

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY BOARD OF VISITORS**

**April 13, 2026  
United States Naval Academy**

Members present: Senator Dan Sullivan (Chairman), Representative Rob Wittman (Vice Chairman), Senator Debra Fischer, Senator Tim Sheehy, Representative Jake Ellzey, Representative Christopher Deluzio (virtually), Representative Van Orden, Representative Sarah Elfreth, Mr. Sean Spicer, Mr. Walt Nauta, and Mr. Earl Ehrhart.

Senator Sullivan called the open session of the meeting to order at 0904 and welcomed the members of the Board of Visitors. He emphasized that the mission of the Naval Academy and the Board of Visitors is more important than ever given the current conflict in the Middle East, and how the Naval Academy is making an enormous difference on that front. He noted that regardless of personal feelings about the conflict, all Americans should feel great pride in the professionalism and excellence of the United States military. Senator Sullivan thanked the Superintendent for his leadership, and remarked that the Army-Navy game success highlighted a great season, emphasizing the importance of the game to America. He noted that the President's Executive Order regarding the Army-Navy game helped buy Congress time to leverage passing legislation to protect the Army-Navy game. The Chairman also noted that the most recent National Defense Appropriations Act (NDAA) demonstrated historic commitment to the Naval Academy and its infrastructure. He remarked that the focus of the mission, of the institution, is warfighting, and that the reputation of the Naval Academy among the War Department and nation had never been higher. The Chairman also asked that Members of the Board bring issues to the Chairman first before going to the Academy, and thanked the Board for their patience as he reviews the process for developing the annual report to the President, committing to fixing the process.

At 0916, Senator Sullivan yielded the floor to the U.S. Naval Academy Superintendent, Lieutenant General Michael Borgschulte, U.S. Marine Corps.

**Superintendent's Update:** Delivered by Lieutenant General Michael Borgschulte, U.S. Marine Corps, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy.

- **Opening Comments and Video:** Lieutenant General Borgschulte started off his update to the Board by noting that things are different in the world compared to the last Meeting of the Board of Visitors. He played a video for the Board that he had developed for the midshipmen, faculty, and staff of the Naval Academy shortly after the start of Operation Epic Fury. The video highlighted the seriousness of the Naval Academy's mission, and the importance for the midshipmen to double down on their preparation as warfighters and leaders. Senator Sullivan and the Board thanked the General for his powerful message.
- **Strategic Plan 2035:** The Superintendent noted his appreciation for the Board, and briefed them on his strategic plan leading up to 2035, all with the ultimate focus of strengthening the Naval

Academy's warfighting focus in training and academics. The Superintendent informed the Board that he has tasked several Senior O-6s on the Yard to lead Operational Planning Teams (OPTs), which are to investigate specific topics of interest in his Strategic Plan 2035, and bring recommended courses of action back to the Superintendent within a defined period of time.

- Admissions OPT: The first OPT the Superintendent briefed to the Board was the Admissions OPT. He highlighted that Admissions is being more highly manned going forward. As Admissions is one of his main strategic focuses. He also thanked the Board, and especially Mr. Earl Ehrhart, for helping encourage the Academy to be more transparent with the Whole Person Multiple (WPM) for prospective candidates; he informed the Board that the WPM calculation is now available online. The Superintendent also remarked that one aspect of the admissions process he is excited about further investigating is integrating a "grit scale," modeled after the Marine Corps' Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS). In addition to the grit scale, he mentioned that one of his goals for Admissions is to increasingly use advanced data analytics to find trend lines between successful graduates and their application data. He specified that he wants to look into the attributes of successful graduates not only in the military sector, but also in business and government, in line with the Naval Academy mission that midshipmen should be prepared to assume "the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship, and government." He informed the Board that the Naval Academy has put out a call for the next Deputy Director of Admissions. Chairman Sullivan asked if the goal for that position is to have a "career" admissions-designated officer, or if that position would be a twilight tour of an active-duty service member lasting only around 3 years. The Superintendent confirmed it is a new position and the concept would be a military Director of Admissions with a civilian deputy director for continuity. Several Members of the Board expressed interest in either being involved in the selection or informed on the selection process for the Deputy Director of Admissions position. The Superintendent confirmed that selecting the right person for the job matters, and that it might take some resources to attract the right candidate, and that all the Service Academies are after roughly the same candidates, so this position is incredibly important.
- Artificial Intelligence OPT: The next OPT the Superintendent discussed was the Artificial Intelligence (AI) OPT. He informed the Board that the Naval Academy is planning to integrate AI into almost every aspect of training at the Naval Academy; the AI OPT is largely to help figure out ways to integrate AI into training and curriculum while maintaining individual midshipman growth independent of AI. He stated that one of his goals is for every midshipman to leave the Naval Academy having a baseline knowledge of using different AI tools, and some select midshipmen having advanced understanding of AI tools.
- Branding OPT: The Superintendent also informed the Board that a high interest area for him is improving the branding of the Naval Academy for the general American public. He stated that he believes that the other Military Service Academies have had better branding than the Naval Academy, pointing specifically to the greater name recognition of West Point and that the other Military Service Academies have more updated and

interactive websites. He stated the largest strategic object branding impacts is Admissions: attracting and bringing in the next generation in a way that actually reaches them.

- **Robotic Autonomous Systems (RAS) OTP:** The Superintendent highlighted the importance of midshipmen being familiar with drones and robotic autonomous systems across several domains – surface, subsurface, and air. He described an OPT he tasked with specifically investigating drone and unmanned systems integration on Yard Patrol Craft (YPs). He stated the desire to see the YPs not only be used for teaching midshipmen navigation, but that YPs should serve as the “mothership” for autonomous systems, with future trainings involving using YPs to practice both offensive and defensive actions utilizing autonomous systems. He showed a video to the Board highlighting some of the current utilization of RAS at the Naval Academy. Senator Van Orden asked if over the summer midshipmen are getting training on UAVs, the Superintendent confirmed that select midshipmen will visit the Unmanned Surface Squadrons in San Diego, but that training is not Brigade-wide yet. Senator Sullivan highlighted to the Members of the Board that in the past the Board of Visitors was the biggest pusher of integrating the Cyber Major at the Naval Academy and the development of Hopper Hall and the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF); he encouraged both the Board and the Naval Academy to look at potentially championing an AI-major, and look at the next steps of what Board support for that initiative would look like. Senator Sheehy emphasized that in addition to AI skills, it is important for AI to have the best data to use to actually be useful, so he encouraged the Naval Academy to look at the whole continuum surrounding AI. Congresswoman Elfreth asked if midshipmen are being trained on both offensive and defensive UAV capabilities; the Superintendent confirmed that midshipmen are being trained on both. Several Members of the Board expressed interest on how AI will be codified in training and academics; the Superintendent and Provost confirmed that the Naval Academy is currently taking a look at the core curriculum taught to midshipmen, and evaluating priorities, and looking into where the AI integration would bring the most value added.

**Provost’s Update:** At 0952 the Superintendent turned the floor over to the Academic Dean and Provost, Dr. Samara Firebaugh.

- **Warfighting-Centered Education:** The Provost updated the Board on over 30 new warfighting-centered classes developed in Academic Year 2026, highlighting: Machine Learning for Electronic & Acoustic Warfare taught by CDR Ed Jatho and Assistant Professor Fiona Knoll; Wargame Theory taught by Professor Max Wakefield and Assistant Professor John Becker; The Chinese Art of War taught by Professor Miles Yu (who plays President Xi Jinping in advanced wargames for the US); and The History of US Naval Shipbuilding taught by Associate Professor Marcus Jacobs. She highlighted to the Board that naval architecture as a major this year has had the greatest increase in midshipmen interest in the past several decades, demonstrating midshipmen aligning with Department of War and Department of the Navy priorities; she also compared this to the US at large, informing the Board that the Naval Academy graduates about 10% of the entire nation’s naval architecture majors.

- **Warfighting-Centered Faculty:** Dr. Firebaugh also updated the Board on the increased warfighting-focused training of civilian faculty, highlighting the threat briefs given on both the CUI and Classified levels, Norfolk and Quantico tours, mid-day training opportunities, collaboration with Fleet entities such as the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV), Navy Cryptologic Warfare Development Group, Commander, Submarine Force Atlantic, Naval Special Warfare Development Group, and Blacksea Technologies, to name just a few. Provost Firebaugh also informed the Board on how several faculty members are actively contributing to the fight through their expertise: Associate Professor John Donnel wrote the software now deployed on surface ships for the additive manufacturing of repair parts while underway; Associate Professor Mike Kutzer won the 2024 Department of the Navy Dr. Delores M. Etter Top Scientist and Engineer Award for his work on autonomous aerial refueling; Associate Professor Elizabeth Yates developed deployable underwater adhesives in collaboration with the Naval Research Lab; and Assistant Professor Chris Hemler wrote the book, “Delivering Destruction: American Firepower and Amphibious Assault from Tarawa to Iwo Jima,” which is on the Commandant of the Marine Corps’ Reading List.
  
- **Capstone Day Preview:** Provost Firebaugh also updated the Board on the upcoming Capstone Day for midshipmen on April 29<sup>th</sup>. She highlighted that 127 projects are related to Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, or Machine Learning; 64 projects are related to Drones, Robotics, or Autonomous Systems; 50 projects are related to Shipbuilding or the Defense Industrial Base; 41 projects are related to Great Power Competition, China, Russia, or Iran; 80 projects related to Cybersecurity; and 59 projects related to Energy Security or Contested Logistics.
  
- **Midshipmen in the Spotlight:** The Provost then turned over the floor to two first class midshipmen, to highlight their Capstone projects, and the warfighting benefit they gained through the Capstone process.
  - MIDN Andrew Galvan-Arrien: Midshipman Galvan-Arrien briefed the Board on his project, which focused research on computer neural networks and edge detection to build resilience in maritime sea-sky line identification, conducted on behalf of the Secretary of War’s Strategic Capabilities Office. Senator Sullivan asked him if the Secretary of War’s Strategic Capabilities Office interacted with him differently because he was “only a midshipman;” Midshipman Galvan-Arrien responded that the office was quite responsive to questions, and understood that by utilizing midshipmen for research the office was actually getting a great deal in terms of return on investment. Mr. Spicer asked if working on this process helped get his security status cleared more quickly; the Superintendent informed Mr. Spicer that Security Clearance processes have not been an issue timeline-wise for midshipmen, compared to the rest of the Fleet which is largely behind.
  - MIDN Nicholas Ciaccio: Midshipman Ciaccio briefed the Board on his research on drone attacks against surface ships, and the two databases he developed utilizing Japanese Kamikaze usage in the Battle of Okinawa. He framed his research around the question: “Under what conditions are one-way attacks successful against warships?” He summarized his two key findings as the fact that attacks were twice as likely to be

successful when the skillfully used terrain backgrounds to guide attacks (pilot skill was a highly influential factor in success), and that mass attacks were more successful than singular attacks, up to a certain threshold. Senator Sullivan asked if he had looked into why the US Navy was so successful against drones in the Red Sea; MIDN Ciaccio responded that that was beyond the scope of his research for this specific project. Senator Sheehy asked if he had looked at the strategic aspects of success, and not just tactical; Midshipman Ciaccio agreed that would be a good lane of study for future research on the same topic. Midshipman Ciaccio also referred to his Capstone advisor, Professor Cullen Nutt, who had helped him to select his specific cases for study and the realistic limitations and capabilities of his project. Mr. Ehrhart agreed that this is an increasingly important area of study, because the enemy only has to get lucky once with these types of attacks.

At 1018, Senator Sullivan asked the Board to push through the rest of the Open portion of the Meeting without a formal break, so those attending lunch would be able to make it on time.

**Athletic Director's Update:** At 1019 the Provost turned the floor over to the Athletic Director, Mr. Michael Kelly.

- **Athletic Success:** Mr. Michael Kelly briefly updated the Board on recent USNA athletic successes, including the Command-in-Chief Trophy, and beating Army in the Star Series; he highlighted that much of the success is due to the Naval Academy's focus on grit, teamwork, and midshipmen development. He mentioned that the Naval Academy had a 74% winning percentage over all winter sports, and that athletic accomplishment can help the name recognition of the Naval Academy, and help bring in dedicated young athletes.
- **USNA in the National Spotlight:** Mr. Kelly briefed the Board on how Naval Academy Athletics, and particularly Navy Football can be a national platform for the Brigade's Standard of Excellence. He highlighted that the Army-Navy Game averaged 7.84 million viewers, and that games averaged 1.35 million viewers, as the most watch G6 team. The Board used this time to discuss how the Members of Board, particularly those within Congress, could best aid the Naval Academy in further protecting the Army-Navy Game. The Board agreed that the President's Executive Order bought time, and that now is a great opportunity to further capitalize on that momentum, as the Army-Navy Game represents more than just football – it brings retention and recruiting, and connects the American people with the military.
- **Athletic Facility Improvements:** Mr. Kelly also briefly updated the Board on two athletic facility projects: updating the Superintendent's tailgate area at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, and the groundbreaking for the new, fully gift-funded, Lacrosse Center.

**Commandant Update:** At 1035 Mr. Kelly turned the floor over to the Interim Commandant of Midshipmen, Captain Austin Jackson, U. S. Navy.

- **Summer Training Update:** Captain Jackson updated the Board on the status of the Brigade, with a focus on summer training. He discussed the summer cruises distribution, with 1,040 Surface Cruises, 248 Submarine Cruises, 157 Aviation Cruises, and 484 Marine Corps Leatherneck trainings. He also discussed the different Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) opportunities, highlighting that the Naval Academy works with the State Department to focus on what is most relevant to the nation. He informed the Board that one change for plebe summer will be that if incoming plebes become injured or can't complete a minimum number of days of training, they'll be put on notice and potentially rolled back a class. The Superintendent added that he's going to focus on not "bubble-wrapping" midshipmen anymore, throughout plebe summer and plebe year, and beyond. Different Members of the Board inquired further into specific training opportunities, and CAPT Jackson and Lieutenant General Borgschulte updated them on current trainings, and projected future trainings. The Superintendent requested that if Members of Board have good ideas or connects, to get in contact to further discuss and collaborate.

**Admissions Update:** At 1052 Captain Jackson turned the floor over to the Director of Admissions, Captain Chad Redmer, U. S. Navy.

- **2030 Admissions Cycle Status and Overall Admissions Update:** Captain Redmer started off his update by emphasizing that the increased attention on merit-based admissions has helped direct the Naval Academy to do things in the right way; he informed the Board that the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) and the Department of the Navy have been "checking our homework," as well, specifically showing OSW the list of candidates ranked by merit and explaining offers of admission. He noted that Admissions is committed to being more transparent about their processes, and in line with chain of command direction. Captain Redmer then updated the Board on the 2030 Admissions Cycle, highlighting that one of the biggest anomalies this year is that the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board (DoDMERB), is quite delayed due to a system update, and that when denying waivers DoDMERB was not transparent. The Board inquired how they might be able to further assist on this issue; the Superintendent let the Board know he would update them later this summer after meeting with the other Military Service Academies at the Conference of Service Academy Superintendents. The Superintendent also mentioned that all of the Service Academies Superintendents will be discussing the Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA), and considering requesting a change to best reflect what component of the CFA actually translate to midshipman success.

Congressman Sullivan adjourned the open portion of the meeting at 1109.