

Army War College introduces Wargame Designer Course

By Mark Leno, AWC Dept of Strategic Wargaming 18 July 2022



Military and civilian professionals designed and developed wargames during the Army War College's first iteration of the Wargame Design Course, offered by the AWC Dept of Strategic Wargaming, June, 2022.

Wargame Design Course participants play 'The Cabinet,' a professional wargame developed by the Army War College Dept of Strategic Wargaming, in the pilot WDC, June 6-17, 2022, at Carlisle, Pa.

Carlisle, Pa. -- The U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership conducted a pilot Wargame Designer Course for 19 Department of Defense and interagency professionals, here, June 6-17, 2022.

The Wargame Designer Course develops skilled designers of wargames that can improve decision-making, training, and education in Army, DoD and other government organizations. The course is designed for those personnel requiring a technical knowledge of game design and development or leaders/managers of wargame teams.

WDC is the culmination of an initial year-long effort of the U.S. Army War College's Department of Strategic Wargaming to improve training and education for professional wargamers. The course is academically rigorous, consisting of seminars, play-through of seven types of war and strategy games, and daily reading assignments. To graduate, all students

must pass a written examination on game terminology and successfully design and playtest a wargame on a topic of their choice. For some additional friendly competition, the faculty tracked student performance using a “leaderboard” and recognized the top gamer and top designers at end of the course.

A diverse and highly motivated student cohort piloted the course, representing eight Army organizations, three combatant commands, all Services (except Navy), NATO (including one French air force officer), Department of State, and the intelligence community.

The first week of the course familiarized students with gaming concepts, the design process, and key types of games. The students played through and studied seven types of war and strategy games to gain a foundation in the art and science of game design. The second week focused on students designing, developing, and playtesting wargames on topics of professional interest. The wargaming department provided mentors who provided individual guidance on game design and with whom the students could consult as they designed their games. Student wargame subjects ranged from the reconstruction of Ukraine to cavalry scout and attack aviation tactics to satellite warfare.

Student feedback on the course was extremely positive. All 19 students completed a post-course survey with all assessing the course as very effective (68%) or effective (32%) in improving readiness to conduct professional wargames. Student comments included: “This has been the most intellectually stimulating course I’ve ever been to in the Army and I want to do more of this work” and “This is probably one of the best professional courses I have attended.”

The course has no prerequisites and is appropriate for all levels of gaming experience from none to seasoned hobby gamers. The faculty used a mix of large and small group sessions with frequent use of “gaming groups” of 2-5 students and “hands-on” experiential learning using a range of professional and commercial games.

USAWC will conduct the next Wargame Design Course, Dec. 5-16, 2022 at Carlisle Barracks. Anyone from the Department of Defense or U.S. Federal government may register to attend. Allied and partner nations or other government organizations may also apply to attend space permitting. Reach out to mark.a.leno.civ with questions or to request registration in future Wargame Design Courses.
