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Systems Engineering Professor Awarded Prestigious ACE Fellowship

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Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Professor of Systems Engineering, Dr. David H. Olwell, was recently named a Fellow of the American Council on Education (ACE). The ACE Fellowship Program is a yearlong higher education professional development program that prepares academic leaders to transition into senior leadership positions in American colleges and universities.

“This is a great honor for me,” said Olwell who was nominated to the ACE Fellowship Program by NPS Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Leonard Ferrari, with support from NPS President Dan Oliver. “I am extremely grateful for the confidence and support of Provost Ferrari and President Oliver and of my references from campus, who were key to the award of this fellowship,” Olwell continued.

“We are extremely proud of Dr. Olwell’s selection as an ACE Fellow,” said Ferrari. “He is uniquely positioned as elected faculty secretary, and a respected former chair of the systems engineering department, to bring experience gained from another institution back to NPS and contribute to a comparative analysis of our educational processes.”

ACE Fellows spend their time working directly with presidents and senior leaders at the universities they are assigned to. They participate and observe in important meetings, key events, and undertake important assignments and projects under the tutelage of their assigned administrators. They also take part in seminars and visit other campuses networking with other national, education leaders. All this with the purpose of observing and learning from the perspective of a different school to later apply that knowledge to their own school.

“I’m very excited just by looking at this laundry list of topics,” said Olwell. “You can see that there is a lot to learn, a lot to observe, a lot to think about, and a lot to bring back to the campus.”

Olwell praised NPS for its educational system and attitude, noting that he felt the university was the best in the world at what it did. As an example, Olwell cited the commitment of faculty to the development of the students, saying he felt it was unmatched. However, he added, as with any organization, there are processes that could be improved on or approached differently by comparison with other benchmarks, and that is what he is hoping to bring back from his experience as an ACE Fellow.

“We have a great faculty, sharp students, hard working, very operationally grounded,” said Olwell, “but I wonder that if, with other business processes, there would be a better way to do some of the things that we try to do.”

His experiences and training would place Olwell on a track to return to a higher leadership position at NPS upon his completion of the program, something that he is not a stranger to. Olwell has been very involved in school leadership, serving as a department chair, running several research projects, and serving on committees across the university.

He said that when it comes to leadership, what motivates him is the idea that a good leader has to be involved in the activities of the institution he heads.

“If you get your oars completely out of the water, you lose track of what’s going on,” said Olwell. “You have to stay connected to the main business lines in the university which are teaching and research.”

On a personal level Olwell enjoys the satisfaction he gets from interacting with students. He said that the quality of the students at NPS was top notch, and that contributing to their educational development makes his job more rewarding.

Olwell stated that, so far, his main teaching experiences have been in the military system but he hopes that he will be able to enrich his knowledge by venturing away from his comfort zone.

“Teaching at West Point … teaching here … I’ve learned how military schools work,” said Olwell, “but military schools are just one island in the great big archipelago of universities and it’s time for me to paddle across and see how the other side looks, and hopefully bring some ‘coconuts’ home.”

Dr. David H. Olwell, Professor of Systems Engineering at NPS, was recently named a Fellow of the American Council on Education. The ACE Fellowship Program is a yearlong higher education professional development program that prepares academic leaders to transition into senior leadership positions in American colleges and universities.