from lieutenant to colonel (or their Navy equivalents). Seminars usually include two or more officers from foreign countries and at least one civilian, such as someone from the Department of State or the Department of Homeland Security.

The military students come from many backgrounds and professions—doctors, submariners, fighter pilots, technicians—even chaplains. Many have held high-ranking commands, overseeing hundreds of people, while others were administrators with little supervisory experience. Some have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, while others have never left San Diego. The foreign students hail from all over the world; they contribute an interesting dimension to the quality of discussions and tend to appreciate Department of State students, who sometimes speak their languages, know their countries—and share their confusion with the experience of immersion in U.S. military culture.

Naval War College student Air Force Lt. Col. Ryan Link makes a presentation to a panel of judges that includes, from left, David Chu, president of the Institute for Defense Analyses, and Paula Dobriansky, a senior fellow at Harvard University.
Photo by Naval War College

Many of my classmates had spent their whole careers in the military, and they seemed alternately fascinated and perplexed by my outsider's perspective. It took a few months before I could "speak military" with any level of expertise, but once everyone got comfortable, the conversations in class became more lively, and even agreeably contentious.

I also found that many of my classmates, often with little previous exposure to State counterparts, had very little idea what diplomats actually do, so I spent time explaining how an embassy worked and about my experiences with State and DOD interactions. By the same token, I learned a lot from my military colleagues, from what it's like to fight from an attack helicopter, to

Previous page: Geoffrey Corn, a professor with the South Texas College of Law, leads a discussion during the Geography of War in Armed Conflict workshop at the U.S. Naval War College.
Photo by Navy MC2 Eric Dietrich