Who’s Got Game?

The use of wargames to enhance the learner-centric experience

by LtCol David C. Emmel

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developed course of action. Now this exercise includes a second phase where the student battle staff execute their plan through a dynamic wargame against an adversary force led by a retired general officer and composed of CSC and National Intelligence University students.

This highly qualified expert serves as the commander for the exercise. Having previously offered guidance and mentorship during the planning, now he provides the joint commander’s perspective during the “fight,” simulating a commander-centric organization. For the first time, students conduct cross-functional staff integration in the form of boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups to execute their plan and focus on supporting the commander’s decision cycle under conditions of uncertainty generated by adversary actions. The opportunity to win or lose plays out each day within a time-constrained environment. In the process, the students will help develop a simulation and gaming tool for use at the company to MEU level. PROTEUS provides the students with a multi-domain combined arms gaming tool with the ability to jointly plan and execute electromagnetic spectrum operations, physical maneuver, and logistics planning and execution. As part of a cross-functional team, students will complete their planning based on a situation that involves a tournament-style competition using unmanned systems and logistical constraints, with the best team being crowned winner.

The use of educational wargames offers a wide range of benefits to enhance the experiential learning of students. As already illustrated, CSC has adopted a liberal definition of wargaming to capitalize on the pedagogical opportunities they present. Much work remains for the next academic year in order to maximize the use of wargames in exercises, “War and Security Studies” courses, as well as game design. For the way ahead, CSC will expand the use of wargames into its student exercises, increasing not only the number of "reps," but also their complexity. Next year’s capstone exercise scenario will again be redesigned to test the new force design against an adversary depicted in the National Defense Strategy. By applying the concepts of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment, the students will increase their understanding of the future operating environment while collaboratively working to address the issues inherent in this problem set.

Building upon the success of “Sea Power in War” from this academic year, War Studies faculty are developing a wargame on naval integration in the age of sail. This effort will highlight what both Napoleon and Jomini failed to address—the important aspect of naval operations during the Napoleonic Wars. After studying the historical background, students will use a wargame to try and rewrite history, but only if they effectively do what Napoleon and his staff did not: integrate naval warfare with land operations. This lesson on the age of sail also stresses the need for a holistic analysis of the instruments of national power and how best to apply them to achieve victory that resonates in today’s climate of great power competition. Another option is a history course that uses a wargame to allow students to apply the historical process to a “battle” that they participate in, critically analyzing contradictory first-hand accounts to reveal biases and hidden agendas of the primary sources which link to broader learning objectives in the curriculum throughout the year.

Security Studies will also benefit from the use of wargames to evaluate the applications of theories introduced into the curriculum (e.g., deterrence theory). An educational wargame offers an experiential learning approach, enabling curriculum learning objectives through relevant game scenarios and rule mechanics that demonstrate how theories work in practice. Planning operations in the information environment provide another area where wargaming shows promise in improving student learning. A counter-adversarial narrative wargame will employ teams to develop action plans using media platforms like Twitter or Facebook to target key stake-
holders and then adapt to changes in the information environment based on courses of action taken. Another wargame effort will explore states’ use of “lawfare” in the information space to gain advantages while operating below the threshold of armed conflict.

Finally, CSC will offer instruction on wargame design. The intent is to introduce wargame methodologies, as well as the mechanics of how to build a game, while improving their analytical skills. In partnership with Georgetown University, the faculty will introduce wargame design as an additional Gray Scholars (advanced studies) line of inquiry for the fall of 2020.

The educational wargames at CSC provide students with the opportunity to “fail fast,” iterate, and learn from multiple tries against their peers and faculty. To build the creative and nimble minds envisioned by the Commandant’s guidance on PME, CSC views intra- and inter-seminar group wargaming as a healthy way to channel and encourage competition, allowing opportunities for students to win and lose, ultimately learning from each outcome. By artfully blending wargames, as well as decision games and case studies into the curriculum, CSC is developing leaders with the intellect and agility to outthink adversaries in this period of rapid change and great power competition. In this way, gaming as a key part of learner-centric education reinforces efforts to increase academic rigor and accountability while developing more lethal warfighters who are also ethical leaders, creative problem solvers, and critical thinkers—in other words, leaders with game who are best equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

Notes
1. The author would like to acknowledge and thank the Command and Staff College faculty who provided input and feedback for this article.
5. For a detailed discussion of this type of approach, see Judkin Browning, “Of Balloons and History: Using Wargames as Active Learning Tools to Teach the Historical Process,” The History Teacher, (Urbana–Champaign, IL: Society for History Education, 2009).