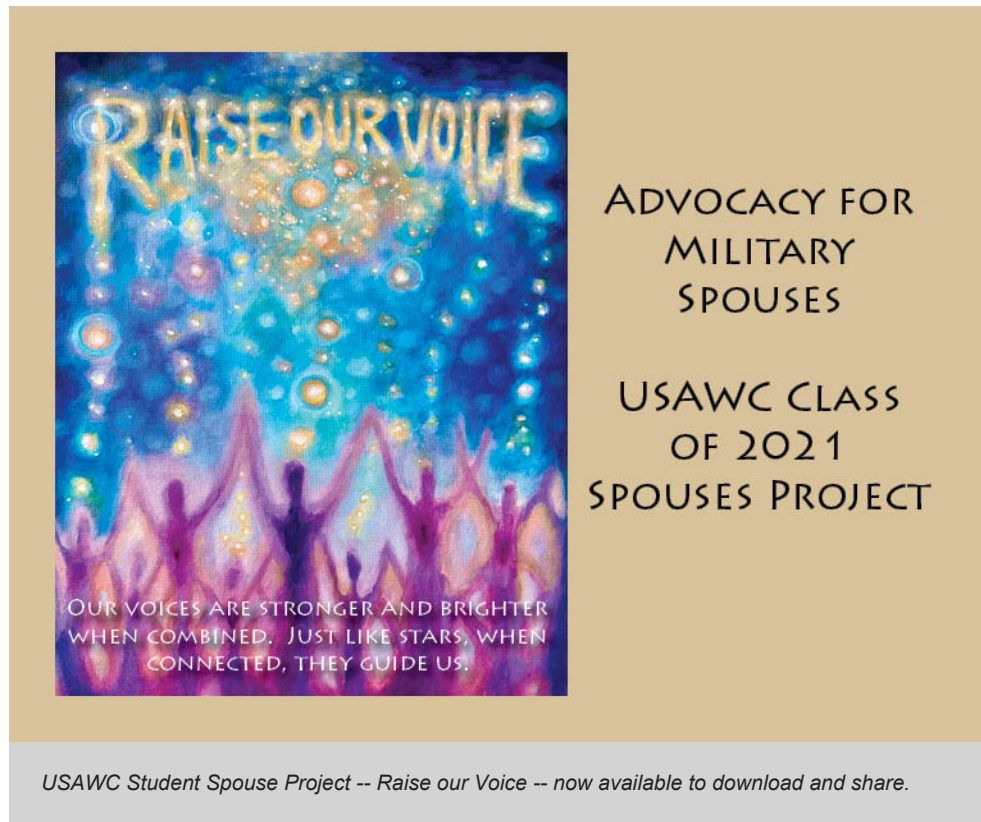


Raise our Voice! USAWC Student Spouses learned together & 'paid it forward'

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 07 June 2021



For Army War College student spouses, the Carlisle Experience was one of learning and personal development, in the mutually supportive company of other student spouses. Now, they pass on their knowledge and experiences in "Raise our Voices," a candid guide to advocacy skills, tips for spouse success and military transitions, and navigating challenges related to education, healthcare and installation life.

A record 263 spouses contributed insights to the academic year 2021 USAWC Student Spouse Project, which was completed by a core group volunteer spouses committed to creating a valuable resource guide for advocacy. The authors drew on the knowledge and experience of hundreds of senior spouses from diverse backgrounds and all military branches. Proud of past achievements, they sought to make a new and positive impact.

" We met each other and were amazed at the talent and potential of our group. ... Many of us will continue leadership roles and many will take the lead for the first time. We encourage senior

spouses to embrace and enjoy their new roles and make the most of their own unique talents.

"As military spouses, we've felt shushed," they wrote, collectively, in the foreward. "Sometimes, it happened overtly when our service members asked us not to get involved and covertly when our ideas were ignored by senior spouses. Over the years, we learned to 'stay in our lane' and not 'rock the boat'...

"... because of the challenges of military life, we have learned to be problem-solvers. We know how to handle emergencies, build our networks, and gather our resources. We don't need to stay in our lanes now because we built a completely new course! We know the shortcuts, roads less traveled, paths of least resistance, and much more. We have our own maps now. It's time to share our skills and knowledge and not worry (as much) about being discouraged. As senior spouses, we can raise our voices to improve our lives, our family's experiences, and our milspouse community. We can raise our voices to inspire future leaders among us to make the most of military life's opportunities. We can raise our voices to mentor problem-solving, goal-oriented, and resilient spouses. Let's all raise our voice!

See: [Spouses_Project_2021.pdf \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#).

Army War College student spouses in classes and workshops of the Military Family Program found that their fellow students were as important as the subject being explored. For these teachers, business professionals, full time moms, entrepreneurs, the company of their peers enriched their own professional and personal growth.

For academic year 2021, the Military Family Program flexed its methods to maximize value in the COVID-19 environment. The rigorous, graduate level class and workshops, the book club, MFP project, and the Executive Leader Development Course shifted to a virtual, asynchronous delivery.

"I was impressed with how well it transitioned to remote delivery. I personally didn't miss out on anything because I couldn't be there," said Jennifer Kaji, who remained in Alabama while her husband attended the War College.

"It was pretty holistic and great for career development," said Kaji, referring to the FLAGS workshop.

FLAGS is a weeklong workshop led by and for spouses who anticipate a future that may expect them to motivate, mentor and guide an array of group types: family readiness groups, professional associations, clubs, employees, volunteer groups, and many more.

MFP does not only focus on professional development. "The MFP recognizes that families play a role in leadership by leading other families and those in their communities," said AWC student

spouse Brienna Pruce.

Projects like the leadership style interview are designed for spouses to find their own leadership style. For Pruce, this exercise allowed her to share meaningful connections, despite COVID. She chose to interview her father, a former chief administrative officer and retired Chief Financial Officer at CFA Institute. "I know him more as my dad than a professional, so this opened up a new level of connection with my dad," said Pruce.

"I was able participate in classes that enhance my skills in both my professional and personal life, which ultimately help my family, my career, and myself," said Samantha McBride whose spouse is the Canadian fellow in the AWC resident class. "Taking a year off from my career allowed us to press the family reset button."

Pruce participated in the Negotiations workshop and then audited the Negotiations course at USAWC. Samantha took a history course at Dickinson College, an opportunity given to spouses of international spouses.

"If you are worried about the time commitment, you can tailor it to be as much or as little as you need," said Kaji, as advice to student spouses arriving in July.

On May 14, 45 student spouses had a lot to celebrate when the Military Family Program hosted a virtual graduation ceremony for the 5th class to graduate from the Executive Leader Development Course designed specifically for student spouses at the Army War College.

The ELDC-S Course provides student spouses with graduate-level education in a variety of specialized leadership areas, including interpersonal, social, and group dynamics, military protocol, ethics, finance, public speaking, resiliency, and negotiation skills. The goal is to increase the participant's understanding of these issues and enhance their effectiveness as partner with a senior officer spouse.

As part of the ceremony, Maj. Gen. David Hill and his wife, Chris Hill, and Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Flom and his wife, Monica, offered congratulations.

"I am really excited to be with you today to express my congratulations to all who are graduating," said Hill. "I think it is fantastic that 45 of you have completed this course, to include spouses of four international fellows. I applaud you all for your courage and resilience."

He noted the course's parallels with the USAWC graduate program in Strategic Studies.

"Like many of the opportunities offered across the schools, centers, institutes, and programs that make up the U.S. Army War College, my impression is that the Executive Spouse Leadership Development Course is unique in purpose, professionally delivered, and well-aligned with our

...to be a premier institution for developing valuable and strategic leaders and implement ideas,” said Hill.

“I just wanted to take this opportunity to let you all know how much I admire what you have accomplished today . . . and during this unprecedented year, when so much shut down, I just love that you just decided to engage,” said Chris Hill.

Christina Daily, the director of Military Family Program planned and executed the course and all the virtual engagements.

Because the course was entirely virtual and asynchronous, participants could work around children, careers and other obligations. One spouse, whose husband is a “geo-bachelor” at the war college, was able to attend every course, event and seminar of interest to her.

The 45 spouses who earned the Army War College Certificate Executive Leader Development were —

Mercedes Arias Blankenship

Sara Bailey

Christie Beverly

Virginia Campbell

Pam Carter

Lindsey Dumser

Gabriela Egan

Caren Hunter

Krista Ickles

Kate Ignatowski

Elizabeth Ives

Sarah Judge

Carole Kadet

Jennifer Kaji

Heather Kline

Tina Kristensen

Kristine Larssen

Michelle Lewis

Trilla Maxwell

Samantha McBride

Cristina McFarland

Brandy Mote

Sonya Mulack

Elizabeth Nicol

Christa Ploetz

Brienna Pruce

Kristen Robinson

Kristi Rogers

Christie Sandor

Heather Sapp

Michelle Sutton

Jessica Thompson

Lori Trofinoff

Laura E. Turner

Angela van Welie

Sara Voelkel

April Watts

Laura Whitford

Ashley Williams

Chimicki Williams

Dana Wilson

Jennifer Witkowski

Lisa Zegment-Reed

Spouse education and development is a special feature of the U.S. Army War College. The Military Family Program offers professional and personal development courses, activities, resources, and collegiality.

Student spouses can build a personalized series of classes offered throughout the academic year, e.g., Public Speaking Workshop, Resiliency Workshop, College Financial Planning, and Solving the Eldercare Puzzle. The educational opportunities of the MFP are structured into four categories:

- Leadership and Readiness
- Personal Growth and Well-being
- Personal Financial Management
- Family Growth and Resilience.

This year, about 50 student spouses will be recognized with Army War College certificates on May 14, reflecting successful completion of the rigorous, graduate-level Executive Leader Development Course. Designed specifically for student spouses, uniquely at the War College, ELDC-S requires completion of multiple professional development courses and elective courses, a written leader interview, and participation in online discussion groups about assigned reading.

Each year, student spouses collaborate to produce the Spouse Project, adding to the family readiness body of knowledge rooted in fellow spouses' experiences. This year's project centered on advocacy: how to advocate for oneself and their families in various contexts, such as academic and medical settings. This guide includes words of wisdom from the spouses themselves and resources. The project will be published in early June.

RELATED LINKS

[Raise our Voices! - The USAWC](#)
[Student Spouse Project 2021](#)