

Gaming in the USAWC classroom: Reinforcing strategic lessons through real world scenario

By Curt Keester 15 July 2018



Col. Jerad Harper, USAWC faculty instructor, leads Lt. Col. Jeffrey Winn and Lt. Col. David Nash in a South China Sea exercise at the Army War College June 21. The exercise used a matrix game format and focused on the application of strategy.

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CARLISLE, Pa. (July 11, 2018) – Recent events in the South China Sea have influenced economies and relations of countries throughout the world, and the Army War College used contemporary events in this critical region to reinforce lessons in strategic studies.

Students of the Class of 2019 Distance Education Program focused on the application of strategy during a South China Sea exercise at the Army War College June 21. The exercise used a matrix game format as an experiential learning opportunity, allowing the students a chance to apply critical thinking skills, and explore aspects of strategic leadership and strategy development.

The realistic simulation required them to first develop and then execute

strategies integrating and synchronizing the diplomatic, economic, informational and military elements of national power. In order to be successful in the game, it was important for the players be agile, work as a team, develop coalitions and modify strategies, said Col. Jerad Harper, USAWC faculty instructor.

“You really have to use the strategy formulation methodology and frameworks we teach and apply them,” said Harper. “Students like that because they’re not just talking about something theoretical, they’re actually putting it into practice.”

The students divided into small groups representing different countries with varying interests in the South China Sea. They were then responsible for implementing strategic plans while adapting to the actions of rivals in the region.

“Everything ties together, and our students have to be able pull from across this range of issues, because the real world problems we have require you to integrate critical thinking, negotiation, an understanding of strategy and the different elements of national power,” said Harper. “How does it all fit in? These are complex problems and when you provide our students with a complex situation, they rise to the occasion.”

The Department of Distance Education and the Center for Strategic Learning co-developed the simulation. The game challenged students with real world problems that drew on their experience and teachings learned throughout their first year in the Distance Education Program. Lessons learned from the policy simulation will apply later in their careers as strategic leaders and planners.