

Study of War Thread in the Academic Program United States Military Academy

The Study of War Thread (SoWT) is a multi-disciplinary effort embedded within the core Academic Program that fosters cadets' intellectual understanding of war as a human phenomenon. This knowledge increases the effectiveness of platoon and company operations, enhances officers' understanding of the strategic and moral context of warfare, and provides a foundation for life-long learning for the Academy's graduates throughout their careers as military professionals.

An effective study of war must be a multi-disciplinary effort, as recognized by LTG (Ret.) H. R. McMaster in an external assessment of the West Point curriculum:

*“In general, the study of war and warfare across the curriculum at West Point might best be approached consistent with Sir Michael Howard’s 1961 essay on how military professionals should develop their own theory or understanding of war and warfare. First, **to study in width**. To observe how warfare has developed over a long historical period. Next, **to study in depth**. To study campaigns and explore them thoroughly, consulting original sources and applying various theories and interdisciplinary approaches ... And lastly, **to study in context**. Wars must be understood in their social, cultural, economic, human, moral, political, and psychological contexts because as Sir Michael observed **“the roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield.”** History, political science, social science, philosophy, literature, geography, and psychology all contribute to understanding war in context. And a critical element of the study of war in context is the military’s role under the Constitution and an understanding of civil-military relations.”* (H.R. McMaster, “The Need for a Coherent Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of War and Warfare at West Point,” 2012, p. 2)

One of the six goals for the Military Program at West Point draws from this same source, that graduates must “demonstrate how to critically think about and understand war and warfare in width, depth, and context.” (The Military Program (Greenbook), Academic Year 2020, p. 6) The Academic Program plays an integral role in achieving this goal, developing each cadet’s intellectual preparation for the rigors and complexity of combat while helping them internalize their professional identity as commissioned officers. Preparing officers to think broadly and deeply about war as military professionals is essential for lethality, readiness, and future service as strategic thinkers and leaders.

Structure and Courses

The SoWT is organized around the four fields of expertise described in the Army Profession doctrine: military-technical, geo-cultural/political, moral-ethical, and human-leader development. Cadets progress through a series of core courses building expertise in these four areas and then complete a capstone course on Officership that integrates these fields of expertise into a coherent whole. The capstone course emphasizes the officer’s role as a warfighter using historical case studies and current scenarios that highlight the platoon warfighting challenges while always considering the strategic context that provides purpose and a moral setting for their lethal actions. Cadets grapple with concepts such as mission command, multi-domain operations, moral leadership in a complex environment, leadership/lethality at the platoon level, and, when needed, disciplined disobedience to illegal or immoral orders.

The following table lists the core courses that make up the Study of War Thread:

Study of War Thread Core-Course Integration

Officership Domain	4 th Class Yr	3 rd Class Yr		2 nd Class Yr		1 st Class Yr
	HI101 The Army of the Republic	PY201 Philosophy	SS202 American Politics	SS307 International Relations	HI302 History of the Military Art	MX400 Officership
Military-Technical	X				X	X
Geo-Cultural/Political	X		X	X		X
Moral-Ethical	X	X		X		X
Human-Leader	X				X	X

Other Participants

In addition to the courses listed above, the thread will serve as an information sharing mechanism for other stakeholders across the Academy. Such stakeholders include faculty teaching other core courses, the academic departments, faculty responsible for academic majors and minors, the Department of Military Instruction, the Brigade Tactical Department, the Modern War Institute, and other research centers. On an annual basis, the thread can serve as a vehicle for developing common situational awareness of what other organizations are contributing to the study of war and warfare at West Point.

Study of War Lecture Series

The Study of War Thread will include a lecture series that highlights how course-wide lectures complement cadet education on the various aspects of war and warfare. The series will include events such as the annual Class of '52 Distinguished Lecture and the Combating Terrorism Center's annual Yearling lecture. Other annual events relevant to the study of war that are sponsored by different departments and USCC will be considered for inclusion in the lecture series.

Thread Goals

The Study of War Thread, as part of the broader West Point experience, provides graduates with an understanding of:

- how the military-technical character of warfare has developed over long historical time periods
- the relationship between the armed forces of the United States and the American political system
- the social, cultural, economic, human, moral-ethical, political, and psychological contexts of war and warfare
- the unique moral-ethical and leadership challenges inherent to war and warfare

Administration and Assessment

The initial co-chairs are Dr. Scott Silverstone (Professor of International Relations and Director of the Grand Strategy Program in the Department of Social Sciences) and Dr. Jeffrey Peterson (Director, Character Integration Advisory Group, Simon Center for Professional Military Ethic). The committee will meet at least twice a year (about March and October) to facilitate communication, mutual support, and to develop and execute an assessment plan. The co-chairs periodically report to the General Committee to receive feedback on the SoWT and to present assessment results, proposals for changing the thread, and any other issues related to the SoWT.