

# U.S. Department of Education

## Site Team Review

### Petition for Degree-Granting Authority by National Defense University, School for Information Resources Management (iCollege)

#### Introduction

On November 3, 2010, a site team from the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) and the U.S. Department of Education conducted a visit to National Defense University's (University) School for Information Resources Management (IRMC or iCollege) at Ft. McNair in Washington, DC. The purpose of the visit was to verify the contents of the University's application for the authority to grant a Master of Science degree in Government Information Leadership (GIL) that the IRMC has developed in response to the Presidential Executive Order 13434 dated May 17, 2007, for National Security Professional Development of current and future Chief Information Officers (CIO) in national security positions in the Executive Departments and Agencies within the Federal Government.

The Department of Education's authority to conduct this review is in a policy statement entitled "Federal Policy Governing the Granting of Academic Degrees by Federal Agencies and Institutions," which specifies that the Secretary of Education appoint a Review Committee to examine applicant Federal institutions and to determine their compliance with four criteria. The NACIQI serves as the appointed Review Committee.

The site team that conducted the visit consisted of the following three NACIQI members:

Dr. Arthur Keiser, Team Chair  
Chancellor, Keiser University

Rep. Cameron C. Staples  
Connecticut House of Representatives

Mr. Arthur Rothkopf  
President Emeritus, Lafayette College

Kay Gilcher, Director Accreditation Division accompanied the team with Chuck Mula and Steve Porcelli, Accreditation Division Staff.

**Special Request:** If the NACIQI concurs with the site team's recommendation and if the Secretary, in turn, concurs with the NACIQI's recommendation, then the members of the site team strongly urge the Secretary, and all those upon whom the resulting

process relies, to expedite matters to the extent possible. It is our intent that the current class be eligible to receive their degrees if degree-granting authority is granted, even though Congress may not act before this first class completes the GIL program.

## **Background**

The University first sought authorization to grant two degrees in the early 1990's. A Master of Science degree in National Resource Strategy was requested for the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and a Master of Science degree in National Security Strategy was requested for the National War College. The U.S. Department of Education evaluated the educational programs and recommended that the authorization be granted. As a result, the legislation authorizing the University to grant the requested degrees was approved in 1993.

The Department of Defense (DOD) Reorganization Act of 1986 required that any of DOD's professional educational institutions that attained degree-granting authority must pursue civilian accreditation. This was mandated so that the DOD degree-granting institutions would be subject to the same review process that assures the quality of mainstream American higher education. Consequently, the University sought accreditation from the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Middle States) after the University received authorization to grant degrees. The University received accreditation from Middle States in February 1997. In October 2001, a reaffirmation visit was conducted and Middle States subsequently granted reaccreditation in 2002.

In 2004, the University requested authorization to grant a Master of Science degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy for the program offered by the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS) located within the Joint Forces Staff College at the University's Norfolk campus, and in 2006 the authorization to grant a Master of Arts degree in Strategic Security Studies offered by the School for National Security Executive Education (SNSEE) located within NDU. After visits by members of the Secretary's National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, the requested authorizations were granted by appropriate legislation.

In 1996, the U.S. Congress passed the Clinger-Cohen Act to validate the competencies and importance of Chief Information Officers' role in the Federal Government. The iCollege participated in the articulation of CIO competencies, and the CIO Certificate became the bedrock of the college's expanding certificate programs. The Assistant Secretary of Defense Networks and Information Integration DOD Chief Information Officer (ASD/NII) became a principal stakeholder of the College by providing guidance and on-going funding, and the Secretary of Defense, in a 1997 memo, established the iCollege and NDU as the primary training source to meet the Information Technology Management Reform Act training needs of DOD's CIOs, executives and senior-level managers.

After September 11, 2001, the government's information managers discovered that the current national security system had an insufficient focus on how leaders can leverage information and information technology to effectively execute agency and interdepartmental goals during national emergencies. Since September 11, 2001, the task of IRMC has changed to providing all government military, DOD civilian, and U.S. Civilian Department leadership with the education and training necessary to leverage information and information technology during natural and manmade disasters and in war fighting environments.

Now, because the IRMC has been asked to fill the gap in developing national security professionals, as mandated by the President, who will be able to collaborate across boundaries the leveraging of talent, resources, and opportunities to employ information and information technology for strategic advantage, the school is seeking degree-granting authority for its professional master's level program in Government Information Leadership.

## **Analysis**

The Review Committee received and reviewed evidence submitted by National Defense University's School for Information Resources Management (IRMC or iCollege) that the following four criteria have been met:

**(1) That the conferring of the authority to grant the graduate degree in question is essential to the accomplishment of the program's objectives of the applying agency.**

The National Defense University (NDU) asserts that degree-granting authority is needed so that the school will be able to achieve its goals of preparing military and civilian government leaders to shape and direct the information component of national power and to advance national security during natural and manmade disasters and times of war by leveraging information and information technology for strategic advantage .

To accomplish this goal, NDU asserts that the possession of degree-granting authority is essential in order for the IRMC to attract the highest caliber faculty members and researchers, who are highly aware of the weight that this authority carries in the academic world. It is also essential to the IRMC because the school needs to compete with other federal and public degree-granting institutions to attract the most desirable students for this vital program.

Also, without degree-granting authority, the IRMC is at a distinct disadvantage. It is vital to the interests of the military and the nation that the federal government have the ability to train and retain its information managers, both civilian and military. These individuals

too often leave public service because they cannot be promoted in their field due to their inability to earn advanced degrees while in government service.

Finally, in pragmatic terms, with the award of a degree upon completion of the program, it is expected that American and foreign students alike will be able to advance more quickly in their respective governments allowing them greater opportunities to cooperate with their counterparts in the fight against global terror, further advancing the goals of the program and those of the nation.

**Site visit team analysis:**

Team members concurred that, given the academic rigor of the School for Information Resources Management, the award of the Master's degree is commensurate with the achievements of program graduates and essential to the goals and objectives of the University.

**(2) That the graduate program in question and/or the graduate degrees proposed cannot be obtained on satisfactory terms through the facilities of existing non-Federal institutions of higher education.**

Throughout its self-study, the NDU asserts that there is no extant counterpart to the IRMC program in a non-federal institution of higher education. According to the NDU, the GIL program is more focused than is typical in the private sector with the core curriculum being delivered “in a carefully constructed, sequential, and progressive manner with key current and real time national security concepts and themes interwoven throughout” (emphasis added). That program content is both current and relevant is essential to program success. The Federal institution is positioned to expeditiously “incorporate recent political, economic, social, and military changes, activities, and policies as they relate to school objectives” as they unfold.

Furthermore, through its distance education delivery systems, the school has the ability to reach 90 percent of senior military and U.S. government agency personnel who are unable to participate in similar educational programs provided by civilian educational

institutions. The IRMC is the only institution equipped to deliver this graduate level curriculum to war fighters in the information component of warfare in areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan, thus enabling them to apply their learning in real time situations.

The pool from which the student body is drawn is atypical in that it consists of military and civilian members of “the Joint, interagency and international security community.” Because the pool ensures that only the highest quality candidates with comparable levels of experience and expertise in the security community are admitted, the students serve as prime resources for one another in the educational process. It would be extremely difficult to assemble and maintain a similar student body in a non-Federal institution of higher education.

Finally, the extensive library resources available to the IRMC students, which are crucial to their success, are unavailable outside of the University’s protected environment. Students are able to access classified information and other materials during the program and after graduation that are generally unavailable at any non-federal institution.

**Site visit team analysis:**

Team members concurred that due to the composition of the student body, the required expertise of the faculty and seminar speakers, and the shared travel of the entire class to selected sites under study, this program cannot be obtained on satisfactory terms through any non-Federal institution of higher education.

**(3) That the graduate program conducted by the applying agency meets the standards for the degree or degrees in question which are met by similar programs in non-Federal institutions of higher education.**

The Department of Defense (DOD) Reorganization Act of 1986 required that any of DOD’s professional educational institutions that attained degree-granting authority must pursue civilian accreditation. This was mandated so that the DOD degree-granting institutions would be subject to the same review process that assures the quality of mainstream American higher education. The NDU sought and was granted the authorization to grant two Master of Science degrees in 1993; in 2004, the NDU received authorization to grant a Master of Science degree for the program offered by its Joint Advanced War fighting School, and in 2006 received authorization to grant a Masters of Arts degree in Strategic Security Studies.

Consequently, the NDU sought accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States). The University received accreditation from Middle States in February 1997. In October 2001, a reaffirmation visit was conducted and Middle States subsequently granted reaccreditation in 2002.

In academic year 2009 – 2010, the College offered 45 graduate-level courses through 202 course offerings related to the Chief Information Officer competencies, Information Assurance, Enterprise Architecture, Acquisition, Organizational Transformation, Information Technology, Project Management, and Information Operations to support the nation's war fighters and the federal agency's CIOs with sophisticated information technology that will enhance strategic decision making for increased national security and enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.

The GIL program is typical of other graduate degree programs in that it consists of 36 to 39 credit hours and includes completion of a research project. The project itself must demonstrate student competence in graduate-level research.

All faculty members hold either a Ph.D. in a relevant field, or a Master's degree coupled with extensive professional experience. Furthermore, the curriculum is updated annually following a review of student and faculty surveys, as well as evaluations of student accomplishment of learning objectives. Full-time resident students are expected to complete the basic requirements within the academic year while part-time students typically need a minimum of two and a half years to complete the degree.

**Site visit team analysis:**

Team members concurred that the Government Information Leadership Program met or exceeded the standards for a Master's degree that are met by similar type/level programs in non-Federal institutions of higher education. The team also noted National Defense University's accreditation by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Higher Education, which includes the School for Information Resources Management as an integral part.

**(4) That the administration of the graduate program concerned is such that the faculty and students be free to conduct their research activities as objectively, as freely, and in as unbiased a manner as that found in other non-Federal institutions of higher education.**

**The existence of an advisory committee of educators from regularly-constituted institutions shall be regarded as some evidence of the safeguarding of freedom of inquiry. Accreditation by an appropriate accrediting body, if such exists, shall be regarded as another safeguard.**

NDU reports that as a requirement of Title 10 U.S.C., which outlines the role of armed forces in the United States Code, the university must provide a climate of academic freedom that encourages “thorough and lively academic debate and examination of national security issues.”

As part of the University, the IRMC must adhere to its published policy that defines academic freedom as

“Providing the climate to pursue and express ideas, opinions, and issues relative to the university purpose, free of undue limitations, restraints, or coercion by the organization or external environment. It is the hallmark of an academic institution. We expect all members of the university community to understand the importance of responsible academic freedom.”

The IRMC must also adhere to the policy of “non-attribution” that helps to ensure that there can be free discussion of controversial and classified subjects and enables the outside speakers to present their views in an environment of academic freedom and responsible intellectual inquiry. The following components are included in the non-attribution policy:

- Statements are never attributed to a specific speaker;
- Imparted information is not to be discussed when a particular speaker could be identified by the disclosure; and
- The content of lectures or discussions is not to be carried beyond the audience members.

As an accredited institution, the University must adhere to the same principles of academic freedom that other accredited universities are expected to hold. The major difference being the “special constraints of a military institution,” where the subject matter frequently contains classified materials. Middle States, as the University’s accreditor, continues to serve as an additional guarantor of academic freedom.

**Site visit team analysis:**

Team members verified the implementation of the institution’s academic freedom policies and the active role of its Board of Visitors and concur that the University is administered with regard for the freedom of inquiry. Faculty attested to the freedom they feel in teaching and writing. Students were observed in discussions attesting to the freedom they feel in commenting on issues. In further support of the team’s conclusion, the University’s accreditation by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools,

Commission on Higher Education is regarded as another safeguard of academic freedom.

### **THE PROCESS OUTLINED**

The process to obtain degree-granting authority entails a recommendation from the National Advisory Committee to the Secretary. After considering the recommendation of the National Advisory Committee, the Secretary can send a positive recommendation to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In turn, OMB recommends the same to Congress where the authorization is granted.

### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Team members reviewed the self-study of National Defense University's School for Information Resources Management (IRMC or iCollege) and conducted a site visit to the institution. After meeting with administrators, faculty and students, and reviewing additional materials on-site, the site team is satisfied that the proposed graduate degree program meets the requirements of the "Federal Policy Governing the Granting of Academic Degrees by Federal Agencies and Institutions." Based on the extremely high quality of the program, the site team unanimously recommends that the Committee recommend to the Secretary that he recommend that the University be granted degree-granting authority, as requested.

The site team wishes to make it clear that it is their intent that the current class be eligible to receive degrees if degree authority is granted even though Congress may not act before the current class completes the course.