

This provides a complete description of Duke's Design Defense Studio 2026, a 3-credit-hour graduate engineering elective course offered by Duke's Pratt School of Engineering and the Duke Master of Engineering Management Program.

Who: Design Defense Studio is for currently serving military members of any rank and from any branch who want to dramatically advance their real-world innovation skills, and who currently have an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution. While STEM degrees are preferred, all undergraduate degrees will be considered. At the Professor's discretion, recently transitioned military members as well as other government employees may be accepted. Design Defense Studio is co-sponsored by the education directorate of ARCWERX, the Air Reserve Component innovation hub, and USASOC.

What: Design Defense Studio is an intense, 10 week advanced graduate engineering management course where student teams tackle strategically important, tactically relevant innovation challenges sourced from the DoW. Design Defense Studio is the foundation course in the Duke Certificate for Defense Innovation, and may be taken alone (3 credit hours), or as part of the four-course certificate sequence (12 credit hours), at the discretion of the student. Design Defense Studio is the DoW-facing version of eLuminate Studio, the popular graduate engineering management course that works directly with industry partners to advance commercial innovation.

Why: Rapid, effective innovation is a key to Department of War success now, in the near term and for the foreseeable future. But innovation is hard, as it means changing the status quo, in which most organization members are deeply entrenched. Moving successfully through the many valleys of death that cause most innovation to fail requires not just persistence but also state of the art skills in the sciences and best practices of innovation in Big, Successful Organizations. Design Defense Studio provides these skills and experiences through a robust curriculum focused on doing innovation (vs. studying innovation theory). This curriculum is derived from the tough innovation environments and success models that exist in the DoW, governments, industry, NGOs and academia.

When: Class Duration May 11th - July 17th, 2026

- **Online prework** week of May 4th, 2026
- **In-residence Workload:** Expect individual and team work of ~50 hours per in-residence session (including class time)
- **You *must* be able to attend** all three in-residence sessions at Duke.
- **In-residence Logistics:** 3 Week-long sessions at Duke University, Durham, NC

- Week 1: Monday, 11 May - Friday, 15 May
- Week 2: Monday, 08 June - Friday, 12 June
- Week 3: Monday, 13 July - Friday, 17 July

- **Times:** M-Th 9a-4:30p, Fridays 9a-12p

- **Travel** must be completed outside of class hours, no exceptions. This generally means arriving on Sundays and departing after 6pm on Friday, or anytime Saturday

- **Hotel:** Residence Inn, Durham, NC - Military per-diem rate

Virtual Logistics (you must be able to attend the 7 on-line weeks between In-residence weeks, using Zoom or Teams)

- Individual and team work 15-20 hours/week
- 1 hour/week online with professors + 1-2 hours/week office hours with team Coaches
- Selected readings as assigned by Faculty

How: Gaining admission to Design Defense Studio requires three things:

1. **A successful Application.** This is determined by the professors in consultation with our military partners.
2. **Funding.** This includes funding for tuition of a bit over \$8k as well as unit TDY funding for the in-residence weeks at Duke. Both ARCWERX and USASOC have funded the tuition portion for students from their respective service branches.
3. **Support from your commanding officer** to attend, and to utilize the new innovation skills learned after completion of the course.

Outcomes: Design Defense Studio produces military members who are ready to drive successful innovation in the future as well as fundable next steps for the team's innovation right now. Most innovations created in Design Defense Studio do receive funding for their next steps on the path to adoption, moving on to testable prototypes and evaluation in military exercises, and some have now reached deployment. Further, many Design Defense Studio alums have gone on to create or manage new innovation programs for the DoW at all levels from unit to HQ, working with industry and academic partners to bring vital new capabilities to the warfighter. The dual-use nature of some of these innovations further broadens the positive impact of those who complete the Design Defense Studio

program. Several alums have chosen to pursue the Duke Certificate for Defense Innovation or the Master of Engineering Management.

If you have any questions about the program, please contact one of us at the email addresses below:

Professor Robb Olsen - olsen.robb@duke.edu

Professor Kate Olsen - kate.olsen@duke.edu

Capt. Danny Smith, Director of Education, ARCWERX - daniel.smith.114@us.af.mil

Helpful links:

- 2026 Application for Design Defense Studio
https://duke.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8d1Gvwi6j64Hjll
- Duke University
 - Certificate for Defense Innovation / Design Defense Studio [Innovation for Defense Certificate | Duke Engineering Master's Programs](#)
 - Article on Design Defense Studio 2025 [Duke's Design Defense Studio Trains Troops to Think Like Professional Innovators | Duke Pratt School of Engineering](#)
 - Master of Engineering Management Program [Engineering Management | Duke Engineering Master's Programs](#)
 - Pratt School of Engineering [Home | Duke Pratt School of Engineering](#)

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