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U.S. Navy photo by Javier Chagoya

Custom Course Builds Skills in Strategic Planning for U.S.'s Pacific Partners

By Javier Chagoya

A cadre of specially-selected Indonesian officers are on campus this week for a customized course in methodologies that help frame solutions and develop strategies to complex problems, titled Systemic Thinking and Planning.

NPS Senior Lecturer Wayne Porter and Assistant Professor Tony Pollman developed the course with teachings that can be applied to address a multitude of complex problems. The two traveled to Indonesia last summer, where their short course on Systemic Thinking and Planning proved a great success.

The officers who traveled to NPS for this latest course, including Rear Adm. Chokky Hutabarat, embraced the strategic planning tools used in the workshop. It was Hutabarat and Porter who selected the students from the summer class to continue in the advanced course now underway.

“We find the systemic thinking and planning being taught at Naval Postgraduate School very useful, and in particular, how the collection of pertinent data and other resources can help us make better policy decisions. It’s not only an academic exercise but it’s clearly a tool that will help me in my own future decision making for our navy,” said Hutabarat, a vice commander at Indonesia’s Naval Staff College and former Battle Group Commander in Indonesia’s Western Fleet Command.

“I’m an Operations Officer by trade and again the practical skills we have learned here are not only excellent tools to be used at the policy making level, but these skills can also be used throughout the

operational world too,” added Hutabarat.

“The course was intended to provide theory and practical case studies related to the application of systems thinking in strategic planning,” explained Porter. “A major focus of the course was the use of system dynamics methodologies developed at MIT by Jay Forrester. It is these tools that enable officers to identify and better understand the non-linear feedback mechanisms that exist in operational and strategic systems. All 13 attendees proved to be excellent students, and their coursework and system dynamics modelling of real-world Indonesian Navy strategic planning was extraordinary.”

Porter is hoping to develop a system dynamics course at NPS that could, one day, also provide distance learning for the Indonesian Naval Technical College (STTAL) and the Indonesian Naval Staff and Command College (SESKOAL).

“With the support of the Defense Analysis and Systems Engineering Departments, and under the aegis of the Littoral Operations Center, I am hopeful to further develop strategic planning methodologies that can serve both our forces and our partners,” he said.

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