Studies Program, a subset of the Distance Education Program.

The Joint Studies Program is a Joint-accredited program aimed at producing JPME II qualified students by creating seminars with personnel from the Air Force, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps students in order to meet joint acculturation standards and requirements.

“This is a difficult course,” said Groton. “I have been having this euphoric feeling -- it’s almost over. From orientation, I was looking at mountain peak and I was down at the bottom. Well, now I am at the peak and see. It’s a really good feeling.”