The Center for ELD serves as the bridge between the Leadership, Education, and Development (LEAD) Division’s curriculum and leadership experiences outside the classroom. ELD draws connections between behavioral science theory and experiential leadership practice.

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Gettysburg Leadership Encounter (GLE)

Two experiential leadership trips to the Gettysburg battlefield occur each year in June and December. In June, the group spends two days at Gettysburg College and on the battlefield, studying leadership principles and lessons from the 1863 battle. Midshipmen leaders attend classes and break-out discussion sessions covering the leadership tenets of loyalty, standards, and action. The two-day retreat enables networking and team-building through a cohesive network of peer support that fosters professional relationships within the Brigade of Midshipmen during the academic year. In December, a one-day trip facilitates the same with the spring semester commanders.

All varsity team captains and commanders from the Brigade (company, battalion, regiment, and brigade) participate in this meaningful leadership experience. Throughout each semester, these 1/C leaders attend follow-on monthly group meetings over a meal, facilitated by the GLE staff.

The discussions serve to keep the leaders energized on Gettysburg lessons learned, assisting them with solving leadership issues in Bancroft Hall and on varsity teams throughout the year, providing them with regular opportunities to network with each other, solve problems, and build esprit-de-corps.

“GLE was a superb experience, not only in developing myself and my leadership vision, but also meeting and interacting with the other Brigade stripers and team captains. It provided a fantastic opportunity for networking and learning key leadership lessons of the past.”
- MIDN Stephanie Read, Class of 2022
Naval Academy Leadership Conference (NALC)

In February 2021, the midshipmen NALC staff hosted more than 300 students and faculty from over 60 schools, including 10 domestic and international service academies, for a three-day hybrid online and in-person conference examining the importance of team and workplace culture.

The theme was “Stronger Together: Cultivating a Winning Culture.”

The conference included keynote speeches from SEAL, doctor, and astronaut LT Jonny Kim; former Navy fighter pilot and Vietnam War POW CAPT Charlie Plumb, USNA Class of 1964; and Mr. Dave Castro, Director of the Crossfit Games. Several leadership panels featured a mix of veterans, active duty service members, founders and CEOs, as well as world-class athletes and coaches.

The Forrestal Lecture was given by ADM Michael Mullen, USNA Class of 1968 and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations. The midshipmen staff looks forward to returning to a full in-person format for future conferences.

“Being on conference staff for two years was one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling experiences during my time at USNA. I learned so much about teamwork, planning, communication, and compromise.”

- MIDN Alejandro Bello, Class of 2021
Naval Academy Women's’ Network (NAWN)

The Network empowers and equips midshipmen to navigate careers as leaders through increased opportunities for engagement, education, and experiences with officers and graduates, cultivating an inclusive and diverse mentoring network of women and men from USNA, the Fleet, and the Operating Forces. The Network typically involves 400-500 midshipmen annually and provides Lean-in Circle opportunities, as well as five networking events throughout the year to foster mentoring and future retention of women service members. During the 2020-21 academic year, three networking and mentoring events occurred in various outdoor venues on the Yard; each February, the Network hosts its annual Military Life Symposium, offering diverse sessions on topics relevant to leading a life and career in uniform. In April, the Network sends midshipmen to the Officer Women Leadership Symposium in Arlington, VA where they are joined by other midshipmen, cadets, officers, and senior enlisted from all services.
National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)

NOLS provides field-based leadership practicums designed to support and complement classroom leadership theory by allowing students to execute and reflect on real-world decision making in austere, unpredictable, and dynamic wilderness environments with immediate consequences. Midshipmen attend month-long backpacking and mountaineering courses in Wyoming and Alaska.

NOLS focuses on four types of leadership:

• Directed leadership,
• Peer leadership,
• Active followership, and
• Self leadership

“At NOLS I learned first-hand that different styles of leadership are needed for varying situations. Leadership is not just the ability to get the team to the finish line, but also keeping the team together. It relies on a level of mutual trust between a leader and their followers.”

-MIDN Walker Lee, Class of 2024
Spring Break Expedition

Like NOLS, the Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School offers a field-based leadership practicum designed to support and complement classroom leadership theory by allowing students to make real-world decisions in austere, rugged wilderness environments with immediate consequences. Courses meet the needs of midshipmen and USNA’s demand for small-unit leadership experiences. During spring break each March, 18 Midshipmen participate in a five-day hike along the Appalachian Trail (Harper’s Ferry area) with 18 military veterans from USNA and the community in a one-on-one mentoring and leadership expedition. They experience cold weather, some snow, and lots of time to bond and discuss leadership and life lessons with each other and their wilderness guides. Over the course of the week, the mids and vets bond as a team to overcome the challenges of elevation, weather, and the need to work together to find the correct route, build nightly campsites, and keep themselves warm and well-fed.

“Outward Bound expedition helped me discover that no two individuals come from the same walks of life. Yet we all ended up in the same place at the same time, working together in the wilderness to be a successful team. Diverse talents were our strength.”
-MIDN Anna Saucedo, Class of 2022

Summer Block Expedition

During the summer course, Outward Bound promotes effective teamwork and leadership development by providing wilderness expeditions and training that emphasize the ideals of character, leadership, and service. This transformative learning experience, where students develop new technical skills as well as a sense of teamwork, self-confidence, and a desire to make a difference, is designed and delivered by a community of the industry’s most skilled and dedicated educators and instructors. ELD programs such as this and NOLS give midshipmen a small-scale yet meaningful opportunity to put into practice in a real-world stressful situation the leadership theories and concepts taught in the academic classroom and Bancroft Hall.
St. Benedict’s Preparatory H.S. is a co-ed Benedictine Catholic secondary school in Newark, New Jersey serving approximately 600 students in grades 9-12. St. Benedict’s provides two experiential leadership and mentoring opportunities for midshipmen each spring and summer.

In May, midshipmen mentor student leaders at St. Ben’s as they take their teams of ninth graders on a five-day journey on the Appalachian Trail. The hike is a rite of passage for all St. Ben’s students who are more used to the troubles of modern urban life than the trials offered by the AT. The mids play a critical role in executing this challenging expedition. The hike is an experience which helps these young men and women assume increased responsibility within the school community.

During late summer, midshipmen work with the new cohort of incoming freshmen as they join the St. Benedict’s community. The training is similar in some respects to the experience of Plebe Summer, occurring right before the academic year begins. Midshipmen spend the first week helping the staff and upper class leadership team prepare to run this indoctrination. The following weeks are spent assisting in the classrooms, mentoring the students, and executing a leadership development course.

Approximately 30 midshipmen per year participate, honing their leadership and mentoring skills and gaining a better understanding of the vast array of social and cultural dynamics that they will likely encounter once they graduate and begin to lead sailors and Marines.

“St. Ben’s provided an ideal opportunity to practice servant leadership. People may not always respect you simply because you are put in charge of them. You need to demonstrate how much you care about them. I had to work very hard to show that I was invested in their success.”
- MIDN Erik Brandon, Class of 2024
Combined ELD-IPO Battle Sites LREC - GEN Washington’s Insurgency

During two weeks in the summer of 2021, ten Midshipmen, led by three Marine officers, traveled along the East Coast to follow some of the nation’s most important and inspiring Revolutionary War battles. The historical lens the team used was that of the (at-the-time) radical revolutionaries’ insurgency in overthrowing the mightiest empire and military in the world, while comparing it to some of our country’s other counterinsurgencies in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The great paradox of the American Revolution is that the Continental Army won relatively few battles yet still prevailed in the war. Viewing much of the war as a colonial insurgency helped explain much of the paradox. It also helped the group better understand U.S. military history while developing themselves within the military profession.

From Boston, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Trenton, to the southern partisan campaign in South Carolina, to the final battle of Yorktown, this group of young midshipmen patriots learned first-hand the daring exploits of General Washington and his inspiring leadership throughout the harrowing years of our country’s first war. The trip’s final stop was the Annapolis State House, where Washington resigned his commission and delivered an emotional speech, in which he saluted the bonds of fellowship that had sustained him and his soldiers over the course of the war. The group finished with a final lunch at Middleton Tavern, where Washington himself once drank ale. Huzzah!

“We discovered that the Delaware crossing on Christmas 1776 was not only a testament to the leadership of General Washington, but more importantly to the determination and courage of the colonial soldiers to press on in the most dire circumstances.”

- MIDN Zack Genereaux, Class of 2022
Sisters Academy

With an 11-month extended day school model, Sisters Academy in Asbury Park, NJ centers on a way of life that provides support for at-risk pre-adolescent girls (grades 5-8) while enabling students to reach for bright futures using education and mentorship as their tools for success. The program offers two to four participating midshipmen professional training and education in experiential leadership via a combination of practical experience and guided reflection.

Midshipmen practice the leadership lessons, concepts, and techniques of USNA's leadership curriculum while serving as mentors and role models to the young students. These midshipmen experience unique intellectual and leadership challenges while leading in the classroom, reinforcing current leadership and STEM theory and application, strengthening their creative problem-solving skills, enhancing their innovative thinking, and honing their ability to adapt to dynamic situations.

NL245 - Engineering Leadership

Engineering Leadership is offered by the Aerospace Engineering Department as an upper-level humanities course to better prepare students for leadership and project management roles in a technical and experiential environment. During practical application projects, students practice project management and technical leadership skills while working in teams. In order to achieve this objective, NL425’s current curriculum addresses three areas: leading engineers’ teams, leading engineers’ work, and leading engineers’ innovation. The course provides instruction using lectures, reading assignments, classroom discussion, group projects, and various experiential learning activities with content that focuses on the following themes: communication, team dynamics, leadership styles, creativity, and project management. The course is currently taught by CAPT Ken Reightler, USNA Class of 1973, a former NASA astronaut.