

Expansion of Shoemaker Scholarship Program at NPS Enhances Education Readiness for Naval Aviators

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA, USA, May 7, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) is working to further extend access to its advanced degree programs throughout a warfighter's career. Building on the recent success of providing graduate-level certificates to student Naval Aviators, NPS and Commander, Naval Air Forces recently announced an expansion of the school's Shoemaker Scholarship program from 10 to 50 quotas, giving more newly commissioned Naval officers in the aviation pipeline an opportunity to earn their master's degree before entering flight school.

Developed by multiple departments at NPS, the Shoemaker Scholarship

program offers students a condensed master's degree with a variety of defense-focused science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) options.

"Expanding the Naval Academy's Shoemaker Scholar program 500 percent marks a significant milestone in our commitment to fostering excellence in Naval Aviation," said Vice Adm. Dan Cheever, Commander, Naval Air Forces. "Empowering the newest generation of Naval Aviators and Naval Flight Officers with a robust 12-month graduate education at the Naval Postgraduate School enhances individual capabilities and strengthens our Navy's warfighting team. This initiative demonstrates our dedication to world-class education, decisive combat power, and producing officers ready for today's challenges and empowered to innovate for the future."

In 2018, NPS worked with Vice Adm. Michael Shoemaker, then serving as Commander, Naval Air Forces, on a graduate education opportunity for student Naval Aviators, taking advantage of



Newly commissioned U.S. Navy officers attending NPS are benefiting from a recent expansion in the school's Shoemaker Scholarship program, which provides junior officers in the aviation pipeline with an opportunity to earn a master's degree before entering flight school.

delays in new starts to the training pipeline. Coined the Shoemaker Scholarship, the program was designed to maximize education opportunities for a handful of newly commissioned Naval Aviators en route to Naval Flight School in Pensacola, Fla. It was a resounding success.

“The Shoemaker Scholarship is intended to provide recent graduates from the USNA or ROTC an opportunity to receive advanced education early in their careers,” said U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Amy Roznowski, Deputy Senior Marine Representative at NPS. “The officers are awaiting the start of Naval flight training, and we are taking advantage of a gap in timing to enhance their careers by receiving advanced education and earning a master’s degree.”

Education is a key warfighting enabler. The expanded Shoemaker Scholarships, combined with more stackable degree certificates offered through NPS Online, is part of a Department of the Navy (DON) effort to implement a continuum of learning as outlined by the Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro, in the Naval Education Strategy.

“Naval education is foundational to our ability to deter conflict and succeed in war,” Del Toro said. “We will continue to strengthen our Department’s culture, policies, processes, talent management, and investments to reflect education’s key role in force development.”

Typically, Navy officers are required to achieve a master’s degree to further advance their career tracks. In the aviation community, however, asking a pilot to leave the fleet to go to school for two years is very difficult logistically. The Shoemaker Scholarship program allows the students to get their degree before they get to the fleet, granting them the opportunity to sharpen their mind and then take their new-found expertise to their next command and reducing the need for an operational gap.

“Using this program, we were able to increase the number of NPS graduates,” said retired U.S. Navy Capt. Bill Sherrod, former NPS Chief of Staff and Air Warfare Chair. “We get more skilled students out into the fleet, but not disrupt their career timeline. The delays in flight training creates the opportunity on the front side as opposed to later in their career. And that was really the impetus behind the expanded program.”

Not only does the Shoemaker Scholarship program positively impact students, but it is also a cost-effective way to strengthen the fleet. While serving as NPS Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, Dr. Joseph Hooper championed the expansion of the Shoemaker Scholarship program, stating that NPS could utilize additional curricula for Shoemaker students with classes that are already being taught at the university, filling empty seats.

Adm. Samuel Paparo, an NPS alumnus and Naval Aviator who commanded the U.S. Pacific Fleet and was recently appointed as commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), recognized a backlog at flight school and looked for solutions across the Naval Education Enterprise.

“Admiral Paparo has been a champion for NPS, and we were able to put forward options for graduate education that could help with the aviation training pipeline,” said Hooper. “Highly qualified ensigns coming straight from undergraduate studies were able to slot into classes already being offered for our resident mid-career officers. It’s a benefit to the aviation community, the students, and to the university to create flexibility in obtaining advanced degrees early in the career.”

The program, which saw the first expanded cohort arrive last year, has been a resounding success thus far. Not only do Shoemaker Scholars have a higher graduation rate from flight school, these junior officers come to NPS fresh from their undergraduate studies; they learn very quickly in class, but also get advice from the many mid-career Navy, Department of Defense and international officers with real-world operational experience who make up the bulk of the student body.

Indeed, Shoemaker Scholars have made their mark at NPS and within the DON. U.S. Navy Lt. Suzelle Thomas, a 2019 Shoemaker Scholar, was the first woman to qualify in the F-35C Lightning II following her designation as a Naval Aviator. Two June 2023 graduates, Ensign G. Forrest Dawe and Ensign Nate McDonald, saw their applied research projects contribute advancements to aviation capability: Dawe researched a method to predict vortex conditions for hypersonic testing in the NPS supersonic wind tunnel, while McDonald developed and fabricated a novel engine design for tactical missiles supporting an Office of Naval Research (ONR) project.

This June, 21 Shoemaker Scholars are on track to graduate and will head to Pensacola for flight school with their master’s degrees in hand. Among them will be Ensign Justin Yu, who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy last year and will earn his NPS master’s degree in Astronautical Engineering. His applied research focuses on combining systems engineering architectures with physics-based models of co-orbital engagements to support mission engineering efforts aimed at protecting friendly assets from aggressor spacecraft.

“Coming straight from the Naval Academy, I found the experience here at NPS to be a great complement,” said Yu. “My peers and I of course value the education and hands-on research, but also the opportunity to learn from all the other students who come here from the fleet or from the other services with different operational backgrounds, perspectives and aspirations – that’s invaluable, and we’ll stay in touch.”

Roznowski added, “With every Shoemaker Scholar that comes here, NPS builds a stronger network of skilled decision makers and deeper ties to the fleet. Ensigns in the Shoemaker program depart NPS and take with them not just the knowledge of their academic program, but also the ability to educate their fellow Sailors and Marines other servicemembers about the opportunities and capabilities offered at NPS.”

Lt. Cmdr. Ed Early
Naval Postgraduate School

+1 831-656-3567

PAO@nps.edu

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