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CNO Addresses Navy Corporate Business Course
Monday, March 26, 2007

By MCCS (AW/SW) Jacqueline Kiel

The Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Center for Executive Education (CEE) wrapped up another highly successful executive course March 9, one which boasted high-level visitors, including the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Michael Mullen.

The Navy Corporate Business Course (NCBC) for Captains and GS15 civilians has grown progressively since its inception in September 2004. NCBC is an intensive two-week course that includes weekend and evening meetings. "An important part of the agenda consists of setting up the Navy case, so we begin with as many of the Navy leadership as we can in the first week to understand their imperatives and issues," explained Ron Franklin, director, Center of Executive Education (CEE). "That's a very important part of understanding for the participants on why they're here. It's not just the general theory of what it means to do strategy or to work toward transformation; rather for the participants to understand their specific task for the Navy, so we bring in the leadership across the various OPNAV codes and Warfare Enterprises.

While the CNO almost always addresses the course, it is usually via a video teleconference. Having the CNO actually appear in front of the participants was a treat for them.

Franklin called the engagement with the CNO "very direct, very informative and candid."

Mullen began by talking about the budget. Comparing budgets over the last several years, he said, "This is going to get a lot harder before it gets easier. We're well funded in readiness, and we executing really well, but we've been running ashore at 70 to 80 percent for years."

Mullen touched on Sea Enterprise. "The Enterprise approach is one I have the most comfort in," Mullen stated. "The Enterprise approach has incredible potential for us.

"In a time of change, a constant is leadership. Communication is critical. I owe you the right kind of pressure, informed pressure and informed guidance," Mullen told participants. "This is an exciting time. We have lots of challenges and lots of work. I believe when the ground forces come back, fleet forces must deploy. We will learn a lot more about what the riverine force is going to be in the next year."

One participant, Prospective Commanding Officer of USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) Capt. Ladd Wheeler, found the CNO's discussion held to the theme that he has become quite familiar with, a focus he knew from his previous job as the chief of staff on a type commander staff. "That is the focus on the framework of the Navy Enterprise and the people, the money and the stuff aspect," Wheeler explained. "And that was the CNO's overarching theme that he used to give us worker-level definitions of some of the strategies in this most recent version of the 2007 strategy and vision. Because he used that framework, which we understood, and those themes, which we understood, it made it very easy to get instant connection on what it was he was looking for."

CNO'S visit to the March NCBC was a huge plus for the group. "The feedback from the class was extremely enthusiastic," Franklin stated emphatically. "There's no alternative to having the chief of your business come and chat with you in person, and spent more time than he planned."

"The Navy is in a transforming process right now. Transformation, strategy, and leading change themes all very much complemented the 'Strategy for Our People' dimension provided by Rear Adm. Dave Gove, commander of the Navy Personnel Command; the issue being 'how do you find the talent for the Navy of

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the future,” Franklin pointed out. “We’re actually in competition with corporate America.”

According to Franklin, the NCBC exceeds expectations both in terms of impact and reputation. Participants are going back to their commands and motivating other senior leadership to attend, who then send others to the course. “This is because it builds on its own reputation of fascinating content, valuable takeaways and direct impact back in the command,” he explained.

Executive Learning Officer of the Navy, retired Vice Adm. Philip Quast calls this group good, but believes all the past groups have been particularly sharp. “They’re chosen by both their chain of command as well as their Enterprise leads, and they’re chosen on the basis of potential growth in the Navy and leadership positions as well as promotional upward mobility, he explained. “As you can see, when you get the PCO of a carrier in here you’re talking major player.”

These people are known in the business world as high potentials. “These are the people that you groom to take leadership positions within your organization or institution,” Quast said. We’ve got a combination of civilians, GS 15s who will probably become SESers, and officers who are going to be leaders in their organizations. Over the last couple of years, we’ve had enough of the graduates of this course selected for flag (that) it’s a good indicator the people coming to the course are hand selected.”

According to Quast, this particular iteration of the program has been in existence for several years. Prior to that, only flag officers and SESers were receiving executive education. However, the attendees had recommendations for changes. “These were based on the fact that they thought the course was very valuable,” Quast explained. “They said, ‘we got it much too late in our careers, and we ought to be focusing our efforts on those who are coming up and taking our places.’ So from those recommendations, the CNO established the NCBC, and now these are very competitive opportunities. We only educate about 210 Captains/GS15s a year and you probably have 20 times that many that could fill these positions.”

Wheeler expected the course to be well structured and enlightening. “I thought it was very well threaded together in the way that it was built up in component,” Wheeler said of the course. “They explained to us strategy not only of the change process but also of our Navy. That’s why we had such key leadership come and speak to us.”

Even presenters at the course were amazed at the caliber of the program. “I’m very impressed with the organization and the way they cover important topics for these folks who have been identified as fast trackers,” said Joyce Gioia, a strategic business futurist and author.

Wheeler, a 25-year naval officer who has 3,600 flight hours in 28 different kinds of aircraft, put it succinctly when he said, “Quite frankly, we’ve got a lot of talent in our Navy that we’re not utilizing and bringing an Enterprise construct into being allows for collaboration which will generate innovation, which will generate efficiency.”

“I think most of us, given where we are, already have the tools,” stated class participant CDR Dave Haas, commanding officer for Pre-commissioning Unit Independence (LCS 2) Gold Crew. “But I think that they’ve packaged it nicely to recognize ways that use those tools. I think I am learning new tools to put in the tool bag.”

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