

Captain Markus Gudmundsson, NPS Leadership

Dean of Students

Captain Markus Gudmundsson came to NPS in 2018 to assume the role of dean of students. In this position, he serves as the commanding officer of the student military element and is responsible for matters related to students' health, welfare, discipline, academic standing, accountability and travel. He spoke with us about COVID-19's impact on NPS, how he's seen the school grow and change over the years, and also shared highlights and challenges of his own naval career.

What has your experience at NPS been like since you came here in 2018?

My role as dean of students is to support student requirements. I look out for student interests. Much of my time is addressing the specific needs of a few students who are really challenged. You can name any challenge that a human might experience and we've got a student who is experiencing that. Students come to us with eight to 15 years of military experience which includes training, deployment, separation from family, etc. They have been active participants in military operations. I tell them at student orientation, *'This is your opportunity to take a look at your deferred maintenance issues, or the issues that you didn't have the time to address in your breakneck pace of train/deploy/train/deploy.'* Those issues may be medical issues, family issues, or mental health challenges. I have all of the resources that can address those issues and my main job is making the connection between the need and the resource, and advertise that that's an important thing to do.

You get a lot of facetime with NPS students. How would you describe the collective student body?

They are the best of the best; the hand-selected from the hand-selected; proven professionals and dedicated patriots. They come here with real fleet challenges and they have a dedication to solve them, and in many cases they do. It's amazing to see.

How have you seen NPS change and grow since you first started as dean of students?

There has been a tremendous amount of effort in strengthening and expanding our ability to connect with industry and other centers of technological innovation. We are a much more strategically driven organization than we were three years ago. Putting our strategic plan to work has been fascinating to watch. Our ability to work with the NPS Foundation and other non-federal entities has also improved tremendously.

You mentioned partnering with industry. Why do you believe that is important for NPS?

NPS students come here with knowledge and experience with real fleet challenges and a desire to solve them. There is no other graduate institution that only admits professional career military members. This student population does not exist anywhere else in the world. That is a unique opportunity for industry because we have unique technological challenges that we can partner with industry to solve. A student or faculty member with their unique project partnering with industry is the only way we can leverage the industrial strength to see those challenges to a conclusion. The flip side is, industry often comes up with really good ideas but doesn't understand how to apply them. If there is a more transparent relationship with some industry partners, we may be able to look at a capability in a way different than anybody else and help them apply

it. The exchange of ideas and experiences and capitalizing on our unique student population and the industrial strength of our partners is really important.

How would you describe the value that NPS brings to the U.S. Military and Department of Defense?

I'll share an example from my personal experience. This is one tiny vignette that is happening all over the Department of Defense with NPS graduates. I knew a guy who came to NPS with a fleet problem to solve. The operational Navy was slow to change and adopt new ideas and he was frustrated with that, so he came here to research one specific thing. When he was on the flight line, he would finish with his flight, wait 20 minutes to taxi the plane in to park and shut it down. He thought that was horribly inefficient. This routine was unused time for pilots who were in the cockpit doing nothing and burning gas as the planes sat there in idle, plus the wear and tear on the engine. NPS gave him the tools to quantify all of that and to demonstrate the millions of dollars being spent on that inefficiency. He solved that problem for the Navy. Countless students like him go back to the fleet with tools to solve these types of problems.

How has COVID-19 impacted your role as dean of students and what have been some of the biggest challenges you've had to work through in that role?

To communicate frequently to make sure the student population fully understands the environment we are in and how we are responding to that, also to keep our population safe. I feel I have two imperatives. The first is to make sure each individual is protected and to put in place policies that don't expose individuals to potentially hazardous conditions. The second is to protect the institution, to make sure the virus doesn't affect the institution so we can continue to do our work of delivering a world-class education. Those two imperatives are often in opposition. This situation has put special stress on some families so we are working with those individuals to allow the service member to be able to focus on their classwork.

Any estimated date for when we will see students back in physical classrooms?

We have the same kind of conditions-based criteria for modifying what the campus does as the broader Department of Defense does. We are looking very closely at what Governor Newsom and the State of California are doing and we're looking at the trends in Monterey County and what the county is doing. I am not optimistic that we will return to campus anytime soon based on the condition in our local environment. I think this will continue to affect us for a long, long time. I am looking to protect both the individual and the institution. It's about protecting the students, the faculty and the institution as a whole.

Transitioning to your personal Naval career, why did you decide to join and attend the Naval Academy back in 1991?

I grew up in Boise, Idaho. During my junior year, my friend was inspired by "Top Gun" and was super motivated to attend the Naval Academy. I didn't have a vision for where I was going, so I decided to throw in an application with him. I got in and the rest is history. I got married right out of the Naval Academy and my wife and I would talk all the time about where we're going next before every set of orders that we got in the Navy. My goal was always, 'I want to be an air wing commander.' It took 26 years but I finally got to command an air wing.

What are you most proud of from your career in the Navy thus far?

I'm proud of the whole thing. There's not a single tour I look back on and think I could have done better. My wife and I have deliberately chosen the path that we're on and it led to the opportunities that we hoped it would. I'm super proud that I had the chance to serve overseas in Japan and expose my kids to an international experience. We also got to serve in Germany, so it was almost six years of overseas experience for the kids. Nothing beats your O5 command tour when someone hands you the keys to your own squadron and 12 jets. That was certainly a highlight. And the relationships that we've established and maintained ... we have friends for life that you don't get in any other kind of career. Also coming back to command the fleet replacement squadron, that was basically running a training station which was super motivating, super fun. And commanding the air wing in Lemoore at a really stressful time when we were working through maintenance challenges and bringing to life that F35 community.

Is there any particular challenge from your career that you learned from?

The most satisfying would be back in my O5 command with the Black Aces squadron in Lemoore. I was part of that squadron from the very beginning of their training cycle all the way through a combat deployment in Afghanistan. To do all the little things along the way to ensure the crew was able to perform in a combat, stressful environment and then get to go take them through it and watch them perform professionally and with a precision and restraint and in compliance with the rules was an absolute joy. You take inexperienced folks and you train, coach and mentor them and then you see them perform brilliantly, that was really rewarding.