

Updated January 13, 2026

Graduate Degree Program Information Packet

The U.S. Naval War College's (NWC), Graduate Degree Program (GDP) provides an opportunity for students or graduates of NWC's Fleet Seminar Program (FSP) to earn the NWC Master of Arts in Defense and Strategic Studies degree. Students accepted into this program must complete a total of 30 semester credit hours of coursework.

Course Highlights

- FSP students can apply after completing at least seven semester credit hours of FSP courses.
- Students earn a Master of Arts degree in Defense and Strategic Studies.
- Accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education.

Who is Eligible

U.S. military officers and federal government employees only may be eligible to apply and take part in the GDP.

- Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard officers, active or reserve, must be in the grade of O3 or above.
- Officers, active or reserve, in the other military services must be in the grade of O4 or above.
- Civilian federal government employees must be in the grade of GS11 or above (or equivalent). Selected staff members in the federal Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches that are eligible to take part in FSP may also be eligible.

What to Expect

Students interested in pursuing the M.A. degree must complete 30 semester credit hours of coursework.

- FSP courses are conducted at multiple Naval bases and stations across the United States.
- FSP courses are conducted in a seminar-style and include research, writing, and class discussion.
- Elective coursework will most likely need to be completed at a non-NWC regionally accredited institution.

How to Enroll

Students applying for GDP must meet the required employment criteria, have completed at least seven semester credit hours of FSP courses with no course grade lower than a B- and possess a baccalaureate degree, preferably from a regionally accredited institution. Applicants must:

- Apply to the GDP using the online application.
- Request official transcripts be sent from each previously attended undergraduate or graduate institution directly to the GDP office.

- Have two letters of recommendation on their behalf sent to the GDP office—at least one must be from an NWC faculty member.

Please Note: Students applying to the Graduate Degree Program must have completed at least seven semester credit hours of Fleet Seminar Program courses with no course grade lower than a B-.

Eligibility

All applicants applying for this program must:

- Be currently serving as an active duty or reserve officer, federal employee, or congressional staffer.
- Possess a Baccalaureate Degree (i.e., B.S./B.A.), preferably from a regionally accredited institution. For those holding non-U.S. baccalaureate degrees, please contact the GDP Program Manager at GDP@usnwc.edu prior to applying to the program.
- Have completed at least seven semester credit hours of FSP courses with all course grades B- or better.

Military Officers

Active and reserve officers in the Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard must be in the grade of O3 or above to be eligible. Active and reserve officers in other military services must be in the grade of O4 or above.

Federal Employees

Civilian federal government employees must be in the grade of GS11 or above (or equivalent). Selected staff members in the federal Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches that are eligible to take part in FSP may also be eligible.

Course Overview

GDP students must complete coursework that closely mirrors that of NWC's resident student body. To be awarded the NWC Master's degree, GDP students must complete 30 semester credit hours of coursework divided between core courses (completion of all FSP courses) and an elective requirement.

Please Note: Coursework applied for credit in any other degree program cannot be used to meet the requirements for this degree.

Core Courses

Core courses for the GDP are taken through the Fleet Seminar Program and are conducted at the graduate level. All courses must be completed with a B- or better grade.

GDP students who receive a final grade of C+ or below in an FSP core course will be disenrolled from the GDP. Core courses cannot be repeated in order to meet the minimum grade standard.

The required core courses and credits awarded are:

	Courses Taken Prior to Academic Year 2025/2026	Courses Taken During Academic Year 2025/2026 And After
Strategy and War	Seven (7) Semester Credit Hours	Eight (8) Semester Credit Hours
Theater Security Decision Making	Seven (7) Semester Credit Hours	Seven (7) Semester Credit Hours (Plus One Semester Credit Hour for Leadership in the Profession of Arms course)
Joint Maritime Operations	Seven (7) Semester Credit Hours	Eight (8) Semester Credit Hours

Please Note: Core courses taken through the U.S. Naval War College’s CD-ROM, Web-enabled, Online, or NWC at NPS Programs will not satisfy this requirement. Credit for similar courses taken at another institution cannot be transferred.

Students must complete all core courses and electives within a seven-year time period. Coursework for the Graduate Degree Program degree requirements cannot be more than eight years old at the time of graduation.

Elective Courses

Both the NWC in-residence curriculum and NWC’s Online Program offer a very limited number of elective courses—GDP students in nearly all cases will need to take elective courses from non-NWC institutions.

Elective coursework can be completed at non-NWC institutions regionally accredited to award graduate degrees. Students admitted to GDP must complete all electives under a single Area of Study (AOS).

Before enrolling in or registering for any elective course (even those offered by NWC), students should receive approval from the GDP manager to use that course. Students must use the Request for Approval of Elective Course form on the GDP site to submit approval.

Accreditation Information

The Naval War College (NWC) has been accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) since 1 March 1985 to award the Master of Arts Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies (“MANSSS”) to eligible resident students. Beginning in the fall of 2001, the accreditation was extended to the College of Distance Education’s (CDE) Fleet Seminar Program (FSP) in the Washington, D.C. area. This soon expanded so that students at all FSP sites could have the opportunity to pursue a course of study leading to a NWC degree. Beginning with Academic Year 2015/2016, those resident students in the College of Naval Command and Staff (NWC’s resident Intermediate Level Course or “ILC”) were awarded the Master of Arts Degree in Defense and Strategic Studies (“MADSS”), a degree separate and apart from those graduating from the College of Naval Warfare (NWC’s resident Senior Level Course or “SLC”). As CDE’s Fleet Seminar Program is designed as an ILC and parallels as closely as possible the course courses taken by NWC’s resident College of Naval Command and Staff students, students accepted into the GDP from the July 2015 Admissions Board forward will receive the MADSS upon program completion. Those accepted prior to that Admissions Board and graduating after June 2015 will have the option to be awarded either the MANSSS or the MADSS.

Enrollment

Please review the eligibility section to ensure you are eligible for the program.

Applying for Graduate Degree Program

Submit an online GDP application.

Submit two letters of recommendation using the form linked below. At least one must be from a NWC faculty member. The individuals completing the recommendation letter should submit it directly to NWC. Letters have the option of being digitally signed as well as being electronically sent.

Request that official transcripts from each previously attended undergraduate or graduate institution be sent directly to the GDP manager. Official transcripts are acceptable as either hard copy or electronic.

Admissions materials, including transcripts, can be sent to GDP@usnwc.edu or:

College of Distance Education (Code 1G)

Graduate Degree Program Manager

686 Cushing Road

Newport, RI 02841-1207

Please Note: *Incomplete application packages that have been inactive for more than eighteen months may be discarded/destroyed.*

Application Decision

The GDP Admissions Board meets quarterly (January, April, July, and October) to review each complete application package and make admissions recommendations to the Dean of the College of Distance Education who makes the final admissions determinations. Applicants will be notified of the results of this determination once that decision has been made.

Time for Completion

Students must complete all core courses and electives within a seven-year time period. Coursework for the Graduate Degree Program degree requirements cannot be more than eight years old at the time of graduation.

Any student who feels that they will be unable to complete the degree requirements within the prescribed time period due to exceptional circumstances may request a leave of absence. Students contemplating requesting a leave of absence should contact the GDP Manager at GDP@usnwc.edu, for further information.

Disenrollment

Students will be disenrolled if they have not completed the degree requirements within seven years of enrolling in their first FSP course and have not been granted a leave of absence or contacted the GDP Manager regarding their situation. Students are responsible for keeping track of their progress with respect to the program's time requirement.

Elective Courses

Both the NWC in-residence curriculum and NWC's Online Program offer a very limited number of elective courses—under limited circumstances some students may be allowed to take electives offered in residence at NWC.

GDP students will most likely need to take elective courses from non-NWC institutions regionally accredited to award graduate degrees.

Please Note: *It is the responsibility of each student taking courses at other institutions to comply with that institution's procedures and policies concerning admissions, registration, and fee payment.*

Elective Requirements

All elective work must be at the graduate level and elective courses must be relevant to (or represent advanced study in) one or more of the core course disciplines. Courses must be administered through and credits awarded by institutions that are regionally accredited to award graduate degrees.

Students admitted to GDP must complete all electives under a single AOS.

Requesting Approval for an Elective

Electives will only be approved if they have been determined to meet NWC's quality and academic standards and are in congruence with the overall focus of the NWC program.

Before enrolling in or registering in any elective course (even those offered by NWC), students should receive approval from the GDP manager to use that course. Students must use the Request for Approval of Elective Course form on the GDP site to submit approval.

Transferring Elective Credit from Non-NWC Institutions

To transfer credits awarded for completion of approved non-NWC elective courses, students should have the institution from which the course was taken send an official transcript directly to the GDP manager. Official transcripts (either hard copy or electronic) are acceptable.

- Students taking more than one course from an institution can wait until all courses are complete before ordering their transcripts.
- A student will not be awarded more credits than what is documented on the transcript.

Transcripts can be sent to GDP@usnwc.edu or:

College of Distance Education (Code 1G)
Graduate Degree Program Manager
686 Cushing Road
Newport, RI 02841-1207

Please Note: *Coursework applied for credit in any other degree program cannot be used to meet a requirement for this degree. Additionally, courses that are part of a JPME-granting curriculum cannot be used to satisfy, in whole or in part, the elective requirement.*

Area of Study

Students must complete all coursework for electives under a single AOS to fulfill the elective requirement.

Please visit our website for the latest listing on available AOS and Associated Navy Academic Qualification Designators (AQD).

