Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education

Published by Marine Corps University Press


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As the deputy director of the Joint Staff J5, Counter Threats and International Cooperation, I oversee the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) portfolio, part of the Department of Defense’s (DOD) WPS program intended to promote the safety, equality, and meaningful contributions of women. From a national security perspective, advancing WPS is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. A vast body of evidence unequivocally demonstrates that women’s contributions are critical to conflict prevention and resolution, peace building and peacekeeping, disaster preparedness and recovery, and stability worldwide. We know that when women actively and meaningfully contribute to defense and security sectors, their nations are more secure and stable and more inclusive of the entire population, and that they better detect threats and vulnerabilities and better ensure the different security needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, WPS upholds our nation’s commitment to human rights and makes the United States a more credible partner of choice by supporting the development of professional, diverse, and accountable partner-nation militaries. This is why, in this era of strategic competition, it is critical that DOD integrates WPS principles to build diverse teams, incorporates a holistic and human-centered approach to security, enhances long-term stability, and increases Joint Force lethality through recruitment and retention of the most capable warriors.

To further hone our lethal force, we work to educate servicemembers on the value of WPS principles. Our Joint Staff team has developed two Joint Knowledge Online courses, available to all DOD personnel, which provide a baseline understanding of WPS and its application to key DOD mission areas: DOD Introduction to Women, Peace, and Security and DOD Women, Peace, and Security Implementation. Our professional military education (PME) institutions are currently developing Service-specific courses to ensure their members understand how WPS applies across mission areas. All WPS PME leads have all been trained in our Joint Staff Operationalizing WPS 100 (Gender Focal Point) and Operationalizing WPS 200 (Gender Advisor) courses. From conducting gender analyses for information operations campaigns and integrating gender perspectives into campaign and contingency plans to applying gender injects to disaster response wargames, our WPS PME leads are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills to apply key concepts to national security problems and to interpret their relevance to U.S. military objectives. Our Joint Staff team regularly engages with PME leads in the Joint WPS Academic Forum, where best practices and lessons learned for building curricula are shared. WPS PME leads have also been instrumental in providing feedback to the Joint Staff team developing key leader seminar materials to educate DOD senior leaders. I am proud of the work of the PME institutions, and I look forward to seeing how they drive even more action on integrating WPS principles across all courses.
I had the pleasure of reading this year’s Joint WPS Academic Forum’s WPS Top Paper Award-winning piece by U.S. Army major Sarah Salvo. I was impressed by Major Salvo’s academic rigor. This paper highlights a key WPS principle—that advancing women’s participation as a core tenet of our national security reflects DOD’s commitment to diverse teams and DOD’s adherence to military justice, accountability, and standards of conduct. I am encouraged to see military students addressing such important issues as sexual harassment and assault in our armed forces. The Joint Staff takes these reflections and the many recommendations and tasks from the 2021 Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military and is striving to educate and develop a Joint Force with improved teamwork and combat capability.

Thank you to Dr. Lauren Mackenzie for developing this special monograph on WPS for the Marine Corps University Press to highlight the best papers from across the Services submitted to the Joint WPS Academic Forum’s writing award program. I look forward to seeing more PME institutions spotlight WPS scholarship, which not only empowers military students but also enhances the meaningful participation of women in the defense and security sector.

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