

First Cohort of NPS, NAVWAR Scholarship-for-Service Program Set to Start this September

First of its kind partnership between DOD agencies and the nation's HBCU/MSI institutions advances diversity, opportunity in STEM.

MONTEREY, CA, UNITED STATES, August 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The inaugural [Naval Information Warfare Systems Command](#) (NAVWAR) and [Naval Postgraduate School](#) (NPS) Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions (HBCU/MSI) Scholarship-for-Service (S4S) Program has officially commenced, with four students selected as part of the initial cohort to start their studies at NPS this September.

The two-year graduate program is the first of its kind within the Department of Defense (DOD), with NAVWAR serving as the pilot. It aims to encourage research and educational partnerships between HBCU/MSIs and government defense organizations. With tuition, salary and travel all covered by the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (USD [R&E]), the program will support the students financially and with mentorship from current DOD employees throughout their studies at NPS in Monterey, Calif.

“It’s an honor that NAVWAR is partnering with NPS to take the first step as the pilot of this extraordinary program,” said John Pope, executive director of NAVWAR. “The labs the students will be working in upon graduation do vital work that serves the warfighter. I can’t wait to see how this program will gain traction across the DOD, and what the first cohort and beyond will be able to achieve by participating.”

Scholarship-for-Service refers to the scholarship provided to the participants to complete their



Allyson Dopwell, NAVWAR-NPS diversity STEM S4S program interim director, and James Yapnayon, one of the students of the inaugural cohort, are pictured at the Naval Information Warfare Center (NIWC) Pacific.

master's degrees at NPS at no cost to them, in exchange for three years of service at a Naval Information Warfare Center (NIWC) Pacific or NIWC Atlantic laboratory upon graduation. The NIWC locations include San Diego, Calif. and Charleston, S.C.; New Orleans, La.; and Norfolk, Va., respectively.

The selected students are all recent graduates from HBCU/MSIs pursuing master's degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields relevant to the DOD. Because the NIWC labs hire and onboard the students as employees before attending NPS, they will be receiving salaries while completing their studies.

There are multiple stages in the S4S program, with participants first reporting to their chosen NIWC location for onboarding as employees in August 2023. They then transition to NPS in September to begin their studies for a master's degree, remaining for 18 months. During the last six months, candidates will complete their thesis at their identified NIWC. Upon completion of the program, graduates have a service commitment to work at their respective NIWC for three years, with a salary commensurate with their master's-level experience.□

Two of the students will be going to work at the Cyber/Science & Technology (S&T) and Command and Control and Enterprise Engineering labs at NIWC Pacific, respectively, and the other two will be heading to the Production, Quality & Manufacturing and Data Science & Analytics labs at NIWC Atlantic, respectively. Throughout their time at NPS, the students will be making quarterly trips to their NIWC location to work alongside their academic supervisors and build a relationship with their future colleagues.

One of the participants, James Yapnayan from Norfolk State University, is planning to study computer science with a specialization in either cybersecurity and defense or cyber operations. He found out about the NAVWAR-NPS S4S program from his senior seminar professor as an option for both career advancement and pursuit of higher education upon graduation. Yapnayan is most looking forward to continuing to learn about the latest research and methodologies related to cybersecurity and work alongside his peers who share a similar passion.

"One of my role models that influenced my decision to pursue this program is my father, James Yapnayan, Sr., who served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years," he said. "His dedication and service has inspired my own desire to contribute to the country through Navy civilian service, a step that feels like giving back to an institution who has given so much to us."

Justin Copping, NIWC Pacific academic supervisor and cybersecurity resiliency branch head, will be working with Yapnayan at the Cyber/S&T lab in San Diego. He'll meet with Yapnayan one-on-one during his quarterly visits to the lab from NPS and provide advice as a mentor, like helping him select relevant classes.

"Being a good mentor is not only about giving career advice but also ensuring they feel

personally supported, because new professionals often feel like they don't belong when they're first starting," said Coppage. "I'm looking forward to watching James' career grow and making sure he feels like he's part of the team while he's in Monterey. He's already indicated what he's interested in pursuing, and I hope to help him meet his goals."

Dejuan Green, also graduating from Norfolk State University, will study computer science with a cybersecurity and defense track while at NPS. With an undergraduate degree in information technology, he will leverage his existing skills to further his knowledge in the industry as well as expand his horizons by meeting other like-minded individuals.□

"I have always been interested in security operations center analyst positions as well as digital forensics but overall, the goal is to develop my skill to become a cybersecurity professional and help others," he said. "I've never been to the west coast before, so I can't wait to see the scenery and nature."□

Joe Amman, project engineer at NIWC Atlantic, will be mentoring Green throughout his studies and supervising him directly when he returns to Norfolk after 18 months at NPS. "We are tentatively planning for Green to support in-service life-cycle engineering, fleet/customer support or quality assurance," Amman said. "We hire many new professionals at the Production, Quality & Manufacturing lab and support them with mentorship, rotation and more, so we have a good infrastructure in place to help Green succeed."□

Although this year's cohort is four students, Allyson Dopwell, NAVWAR-NPS diversity STEM S4S program interim director, is hopeful that future classes will grow in numbers and expand to other DOD laboratories as the S4S program becomes more established. The program has also received support from leaders across the DOD and Navy like Dr. Kevin Smith, the vice provost for research at NPS; Maurice Civers-Davis, the Navy HBCU/MSI program office deputy director; and Evelyn Kent, the director of the HBCU/MSI program at the Office of USD (R&E).

"There has been more interest within the DOD and Navy in investing in our future talent for our national security as well as increasing diversity," Dopwell said. "As program director, I am working to cultivate relationships between the Navy and HBCU/MSIs across the country to attract more applicants for future years. We're excited to see the program improve and grow in the years to come."□

About NAVWAR:

NAVWAR identifies, develops, delivers and sustains information warfighting capabilities and services that enable naval, joint, coalition and other national missions operating in warfighting domains from seabed to space and through cyberspace. NAVWAR consists of more than 11,000 civilian, active duty and reserve professionals located around the world.

About NPS:

The Naval Postgraduate School provides defense-focused graduate education, including classified studies and interdisciplinary research, to advance the operational effectiveness, technological leadership and warfighting advantage of the naval service. For additional information, visit NPS online at <https://nps.edu>.

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