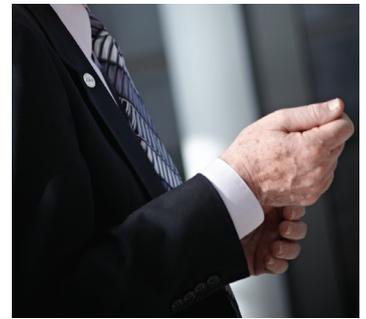


A Conversation with Dr. Robert Childs Chancellor, National Defense University's iCollege

Today, even the most seasoned government leaders are facing extraordinary challenges in managing information technology, financial, and human resources; understanding social networks, and competing globally. Information age leaders need to know how to respond rapidly to evolving priorities and how to leverage a multi-generational workforce. They must also be agile in meeting the national security challenges today and into the future. What skills do strategic leaders need to be successful in the information age? How is the National Defense University's iCollege positioning itself as a global hub for educating, informing, and connecting information age leaders? Dr. Robert Childs, chancellor of The iCollege at The National Defense University, joined me on The Business of Government Hour to explore these questions and so much more.

On Reshaping the Mission and Vision of NDU's iCollege

The IRM [Information Resources Management] College was founded in 1988. The rebranding to iCollege ... came about in 2009. The National Defense University (NDU) President, Vice Admiral Ann Rondeau, USN, was really behind this effort. After our 20th anniversary, we started ... reflecting on what we had done in the past. We found that we were doing more than just educating people. We were actually informing and connecting people. We made our name with the Chief Information Officer programs, and all of a sudden it had expanded into process improvement, enterprise architecture, emerging technologies, all of these areas. Now, it was no longer just CIOs. It was leaders. We're actually becoming a global hub for educating, informing, and connecting information age leaders. Our mission at the NDU iCollege is to prepare leaders to direct the information component of national power by leveraging information and information technology for strategic advantage. It [relates to the "5 i's of soft power"—information, innovation, inter-agency, industry, and international]. It's all about developing the strategic leaders for the information age.



Despite [this] huge step forward, we haven't changed much organizationally. We have about 85 people: 50 faculty members, 35 staff members. Departments are organized around programs such as information technology, emerging technology, information assurance, cybersecurity, cyber leadership, CIO/CFO skill sets, IT-project management, and much more. Approximately 50 courses are offered multiple times throughout the year, seven graduate certificate programs, and the College's new Government Information Leader (GIL) Masters Degree of Science program are available.

Our international presence is growing considerably. In our [14-week] advanced management program ... we normally have about 30 students enrolled. We used to have one international student per seminar. Now we're getting up to ... eight international students. Twenty-five percent of the class could be international students.



Honorable John G. Grimes, Dr. Marwan Jamal, Prince Naef (Saudi Arabia), and Dr. Robert Childs.

On the Expanding International Presence

In addition to formal education programs, we have also begun hosting international conferences to highlight faculty expertise, bring together global decision-makers, and share best practices. The conference and the outreach are an evolving model. In fact, at the beginning there were those [who] wondered why we were spending our time doing it. My response was you put the stake in the ground and people start coming to you. We say we are a global hub and that's the strategic direction we're pursuing.

In July 2010, the college hosted 250 government, academic, and private-sector leaders from more than 10 different countries at the *Regional Collaboration in Cybersecurity Conference* in Singapore. We had speakers such as Peter Ho, the Head of Civil Service in Singapore, and Jaak Aaviksoo, Minister of Defense of Estonia. After Singapore, I received favorable e-mails from people [who] had heard about the conference even before we put out a news release. It's amazing—talk about building networks and a global community.

In October 2010, we hosted a conference on cloud computing in London in conjunction with AFCEA International. John Suffolk, the chief information officer of the UK, was our keynote speaker. We also had Lieutenant General Kurt Herrmann, director of NATO Communication and Information Systems Services Agency (NCSA). They both spoke about what cloud computing meant and where it could go. In February [2011], we hosted a two-day

international conference, *Regional Collaboration in Infrastructure Protection: Securing National Information and Key Assets in the Middle East*, in Dubai, UAE. Early planning is also underway for international events in South America and the Far East.

It is an evolving model. As we put this model together, we have found common problems ... around the world ... with slight modifications due to culture, budgets, and differing stages of [maturity]. For example, I wouldn't go into the Middle East and talk about cloud computing and virtualization yet. They're at the critical infrastructure protection level, but maybe the next round of conferences there will tackle those issues.

Partnerships are the key. We have partnerships with AFCEA International, IAC-ACT, and many corporations. We leverage these partners when putting on our conferences; our global hub concept is very much based on having these partnerships.

On Receiving Masters Degree-Granting Authority

The iCollege was the last of the five schools that make up the National Defense University to seek and receive degree-granting authority. We went through a very extensive three-year study. We had to look at our internal processes and go through everything that any college or university goes through for accreditation. Admiral Rondeau and I had to testify before the 18-member National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) and the Department of Education to request degree-granting approval for the NDU iCollege. [NACIQI is the federal advisory body



Dr. Robert Childs, Honorable Peter Ho (Singapore), and Conference Participant.

“We’re actually becoming a global hub for educating, informing, and connecting information age leaders...It’s all about developing the strategic leaders for the information age.”

— Dr. Robert Childs



to the Secretary of Education that provides recommendations on the recognition of federal academic institutions to award advanced degrees.] We received a unanimous 18-to-0 vote to grant the Master of Science degree and be awarded degree-granting authority. NACIQI members who visited the College in last November praised the high quality of the program, faculty, and students.

I have to mention this story of support because it was so powerful. Steve Cooper, who has held a number of CIO positions inside and out of government, provided a wonderful testimony of the importance of the iCollege. Steve said [paraphrasing]: ‘I’ve been CIO of three very important agencies of significant magnitude, and I’m here in class because this is the best education that I can find in the country ...’ The committee members heard that, and you could just see the look on their faces. What a testimonial! I think it typifies what people say about the college. When somebody comes, we have a lifelong friend and a lifelong advocate.

On Federal Consortium for Virtual Worlds (FCVW)

Regarding virtual worlds, the one you hear most about is Second Life. Literally, you create a world that can mirror the real world, or it can mirror an imaginary world. Its purpose is total immersion. You’re more than a mere observer; you’re a participant in this virtual world.

The consortium was created to explore multi-agency and intra-agency collaboration using the robust capabilities of virtual worlds, examining best practices across multiple sectors. The objective of the consortium is to help government agencies to share resources, training, and experience; leverage outreach capabilities and practices; connect to new partners and business opportunities; and demonstrate the benefits for virtual worlds’ collaborative capabilities. It consists of over 1,600 registered members from government (federal, state and local, and international), academia, and corporate sectors. The consortium supports individuals and organizations to improve government collaboration through the use of virtual worlds to enrich collaborative online experiences, explore technologies that may enhance telework,



NDU iCollege Crisis Management iLab.

and foster cross-agency collaboration. It provides a venue to share best practices and lessons learned for the collaborative use of virtual worlds, address common challenges, and create structures to share resources.

On Recognition and Awards

I feel incredibly honored to have received the Fed 100 award for the last three years, but I look at it as organizational recognition more than an individual achievement. It’s ... an affirmation that you’re doing [important] things ... and your peers think you’re doing important things. It can be a launching pad for new things as well as ... a platform to talk about the things we are doing. As I mentioned, one of my biggest challenges is getting the word out on what we do. Awards and recognition can help make this happen. In 2009, Dr. Marwan Jamal, Professor at the iCollege, received a Rising Star Award from Government Computer News. Dr. Cathy Downs received an award for teaching netcentricity. The iCollege team, led by Professor Mark Duke, recently won the Government Information Security Leadership Award



Dr. Robert Childs in the NDU iCollege Innovations iLab.

(GISLA), which recognizes the ongoing commitment by federal information security leaders who have significantly improved the security posture of a department, agency, or the entire federal government.

We also received a telework award as well as an award for distributed learning. The organization has received many awards, and that tells me we're out there on the cutting edge, doing things, and making a difference. It's a great honor.

On the Classroom of the Future

The classroom of the future my people like to refer to as the "C+ to the I power." This has many implications. The "C" connoting communication, collaboration, and creativity ... magnified to the I power, which encompasses innovation and imagination. I have some very, very creative people. What they're doing in this room is beyond imagination. It's going to have a lot of 3-D and high-def elements. There's going to be a different type of [mobile] projection that ... combines lots of innovative things, like telepresence, virtual worlds, visualization, and augmented reality. It's not going to be a room as you preconceive a room. It's going to be a round room, not a square room. There's not going to be anything permanent in it. Everything's going to be movable ... The key is going to be flexibility, agility, and configuration. I have high expectations.

On Challenges

The biggest challenges that I face are making decisions on how to spend my time and what opportunities to pursue. The landscape is changing so quickly. You have to be out there. You have to constantly be forming relationships. You have to constantly be learning. It's a never-ending thing, whether it's webinars, whether it's blogs, whether it's listening to federal news radio, it's reading *Federal Computer Week*, *Government Computer News*, all these things. What conferences do you go to? What conferences should the faculty be attending? If we're going to be on a program, what program should we be on? Where is the largest impact?

So knowing what the trends are, deciding where to spend our time, as I mentioned, getting word out on the college. I mean, I am constantly trying to do things like that, and I welcome the opportunities like today to speak and talk about the programs.

On Leadership

The leader has to recognize excellence and create the environment where people can perform well and excel. The leader has to understand the trends, connect the dots, and seal the deals. The leader has to make major resource decisions. You try to position your organization in a place that you can take advantages of the trends and the talents that you have in your organization. You have to understand where you're going, but at the same time you have to be ready to change the next day. It's not about blowing in the wind. It's about understanding where you have the best chance to apply your expertise and be successful. ■

To learn more about the NDU iCollege, go to www.ndu.edu/icollege



To hear *The Business of Government Hour's* interview with Dr. Robert Childs, go to the Center's website at www.businessofgovernment.org.



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