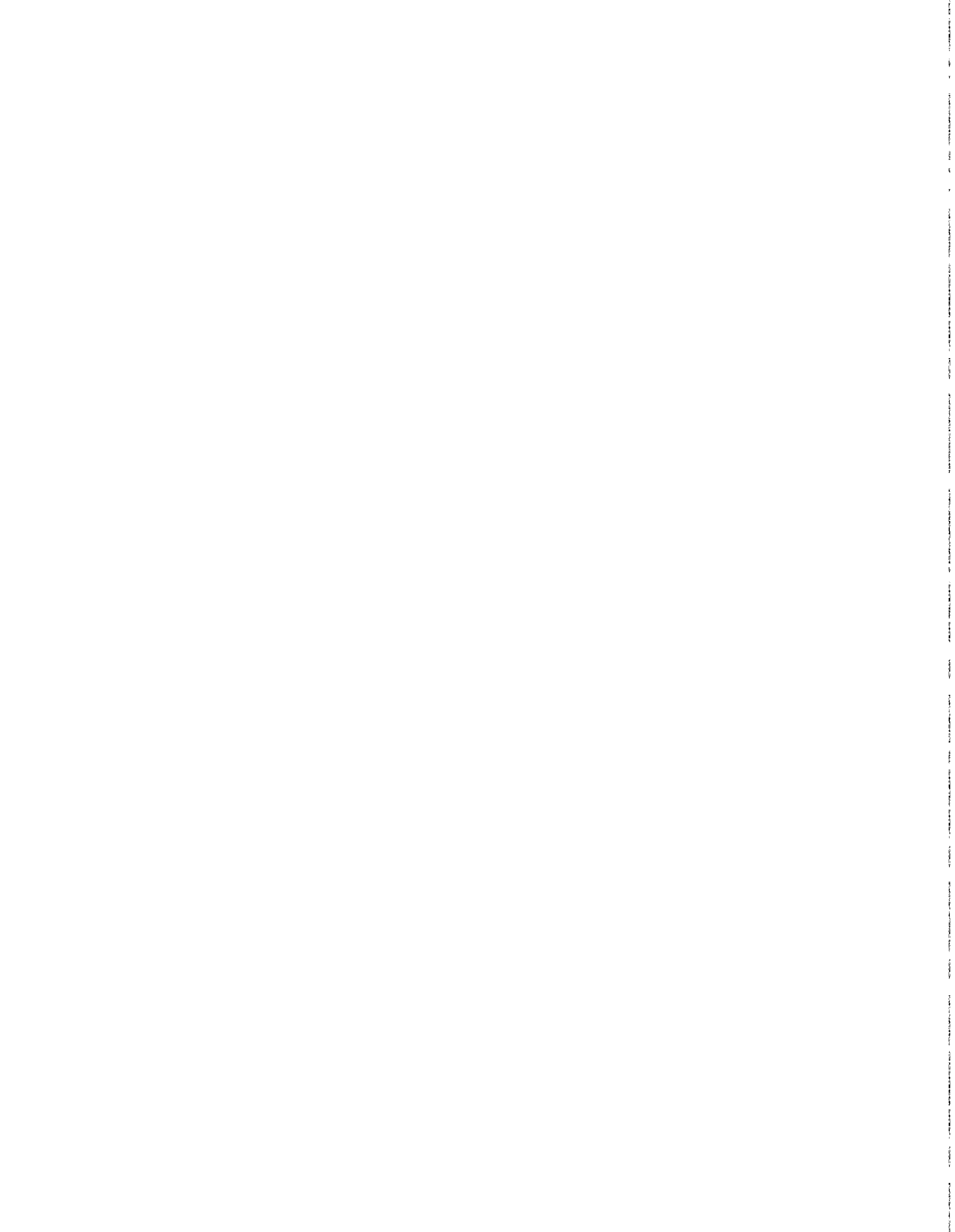


GAO

SP-302

GAO 87-104

Women's Advisory Council 1987 Annual Report



Foreword

This report describes the accomplishments of the Women's Advisory Council (WAC) during fiscal year 1987. Memoranda issued during the year are cited in the text, and copies of these memoranda are included in Appendix I of this report.

The Council's Executive Board wishes to thank all of those who contributed to WAC's efforts during the past year.

Christine M. Kopocis
President

Sarah J. Brady
Executive Vice-President

Susan A. Sacco
Vice-President for Communications

Suzanne Priftis
Secretary

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DMTAG	Design, Methodology, and Technical Assistance Group
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
GAO	General Accounting Office
GSA	General Services Administration
OIE	Office of Internal Evaluation
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
WAC	Women's Advisory Council

Introduction and Overview

Background and Goals

The Women's Advisory Council was formally established in 1975 to assist the Federal Women's Program. In 1976, WAC was officially sanctioned by the Comptroller General as a permanent council to address the interests of women in GAO.

The Council's overall goals, as stated in its bylaws, are to

- advise and assist the Comptroller General and his designees, the Federal Women's Program Manager, the Director of Civil Rights, the Director of Affirmative Action Plans, and the Director of Personnel on policies and programs concerning women in the U.S. General Accounting Office;
- serve as a liaison to Division and Office management;
- advance the interests of women in the U.S. General Accounting Office; and
- provide a representative forum for discussing and publicizing women's issues and problems.

Organization and Issues

The Career Development, Personnel, and Special Projects Committees carried out the Council's work during FY 1987. An Executive Board composed of the Council's elected officers participated in projects and met with GAO officials to discuss various matters throughout the year. Committee members are listed in table 1.1. WAC fiscal year 1987 award recipients are listed in table 1.2.

Specific issues addressed by the Committees during the year included:

- an examination of how GAO can expand promotion opportunities for personnel in female-dominated job series,
- comments on the draft revision of the GAO maxiflex order and the revised/final part-time order,
- a review of recruitment efforts at GAO versus other similar federal agencies,
- a review of and comments on the Personnel Task Group's proposal, "A Revised Personnel Program for GAO",
- comments on the Child Care Development Board's proposal to establish a day care center in the GAO building, and
- comments on the GAO draft smoking regulation.

President's Message

The employee councils serve an important role in GAO and the representatives on these councils deserve the encouragement and thanks of all

GAO staff for the time and energy they devote to representing our interests. I wish to congratulate the fiscal year 1987 representatives to the Women's Advisory Council, in particular, for their work in advancing the interests of women in GAO. This report reflects their efforts and will serve as an historical reference of their efforts for all GAO staff.

In addition to working on agency-wide issues, Council members channeled information on employees' views to division and office management. While the Council identified new issues which concern the women in the agency, it continued working on unresolved issues raised by past Councils. We leave with the fiscal year 1988 Council a list of issues we hope will be carried into the future. I wish the 1988 representatives success in their efforts on these and other issues they encounter.

Chapter 1
Introduction and Overview

**Table 1.1: Women's Advisory Council
Members Fiscal Year 1987**

Executive Board		
Christine M. Kopocis	OGC	President
Sarah J. Brady	NSIAD	Executive Vice President
Susan A. Sacco	GGD	Vice President for Communications
Suzanne Priftis	HRD	Secretary
Career Development Committee		
Elise Garrett	GGD	Co-chair
Carol H. Shulman	RCED	Co-chair
Wanda E. Avila	NSIAD	
Susan B. Hoovler	OGC	
Jennie A. Howell	NSIAD	
Kathleen M. Peyman	AFMD	
Sandra M. Saseen	GGD	
Sheryl Gilmore Taylor	RCED	
Personnel Committee		
Susan Beekman	RCED	Chair
Sarah J. Brady	NSIAD	
Barbara A. Chapman	PEMD	
Cynthia C. Heckmann	GS&C	
Carol L. Kolarik	WRO	
Margaret A. Mills	AFMD	
Frances C. Shannon	PERS	
Terri R. Yancy	PERS	
Special Projects Committee		
Monica L. Surber	PEMD	Chair
Susan Bean	IMTEC	
Jan E. Bogus	GGD	
Jackie Council	GS&C	
Claudia J. Fletcher	IMTEC	
Diana M. Olmstead	IMTEC	
Judy K. Pagano	RCED	
LaRhonda Parker	COMBINED OFFICES	
Patricia A. Peterson	COMBINED OFFICES	
Suzanne Priftis	HRD	
Susan A. Sacco	GGD	
Beverly C. Schladt	NSIAD	
Amy L. Zimmerman	WRO	

**Table 1.2: Women's Advisory Council
Fiscal Year 1987 Award Recipients**

Distinguished Achievement Award

Carol L. Kolarik

Outstanding Achievement Award

Sarah J. Brady
Christine M. Kopocis

Special Recognition

Barbara A. Chapman
Cynthia C. Heckmann
Monica L. Surber
Sheryl Gilmore Taylor

Career Development Issues

During fiscal year 1987, the Women's Advisory Council addressed career development and other employment issues. The Council

- examined how GAO can expand promotion opportunities for personnel in female-dominated job series;
- commented on the draft revision of the GAO maxiflex order; and
- commented on the revised/final part-time order.

Promotion Opportunities—Upward Mobility Program

The Council examined career development opportunities for personnel in female-dominated job series, particularly administrative support staff who are concentrated in the GS-7 and below grade levels. Presently, administrative personnel can convert only to evaluators or DMTAG specialists through the Upward Mobility Program.

To develop opportunities for administrative support staff, the Council recommended to the Assistant Comptroller General for Operations that the Upward Mobility Program be expanded to include positions other than those in the evaluator and DMTAG series. Capable, motivated staff who may not wish to become evaluators or DMTAG specialists should be given the opportunity to convert to other job series, such as budget analyst, writer/editor, personnel specialist, librarian, paralegal, or technical information specialist. WAC believes that the Upward Mobility Program could serve this purpose. However, because openings for Upward Mobility Program positions are limited, the Council recommended that one or two upward mobility slots could be used to develop staff in one or two of these fields each year. (See Appendix I, p. 18 for copy of memo.)

Maxiflex

WAC reviewed the draft revision of the GAO maxiflex order 2620.1 and submitted comments. (See App. I, p. 20.) In its comments, the Council proposed increasing credit hour accrual from 10 to 16 hours to accomplish three purposes: 1) allow flexibility to work extra hours when necessary to ensure jobs are completed on schedule; 2) enable parents to attend to sick children without being forced to take annual leave; and 3) assist employees with low leave balances because of prolonged illness and other periods of incapacitation (e.g. maternity leave), and/or short length of time in federal employment. The Council noted that OPM has "deliberately refrained" from preferring one credit hour limit over another. In addition, to avoid the problem of "increased year-end lose or use scheduling problems" cited by management as a major objection to increasing the credit hour accrual limit, the Council suggested that

credit hour accrual exceeding ten hours be limited to employees earning less than eight annual leave hours per pay period.

Part-Time

The Council agreed in general with the final GAO Order 2340.1, Part-time Employment Program, issued in March 1987. WAC was pleased with how its comments on the draft order were incorporated in the final order. (See App. I, p. 22.) WAC believes, however, that at a future date the order should clarify the following:

- Leave category. The discussion on leave for jury duty is confusing. The fact is that if an employee is on jury duty for a full week, he or she is entitled to be paid for the full amount of hours served, even if that amount exceeds the employee's regular work schedule. This point needs to be clearly stated in the order.
- Retirement benefits. An example of how retirement benefits are calculated for part-time employees, similar to the example provided for health benefits, would be helpful.

Personnel Issues

The Women's Advisory Council's principal responsibilities in the personnel area are to review GAO's affirmative action plans and goals and related activities, such as merit selection and recruitment; monitor the activities of the Personnel Appeals Board; and monitor personnel rules and review proposed revisions in major personnel directives.

In fiscal year 1987, WAC

- reviewed recruitment efforts at GAO versus other similar agencies;
- commented on the Personnel Task Group report "A Revised Personnel Program for GAO";
- responded to the Personnel Appeal Board's draft EEO oversight report;
- reviewed the results of GAO's fiscal year 1986 merit selection promotions;
- assessed the hiring actions taken during the fiscal year 1986 hiring freeze;
- commented on GAO draft order 2335.2, Career Ladder Promotions for Evaluator and Evaluator-Related Positions;
- commented on GAO draft order 2550.7, Severance Pay; and
- commented on GAO's health and life insurance study program.

Recruitment Efforts

In April, 1987, Comptroller General Bowsler asked WAC to research (1) what other similar federal agencies' recruitment practices and materials offer to a prospective employee compared to those at GAO, and (2) whether personnel policies as delineated by other agencies' recruiters could possibly induce a prospective employee to choose that agency over GAO. WAC conducted a preliminary review in order to address these questions. Our findings indicated that recruitment materials discuss basic benefits and policies, but do not go into great detail. In our opinion, these materials contain nothing that would induce a prospective employee to join one of these agencies over the GAO. Our findings also indicated that prospective employees' job concerns are not based primarily on personnel-related issues, but deal with concerns about work-related matters, such as work content, workplace environment, and potential job advancement. Finally, we learned that personnel-related issues become important to prospective employees after they have joined an agency. (See App. I, p. 23.)

Delegation and Decentralization of Personnel Authority

WAC reviewed and commented on the Personnel Task Group's proposal, "A Revised Personnel Program for GAO." (See App. I, p. 28.) The Council's comments address the proposal's treatment of both the organization and the employee.

From an organizational prospective, the Council is concerned that the delegation and decentralization of personnel authority to line divisions will result in duplication of effort in personnel functions throughout the agency and thereby increase staff costs. In addition, the personnel staff in each division will require considerable, ongoing training at a cost to the agency in terms of time and money. The testing of the decentralized system appeared limited and the idea that decentralization would allow central Personnel to assume a greater role seems unlikely since central Personnel would no longer have much control.

From an employee standpoint, the Council is concerned about equity in the personnel process. WAC is concerned that delegation and decentralization of personnel authority will lead to inconsistencies among divisions in their interpretation of personnel rules and their administration of the program. Similarly, WAC is concerned about equity in treatment of employees in employee relations cases.

WAC suggests that further testing of the proposed program is needed before full scale implementation is commenced. The test should entail all facets of the personnel program and the results should be evaluated by Personnel, or some other independent group such as OIE, but not by the division where the pilot program takes place.

Personnel Appeals Board

WAC commented on the Personnel Appeals Board's draft Oversight Review Report on Career Ladder Promotions. (See App. I, p. 32.) Our comments centered on the statistical significance of the sample and whether there was a discrepancy between the time spent in grade for employees with similar credentials.

Merit Selection Promotions and Hiring Freeze Actions

WAC collected data on the fiscal year 1986 merit selection promotions and hiring actions taken during the fiscal year 1986 hiring freeze. We found that the data was difficult to interpret in the form it was presented. To clear up these interpretation problems, Council members discussed the data with Lowell Dodge, Director of the Office of Affirmative Actions Plans, and his staff. Mr. Dodge informed us that because the affirmative action goal setting process was so new, different divisions and offices

reported somewhat differently. However, the officials said additional guidance is being provided to divisions and offices both for goal setting and for reporting of results. In terms of the exceptions made under the hiring freeze, the Council suggested displaying the data so that percentages by gender and race be identified separately by evaluator and administrative categories rather than just by total percentages.

Career Ladder Promotions

WAC commented on draft GAO Order 2335.2, Career-Ladder Promotions for Evaluator and Evaluator-Related Positions. (See App. I, p. 35.) The Council supported this order as a step in the right direction in terms of attempting to establish an agency-wide policy for career ladder promotions. However, WAC pointed out a number of areas that need clarification, such as the use of time-in-grade guidelines, the use of development plans, and rights to appeal. We also commented that, while we understand the need for management judgement in making promotion decisions, the draft order appeared to leave too much leeway for management judgement.

Severance Pay

WAC commented on draft GAO Order 2550.7, Severance Pay. (See App. I, p. 37.) The Council questioned the fairness across gender and ethnic divisions of the "age adjustment allowance." As the draft order was written, the age adjustment component of the calculation carries a great deal of weight. In a reduction-in-force, the Council wondered if women would find themselves not only disproportionately on the list, but with severance pay calculations diminished as well. WAC suggested that more research be conducted on alternative ways of calculating severance pay.

Health and Life Insurance

The Council was encouraged by GAO's preliminary plans for an independent health and life insurance program. However, certain concerns were raised about the program in our comments to the Assistant Comptroller General for Operations. (See App. I, p. 38.) WAC questioned the idea of choosing a health or life insurance plan in which rates are low as compared to one which would cost the same as employees presently pay but offer greater services. WAC also wondered why Blue Cross/Blue Shield's high option plan was compared to the health plan presently offered by the Federal Reserve Board. Finally, the Council believes that GAO should strongly consider the issue of disability insurance when developing a life insurance program.

Special Projects

This past year, WAC worked on the following special projects:

- supported the Child Care Center Development Board's proposal;
- informally tested the Child Care Information and Referral Service;
- commented on GAO's draft smoking regulations;
- monitored the activities of the Health Advocacy Program (HAP), the asbestos advisory panel, and the AIDS Task Force;
- organized a speakers' series.

Child Care

Referral Service

Child care has been an important issue for WAC since 1978. In FY 1987, GAO implemented a 1985 recommendation by the Child Care Task Force to provide a child care information and referral service for its headquarters' employees. The contract was awarded in March 1987 to Child Care Systems, Inc. of Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

Four services are offered by Child Care Systems, Inc. to GAO employees and employees' spouses. These include a counseling hotline, referrals on local child caregivers, guidebooks and checklists, and parenting workshops. These services are described in a brochure from Child Care Services (See App. II, p. 44, for excerpts.) A workshop on Time Management and one on Holiday Stress and Communicating with Children have been held.

Monthly reports on the use of the services are sent to GAO by the contractor. WAC analyzed these reports during the four and one-half months ending August 31, 1987. During this period, 130 GAO employees or their spouses nationwide called Child Care Systems for information. A profile of GAO participants prepared by the contractor indicated a majority (79%) were between the ages of 31 and 40, most were married (71%) and more than half (68%) were in "professional" or "office/manager" positions. On a scale of 1 to 10, 74% of respondents ranked the referral counselors' helpfulness at 8 or above.

Several WAC members called to test Child Care Systems for referrals in Northern Virginia, Montgomery County and Washington, D.C. The service was prompt in sending basic brochures, such as a "baby-sitter Checklist". Actual referral names and contact information comes from

local organizations. Although local services are available to GAO employees without Child Care Systems involvement, it was our limited experience that service provided by local operators was embellished by the GAO contractor. For example, the Fairfax County Office for Children narrowed down a list of available child care for one of our callers, a service she indicated was not performed for her when she had contacted them directly. Overall, WAC members who participated found that assistance for child care in Washington, D.C. was less helpful than in Northern Virginia or Montgomery County.

Child Care Facility

WAC is monitoring the progress of the GAO Child Care Center Development Board proposal for on-site child care submitted to the Assistant Comptrollers General for Operations and Human Resources in October 1986. The proposal was sent to a child care consultant, four other outside groups, members of GAO management, and all GAO employee councils for review.

WAC has fully endorsed establishment of an on-site center. A memo stating our position was prepared for the Assistant Comptroller General for Operations. (See App. I, p. 40.) WAC found the proposal to be based on thoughtful weighing of cost vs. quality alternatives to arrive at a reasonable alternative to meet GAO employee child care needs. The Council agreed to support another survey of GAO employees if the level of interest based on the 1983 survey was a real issue. WAC offered to support the effort in other ways, such as organizing fundraising, applying for federal grants, or soliciting corporate sponsorship.

The Council has also kept abreast of child care facilities opening in other federal agencies. Centers at the Environmental Protection Agency, the House of Representatives, and a consortium center for GSA, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Department of Interior opened this past September. Demand for infant care slots has been overwhelming at new Federal centers. At the "Learning Center" in the GSA building for instance, a waiting list was necessary for the infant care slots even before the facility opened its doors. Infant care slots at the House child care center were allocated by lottery and yet-to-be born children are on its waiting list.

The House Subcommittee on Governmental Activities and Transportation, Committee on Government Operations, asked GAO to provide testimony on GAO's efforts to address employee child care needs. After members of the Subcommittee interviewed the GAO Child Care Center

Development Board and GAO management, it was agreed that a statement for the record would be provided instead. (See App. III, p. 45.) According to the statement, the possibility of an on-site facility was included in GAO's long-range building renovation plans, and space on the first floor of the GAO headquarters' building was identified if GAO decided to build the facility. Fiscal year 1990 was proposed as a possible timeframe for opening such a center.

Smoking Regulations

GSA regulations implemented in January 1987 prohibit smoking in GSA buildings except in designated smoking areas. Agencies were given discretion in implementing the regulations. At GAO, each unit was to designate smoking areas and enforce the policy. WAC commented on GAO's effort after reviewing draft revisions to GAO Order 2792.5 and conducting an informal survey of each unit. Ambiguities in the designation of areas and lax enforcement in some offices suggest the need for a more centralized approach. (See App. I, p. 42.)

Activities of the Health Advocacy Program, Asbestos Advisory Panel, and AIDS Task Force

WAC continued to monitor the activities of the Health Advocacy Program and the employees advisory panel to the asbestos management program. Former WAC members participated in HAP and the asbestos advisory panel and provided regular reports on their activities to WAC. WAC members also attended a meeting of the AIDS Task Force concerning its objectives and plans.

The Health Advocacy Program is a comprehensive wellness program designed to help randomly selected GAO employees from the Washington area develop and maintain healthy lifestyles through wellness education, physical assessments, aerobics classes, and organized support groups. HAP is currently involved in obtaining an exercise facility for GAO headquarters' employees.

An employees advisory panel to the asbestos management program was established by Comptroller General Bowsher in 1986 in response to GAO employees' concerns about asbestos removal in the headquarters building. The panel has both a pro-active and reactive role in assisting management with the asbestos situation. Among its duties are to help disseminate pertinent information and educate employees.

WAC members attended a meeting of the AIDS Task Force in January 1987 and offered the Council's assistance as needed throughout the year. The AIDS Task Force was formed in late 1986 in response to concerns about

protecting the health and safety of GAO staff as well as the rights of confidentiality and privacy of those individuals affected.

Speakers' Series

WAC sponsored several seminars open to all GAO employees with speakers from within and outside of GAO. The topics, speakers, and their affiliations are listed below.

Changes in the Federal Retirement System

Tom Eickmeyer

GAO Special Task Force on Retirement

Osteoporosis

Diane Storey, R.N.

George Washington University Medical Center

AIDS in the Workplace

Mrs. Eleanor Chelimsky

Program Evaluation and Methodology Division

Assault Prevention

Janet Hankins

District of Columbia Metropolitan Police

Changing Worklife Pattern

Shirley J. Smith

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Workforce 2000

Sandy Robinson and John Beverly

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Women's Bureau

Memoranda Issued

GAO

 United States
 General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: September 29, 1987
To: Assistant CG for Operations
Thru: President, Women's Advisory Council -
 Christine M. Kopocis *Christine M. Kopocis*
From: Committee on Career Development, Women's Advisory
 Council
Subject: Expanding the Upward Mobility Program

The Committee on Career Development is examining how GAO can expand promotion opportunities for personnel in female-dominated job series. We believe more opportunities can be provided by extending the career ladder in a particular series or by creating ways to transfer to series that offer higher grades. We recognize that others within GAO are looking at this issue, and we support these efforts. As we consider this issue, we hope to offer suggestions that will increase morale and encourage high quality staff to remain in GAO. Our first suggestion, discussed below, involves a change in the upward mobility program.

We believe the upward mobility program should provide opportunities for employees to fill positions other than just those in the evaluator and DMTAG series. Currently, the program is limited to employees who wish to convert to these series. Consequently, capable, motivated staff who are not inclined to be evaluators or DMTAG staff do not benefit from the program. If the program offered training for positions such as budget analysts, writer/editors, personnel specialists, librarians, paralegals, and technical information specialists, it would appeal to a broader spectrum of people and would be more rewarding for some who participate. Although the number of openings for these positions is limited, we believe one or two upward mobility slots could be used to develop staff for one or two of these fields each year.

Appendix I
Memoranda Issued

We would like to discuss your views on this recommendation and its possible implementation. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

cc: Mr. Kershaw, OOHD

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

DATE: June 25, 1987

TO: Assistant Comptroller General for Operations

THRU: President, Women's Advisory Council -
Christine M. Kopocis

FROM: WAC representative - *Sandra Saseen*
Sandra Saseen

SUBJECT: WAC comments on draft revision of GAO Maxiflex
Order

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on proposed changes to GAO Maxiflex program.

We recommend increasing credit hour accrual from 10 to 16 hours to:

- allow employees the flexibility to work extra hours when needed to ensure jobs are completed on schedule,
- enable parents to attend to sick children without being forced to use their annual leave, and
- assist employees with low leave balances because of prolonged illnesses and other periods of incapacitation (e.g., maternity leave), and short length of time in federal employment.

We also wish to address two concerns expressed by the Maxiflex AWS Program Task Force memo (dated May 18, 1987) regarding credit hour usage. First, an OPM official told us that, contrary to the contention of the memo, OPM did not extend credit hours from 10 to 24 hours to facilitate any particular alternative work schedule. OPM has "deliberately refrained" from preferring one credit limit over another. Second, to address the memo's point about potential "increased year-end use or lose scheduling problems," we suggest that credit hour accrual exceeding 10 hours be limited to employees earning less than 8 annual leave hours per pay period.

**Appendix I
Memoranda Issued**

We strongly recommend that first-line supervisors not be given authorization to permanently restrict employees from the flexitime program (as stated in the memo) in order to prevent any actual or perceived arbitrary or uneven administration of the program. If such authority were to be given, we believe that an employee should have the right to appeal the decision at the next higher level of supervision. We also note discrepancies in the task force memo and the Draft revision regarding first-line supervisor approval/disapproval of an employee's schedule.

We also recommend against the establishment of core time during Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday since this would limit flexdays to either Friday or Monday. Such a restriction could create office and phone coverage problems during those two days. What support exists for these particular proposed core hours? According to OPM regulations, agencies on a maxiflex schedule are not required to adhere to any particular set of core hours.

We question what the justification is for recommending that a 10-hour daily work schedule not be "routinely planned" and approved as a "predominant work schedule". The task force memo did not cite any findings from the Office of Internal Evaluation Maxiflex study which supports this opinion.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: March 31, 1987

To: Chief, Policy and Executive Personnel Branch -
Ann DiBella

From: President, Women's Advisory Council -
Christine M. Kopocis *(K... M. Kopocis)*

Subject: WAC Response to GAO Order 2340.1, Part-time
Employment

We have reviewed GAO Order 2340.1, Part-time Employment Program and generally agree with the order and how our comments were incorporated in the final order. However, we believe at a future date the order should clarify the following issues.

Leave Category

We believe the discussion on jury duty needs to be clarified. If an employee is on jury duty for a full week, he or she is entitled to be paid for the full amount of hours served, even if this exceeds the employee's regular work schedule. We do not feel this point is clear.

Retirement Benefits

We find part II, section h, confusing. An example, similar to that provided for health benefits, would be helpful.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this order and trust that our comments will be given due consideration. For further information on the Council's view, please contact Sherry Gilmore Taylor on 586-8722.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: December 30, 1987

To: Comptroller General
Charles A. Bowsher

Thru: President, Women's Advisory Council
Christine M. Kopocis *Christine M. Kopocis*

From: Women's Advisory Council Personnel Committee

Subject: Results of Preliminary Study of Agencies'
Recruitment Policies

In April 1987, you asked the Women's Advisory Council to research the issue of whether federal agencies' recruitment materials and personnel policies/orders offer "something better" to prospective new employees than those used at GAO and to report our findings. Council members spoke with recruitment and personnel officers at seven agencies, including the GAO. A list of agencies, a description of the methodology used, and a summary of the interviews are attached.

Our preliminary review indicated the following findings:

- Recruitment materials of all agencies we studied discuss basic benefits and policies, but do not go into great detail. Furthermore, in our opinion these materials contain nothing that would induce a prospective employee to join another agency over the GAO.
- Personnel officials in the agencies stated that prospective employees usually do not see personnel policies and orders before accepting a position.
- Prospective employees rarely ask questions about agency personnel-related issues.
- New employees often do not receive copies of the personnel orders until they begin working at the agencies.

Results of Preliminary Study of Agencies' Recruitment
Policies
Page 2

The next step in our study will be to interview personnel directors of other excepted agencies such as the Federal Reserve Board, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Nuclear Regulatory Agency, and the National Security Agency. We are also considering focusing our study on those specific policies related to women's issues, such as recruitment of women and minorities, day-care benefits, maternity/paternity leave, and the number of women in key executive positions in other federal agencies compared to the GAO.

We look forward to discussing our study with you at the annual briefing of the Women's Advisory Council early in 1988 before we continue our work on the topic.

Attachment

cc: Mr. Goldstein

ATTACHMENT

Methodology

Select and interview recruitment and personnel officers from agencies that hire employees with degrees that are similar to GAO's employee education profile.

Determine the extent and detail of the recruitment materials that describe personnel policies of the selected agencies. Do the materials contain sufficient detail to compare personnel policies of different agencies?

Determine the impact of different agencies' personnel policies on a potential employee's decision to accept a position with a particular agency. Do candidates ask questions concerning different agencies' personnel policies?

Agencies

Office of Personnel Management, Securities and Exchange Commission, Congressional Research Service, Congressional Budget Office, Office of Management and Budget, and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board.

Recruitment officials at the agencies we chose said that they hire professional employees with degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Public Affairs, Finance, Computer and Decision Sciences, and the Liberal Arts. We found these degrees to be very similar to GAO's evaluator education profile.

To substantiate the statements of the agencies' personnel and recruitment officials, we spoke with several recruitment officials here at the GAO, and contacted GAO's Personnel Office. Additionally, we interviewed 12 GAO evaluators hired within the last year and asked them what factors influenced their decisions to come work at the GAO (versus another agency if applicable.)

Interview Discussions

Each agency official was asked to discuss his/her agency's personnel policies in relation to inquiries from prospective employees, to show the recruitment materials that describe the policies, and to estimate the extent to which a prospective employee uses the policies in making a decision to accept or reject a position with the agency.

Appendix I
Memoranda Issued

Agencies' recruitment officials said that prospective employees do not receive copies of personnel orders until after a job offer has been extended and accepted. Brief summaries of each agencies' personnel practices are in the individual recruitment brochures. Our review of these documents showed no additional benefit or added perk that would encourage a prospective employee to choose one agency over another.

Agency officials said that questions on personnel practices such as part-time employment, reductions-in-force, retirement benefits, health and life insurance, sick and annual leave, and maternity benefits are rarely asked by prospective employees. When pressed for examples of instances where such questions do occur, only one recruiter could remember a specific job applicant who asked about retirement benefits and reductions-in-force.

GAO work

Recruiting officials at the agencies asserted that the reason a new employee decides to accept a particular job can be based on many factors, such as the type of work he/she will be doing, the work environment of the agency, the types of people he/she will work with, the location of the agency, the potential for job advancement, and the way the job has been presented by the agency recruiting officials.

Recruiting officials from GAO told us that prospective employees rarely ask questions about personnel-related issues during interviews. The interviewees usually ask questions concerning the type of work they will be doing, and the type of work environment in which they will be working. The recruiters provide prospective employees with a basic brochure which discusses the GAO and the basic benefits in general. The prospective employees rarely ask questions concerning the benefits.

The 12 GAO employees we met with said they had not asked personnel-related questions during their job interviews. Furthermore, only 2 of the 12 employees said that GAO personnel practices had been part of their job decision process. These 2 employees were in middle management positions and had expressed concern over retirement benefits and future changes affecting health insurance coverage. The other 10 employees stated that they did not think of personnel-related matters until they had come to work at GAO.

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None of the employees received specific personnel-related orders and policies with their job offers. Half of the employees told us that they had not received this information by the time they had reported for work.

All of the interviewees we spoke with said that the recruiters' demeanor and presentation were important parts of their decision-making process. For example, the recruiter's attitude, enthusiasm, and the way GAO was presented, and the recruitment materials played a large part in the interviewees' decisions to accept employment with GAO.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: July 15, 1987

To: Assistant Comptroller General for Operations

From: Chair, Personnel Committee, Women's Advisory Council - Susan Beekman *ANB*

Subject: WAC Comments on the Personnel Task Group Report

We appreciate the opportunity to review and provide comments on the Personnel Task Group's proposal, "A Revised Personnel Program for GAO." The proposal causes us concern on two levels: (1) the organization and (2) the employee.

From an organizational perspective, we are concerned that the delegation and decentralization of personnel authority to line divisions will result in duplication of effort in personnel functions throughout the agency and thereby increase staff costs by creating the need for additional staff dedicated to personnel functions. In addition, this staff will require considerable, ongoing training also at a cost to the agency in terms of both time and dollars. While the task force acknowledges the costs associated with its proposal, it argues that these costs can be justified by the more timely and responsive personnel program decentralization and delegation will foster, which will, in turn, enable units to operate more effectively and achieve efficiencies. Given the paucity of any hard evidence to support this assertion, we question the rationale. This proposal appears to be based solely on management opinion and anecdotal evidence. (In fact, the task force, itself, acknowledges its reliance on opinions.)

While two separate headquarters pilots (AFMD and NSIAD) were tested, only the results of the AFMD project are reported and the results are not convincing because they lack impartial evaluation. Further, the test proved

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limited, at best, with few actions taken in some personnel areas and other areas either not exercised or infrequently exercised. For example, to assert that the classification process was tested in AFMD when "several" existing position descriptions were redescribed without involving series or grade changes is surely an overstatement. A true test would have involved establishing new positions and redescribing existing positions that management wishes to upgrade and/or change the series in which the positions were classified. The AFMD conclusion that based on its overall test, the pilot approach for human resources management should be expanded to all headquarters divisions seems to be an overgeneralization, given the lack of evidence offered in its internal and what would appear, less than objective, review of the pilot.

The Personnel Task Group argues repeatedly that the proposed personnel system not only would establish greater accountability and personnel authority/responsibility at the local level, and thus, a more responsive personnel system, but would also allow central Personnel to assume a greater role in position management, reviewing organizational structures, staffing patterns, lines of authority, etc., among GAO organizations and offering advice/consultation to ACG-Ops on personnel matters. These goals seem inherently dichotomous. It would be highly doubtful that Personnel's position management views would be accepted by the local units. Will division management acquiesce to a Personnel assessment that it is overstaffed and too highly graded? The fact that divisions want decentralization and delegation of authority indicates they want more control over personnel functions and do not want a central authority acting as a perceived impediment to their organizations. While a worthy goal, position management under a decentralized environment is not very realistic. Just what type of control Personnel could exert in such an environment is questionable.

From an employee standpoint, we are concerned about equity in the personnel process. We are concerned that delegation and decentralization of personnel authority will lead to inconsistencies among divisions in their interpretation of personnel rules and their administration of the program. A decentralized mode facilitates the interpretation of policy to the benefit of the division as defined by division management, which may or may not be in the best interests of its employees. With a centralized personnel program, there is at least a semblance of objectivity. Even this is lost when authority--and power--is delegated and decentralized. While a "professional" (as noted by the Task Group), the line personnelist in a division will basically be serving at the pleasure of the division director and analyses, recommendations, and actions by these personnelists will likely be coopted by that director's wishes. WAC constituents believe that a

decentralized and delegated environment will be much more political, while less neutral and less sensitive to employee concerns than the existing centralized approach. Employees may be reluctant to request career changes such as rotational assignments depending on their division's management. In the past, employees could always turn to Personnel for advice and Personnel would act as intermediary on behalf of the employees. Because under the proposed personnel program, the division is the first level of appeal, employees may be reluctant to use the appeal route for fear it would hurt their career progression.

Similarly, WAC is concerned about equity in treatment of employees in employee relations cases. Under decentralization and delegation, the line personnelist will become the employee relations expert. Currently, this responsibility is centralized in a small group in Personnel that spends considerable time keeping current with case law and consults with OGC on major adverse and performance based actions. It's unlikely that the line personnelist, who will surely be a "generalist" in every sense of the word, will be able to attain and maintain expertise in this most complicated area of personnel. Desk guides provided by the central personnel office are not the answer. And what role, if any, will OGC play in employee relations cases? Surely OGC must be involved, though no mention is made of OGC in this proposal. Some external party involvement is needed to ensure objectivity in dealing with sensitive personnel issues. The potential for inconsistencies among divisions in employee relations recommendations and actions, where emotions can run high, is great under the proposed environment and could result in problematic situations for the agency and its employees.

On page 32 of the proposal, the Personnel Task Group states that "the goal of the proposed personnel program . . . is not absolute consistency of treatment for employees." Rather, the goal of the program is "basic consistency in applying policies" which is "more important on a unit-wide basis as opposed to a GAO-wide basis." We disagree. In terms of treatment of employees, we believe consistency is important from a GAO-wide perspective. While we agree that management should be permitted certain flexibilities to make personnel decisions, this flexibility must not be at the expense of employees' rights. Safeguards are needed to ensure objective treatment of employees.

In conclusion, we believe that further testing of the proposed program is needed before full scale implementation is commenced. The test or pilot should entail all facets of the personnel program and the results should be evaluated by Personnel, or some other independent group such as OIE, but not the division where the pilot takes place. These results should then be shared with employee groups so that they may assess the impact of the pilot's

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actions from the employee's perspective. Overall, this proposal represents a considerable departure from current personnel operations and involves an area that is wrought with sensitivities. It is incumbent upon the agency to ensure that the proposal is sound from not only management's but also the employee's standpoint.

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: April 15, 1987

To: General Counsel, Personnel Appeals Board -
Carl Moore

THRU : President, Women's Advisory Council -
Chris Kopocis

From: Women's Advisory Council, PAB Liaison -
Carol L. Kolarik *Carol L. Kolarik*

Subject: Comments on PAB's Draft EEO Oversight Report

Members of the Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) have the following comments regarding the February 6, 1987, draft EEO Oversight Report.

- The number of personnel folders actually reviewed for the report (after folders of former employees were eliminated from the sample) seems very low in relation to the number of GAO employees represented by the study. Was the sample statistically significant?
- The analysis of time in grade does not take into account such factors as performance ratings and educational background of employees. Was there a discrepancy between the time spent in grade for employees with similar credentials?

Also, attached are comments prepared by a member of WAC's personnel committee. As she put a great deal of thought and effort into these comments, they are attached in their entirety.

WAC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report. We trust our comments will be given due consideration. Should you wish to discuss our views and recommendations, please feel free to call me on 275-8904.

Attachment

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COMMENTS ON THE PERSONNEL APPEALS BOARD
OVERSIGHT REVIEW REPORT ON CAREER LADDER PROMOTIONS

I have reviewed the Personnel Appeals Board Report. While I was not surprised by the findings and have no major concerns with the overall conclusions and recommendations, I do have problems with some of the methodology and explanation of this methodology. My concerns are outlined below:

Administrative Officer Career Ladder (GS-5 through GS-12)

The footnote (number 1) at the bottom of page 15 defining the administrative officer career ladder is both misleading and inaccurate. It is misleading because it leads one to believe that there is no single administrative officer occupational series, but rather that "administrative officer" is a catchall for a variety of occupational series. This is simply not true. A quick review of OPM's handbook of occupational groups and series of classes reveals that there is, in fact, a specific administrative officer occupational series, GS-341. Moreover, it is a series that is well known and is used throughout this agency. The term "administrative officer" is also recognized by GAO managers and employees alike as representing the various administrative staff in divisions and offices--including administrative operations specialists, administrative programs specialist, administrative operations clerks, administrative assistants and the like in the GS-301, 303, and 341 series. To use the term administrative officer as it is referred to repeatedly in this report would be highly confusing to most, if not all GAO readers.

Defining administrative officer as a collection of similar job series and then listing such series EEO Specialist, Counseling Psychologist, Budget Analyst, Training Evaluation Specialist, Visual Information Specialist also leads one to challenge the validity of the word "similar." One would be hard pressed to argue that the duties and responsibilities of a counseling psychologist are "similar" to those of a budget analyst. While there may be some natural groupings of series within those listed in the footnote (such as the personnel-related occupations--personnel management specialist, position classification specialist, employee relations specialist, and employee development specialist), to combine such disparate occupational series as visual communications specialist (graphics designer/artist) with management analyst defies logic and casts considerable doubt upon the meaningfulness of any analysis using such a seemingly artificial grouping. It appears that the "administrative officer career ladder" was generated by simply combining all remaining professional occupational series (from those previously cited--i.e., evaluator, evaluator-related, etc.) which have a career ladder to a GS-12.

The citation for the listing of job series--GAO Order 2335.6, Chapter 7, is also incorrect. It should be, GAO Order 2335.6, paragraph 13 (dated April 13, 1986). The report is referring to a superceded order. I would recommend that all references to the "administrative officer career ladder" be deleted and substituted by some terminology that makes it clear

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that certain nonevaluator related professional series with career ladders were grouped together and that these series are not necessarily similar. I would also recommend that the rationale behind combining these series be explained as well as an explanation offered as to how the combination presents a "meaningful comparison" for the purpose of this study.

Statistical Significance

The discussion on statistical significance (pp. 12 - 14) is somewhat confusing and contradictory, particularly the last paragraph which appears on p. 14. After explaining the concept of statistical significance, the authors of the report set up the reader to accept the argument that in EEO matters, a statistical significance of .10 (or 90% probability) is more meaningful than the commonly used .05 (or 95% probability). But then they quickly "turn the tables" to state they will use the .05 level of significance because the .05 level of significance is accorded immediate deference. Why set the reader up for a broader .10 level and then retreat to the .05 level. I would agree that in EEO matters the .10 level or below is more meaningful given the object of oversight--to encourage management to focus on potential problems. This "bait and switch" is particularly troublesome in that the body of the report addresses only statistical findings of .05 or less. Yet, the appendixes include data where the significance is .10 or less. Why the vacillation here?

Overall, I believe that the statistical methodology section needs to be rewritten so that it is more readily comprehensible. I doubt that many GAO managers are statistical literates and feel that the significance of the statistical findings would be more meaningful if presented in a clearer manner. What I found particularly revealing in the Appendixes--and to me more meaningful--were the mean differences in the number of days for promotions between whites and minorities. For example, I found the data for HRD in Appendix V more troublesome and greater cause for management concern than that for LARO or WRO. (7 months for promotion from 11 to 12 for HRD Blacks vs 3.6 months in LARO and 3.3 months in WRO). Yet, HRD is not cited in the narrative of this report because the statistical significance was .07 (93% probability), or greater than .05. These are the sorts of statistical issues I feel should be addressed in the report.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: July 17, 1987

To: Policy and Executive Personnel Branch -
Margaret Braley

From: Chair, Personnel Committee, Women's Advisory
Council - Susan Beekman *SWB*

Subject: WAC comments on draft career-ladder
promotions order

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft GAO Order 2335.2, Career-Ladder Promotions for Evaluator and Evaluator-Related Positions. We believe the draft order is a step in the right direction in terms of establishing an agency wide policy for career ladder promotions. However, a number of areas need clarification.

1. The order states that assessments of performance and potential will rely on BARS appraisal data as well as other information management believes is pertinent. The draft order also states that an employee must demonstrate at least "fully successful" performance to meet the promotion criteria. However, the order does not provide enough additional guidance. For example, how is management expected to determine when, within the timeframes outlined, to promote an employee with a "successful" rating as compared to an employee with a "fully successful" rating?
2. The time-in-grade guidelines have been lengthened since the March 18, 1986, draft. What data are the time-in-grade guidelines based on? Why were they changed?
3. While we understand the need for management judgement in making promotion decisions, we question how any semblance of agency-wide policy will be set by the draft order. In addition to the policy for informed management decisions, the order allows for additional factors over which the individual employee has little or no control to be considered. These factors which are referred to in 6(b) of the order include assignment experience, training and development, unit promotion patterns, etc. Does this mean one unit can decide to keep all GS-11s in grade at least 18 months before promotion while another unit can promote

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"automatically" on anniversary date? If so, this seems unfair to the employee and could result in employees not wanting to transfer to units where promotions are slower on average.

4. WAC supports the requirement for preparation of a development plan for employees whose time-in-grade will exceed the guideline range. However, we suggest that the order require that all employees be counseled once they reach the minimum time-in-grade regarding their promotability and reasons for decisions regarding promotion date. Additionally, the order does not discuss when management should inform the employee of the promotion date. WAC understands this had been a problem in some units and suggests notifying the employee as soon as the decision is made.
5. The draft order does not discuss an employee's right to appeal a decision by unit management not to promote the employee within the suggested timeframes. We suggest an explanation of the Personnel Appeals Board process or a reference to the applicable order be added.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: March 20, 1987

To: Policy and Executive Personnel Branch -
Margaret Braley

From: President, Women's Advisory Council -
Christine M. Kopocis *Christine M. Kopocis*

Subject: Comments on Draft Order 2550.7, Severance Pay

We submit for your consideration two comments on the clarity of the draft order and one comment on the fairness of a portion of the order.

Coverage 4a: After a conversation with Ann DeBella in Personnel, we understand the list of "excepted, excepted-conditional, or SES career appointment" employees covers virtually all GAO employees since at the time of the legislation she referred to (1980) all current employees were converted to these categories. This could be defined more clearly in the order.

4b(6): This segment reads in part "An employee who . . . declines to accept a position in GAO of equal pay other than a retained rate and tenure located within the same commuting area" is not eligible. However, in #6 just the opposite is stated "unless the employee's position description provides for geographic mobility." Clarification is needed.

Computation of Severance Pay 8b(2): We question the basic fairness across gender and ethnic divisions of the "age adjustment allowance." As it is written, the age adjustment component of the calculation carries a lot of weight. If a reduction-in-force were to be carried out in GAO in the next few years, would women employees find not only that they disproportionately appear on the list to be severed, but that because they are not well over 40, their severance pay calculation is diminished? We suggest that more in-depth research be conducted on alternative ways of calculating severance pay.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: April 17, 1987

To: ACG for Operations - Tim McCormick

Thru: WAC President - Christine M. Kopocis

From: Women's Advisory Council (WAC) Personnel Committee
Member - S.J. Brady

Subject: Comments on GAO's Health and Life Insurance
Study Program

WAC is encouraged by GAO's preliminary plans for a health and life insurance program. We would support GAO's plans to move on with an independent health and life insurance program if our concerns could be taken into consideration. These concerns are listed below.

WAC questions the idea of going with a plan just because its rates are low. Why not choose to pay what we presently pay in exchange for more services? Instead of lowering premiums for the same coverage why not pay a bit more and get more benefits? How did the study group ascertain that lower monthly premiums was what the GAO population wanted most out of health and life insurance programs?

Why did GAO choose to compare Blue Cross Blue Shield's high option plan with the plan presently offered by the FRB? We believe that the low option plan offered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield compares more favorably with the FRB plan. For example, even though the low option has a higher deductible (\$50) than either the high option or the FRB plan, its monthly rates are much lower. Dental care is offered under the low option plan (not offered under the high option plan). In addition, more GAO employees belong to the low versus high option plan which Blue Cross Blue Shield offers.

Finally, we would like to suggest an additional issue, which GAO should strongly consider when developing a life insurance program. This issue is disability insurance. National health statistics report that one of every 2 individuals will get seriously ill over the next 20 years. Almost everybody needs disability insurance, but most employees and employers don't even know what coverage they have at work. Disability insurance, short and long term, protects most people's best asset--their paycheck--against an accident or ill health.

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When looking at types of disability insurance, careful attention needs to be paid to the way it is defined: some policies will pay benefits if a person cannot perform the typical duties of his or her current job, while others will pay out only if the employee cannot work at all. Finally, the chosen policy should be one which is indexed to inflation.

WAC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this issue. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you.

cc: Mr. Ahart



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: April 20, 1987

To: ACG for Operations - Tim McCormick

Thru: President, Women's Advisory Council - Christine M. Kopocis

From: Beverly Schladt
for Special Projects Committee, Women's Advisory
Council

Subject: Child Care Center Development Board's October 1986
"Proposal to GAO Management"

The Women's Advisory Council has reviewed the Child Care Center Development Board's October 1986 "Proposal to GAO Management" and fully endorses its recommendations to provide space in GAO headquarters for a child care center, to provide start-up and ongoing utility and related services costs, and to appoint a management representative at the SES-level to the Board. We agree with the Board's conclusion that an on-site center is the most attractive option of the three examined in the proposal, since start-up and tuition costs for an off-site center are considerably higher than those for an on-site center and a consortium center is not feasible at this time.

We are impressed with the thoroughness of the proposal and with its honest appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of each option. We believe that the amount of energy and enthusiasm that went into researching and preparing it testifies to the intense interest on the part of GAO's staff in establishing a child care center.

Should there be some concern that parental interest in the center has lagged, WAC would be happy to support the preparation, circulation, and tabulation of a mini-survey to update data obtained from the 1983-84 survey conducted by the Personnel Systems Development Project to determine employee interest. We understand that the human resources managers in each division in GAO have discussed the possibility of such a survey, and we offer our services in carrying it out. We hope that this process will not delay the establishment of the child care center any more than is absolutely necessary to ensure sufficient commitment on the part of parents to the center. In order for parents to make informed commitments, however, we believe that they will need to be given specific information -- where the

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child care center will be located, when it is projected to open, and how much its tuition will be. If necessary, parents could be asked to pledge their support in the form of a deposit.

Should management deem that the 1983-84 survey's results are still valid and a followup survey is not necessary, we hope that they will quickly move toward selecting space for the center on the ground floor of GAO's headquarters and begin negotiations with GSA for renovation. WAC offers our continuing support in whatever ways we can: in organizing fund raising activities, in applying for federal grants, or in soliciting corporate sponsorship. Most of all, we hope that management will not keep anxious and excited parents waiting.



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: April 6, 1987

To: General Services and Controller -
Richard Brown

From: Women's Advisory Council President -
Christine M. Kopocis *Christine M. Kopocis*

Subject: WAC Response to GAO Draft Smoking Regulations

The decentralized method proposed to implement GSA smoking regulations at GAO under draft revisions to Order 2792.5 is positive in that each unit is allowed flexibility in meeting the needs of their staff, given the particular space configuration of each area. However, some of the problems brought to our attention suggest that GAO should take a stronger, more centralized approach.

Our specific comments on the draft revisions are:

1. The vagueness of the regulations has allowed a passive approach to be taken in some units, for example authorizing smoking where it occurred prior to the policy by placing a sign, or number at the smokers cubicle. This does not protect non-smokers in the vicinity any more than before the policy. It does not follow the intent of the policy, i.e. that it is a non-smoking building, with smoking allowed in controlled areas only.
2. The policy is meaningless unless enforced. Enforcement has been lax in the offices and divisions where areas have been designated. Smoking continues in general non-designated office space, and particularly in the bathrooms. In more than one division, policy administration has been assigned to a smoker.
3. The criteria to designate smoking areas is ambiguous and open to debate by smokers and nonsmokers. To define an area that is convenient, does not effect productivity, or does not impinge on the health of others is contradictory in most units, particularly given the large number of smokers working in general office space. At a minimum the designation criteria should be ranked, with protection of non-smokers first, in keeping with the intent of the policy.

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4. The process for appeals of unit head-designated smoking areas is poorly defined. Will a phone call suffice, or should it be a written appeal? Must appeals be submitted through unit management first, then ACG-Operations?

5. The process for approving exceptions to the "policy" on a case-by-case basis is also vague. What sorts of exceptions? Can the exceptions be appealed?

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the smoking regulations and hope that these comments will be useful. If you have any questions, please call Monica Surber, Co-Chair of our Special Projects Committee on 275-1830.

cc: Tim McCormick

Child Care Systems' Brochure

Child Care Systems, Inc. INTRODUCES



The Child Care SolutionSM

Timely, practical help with your
child care problems . . .

The Child Care SolutionSM — comprehensive help you can use in four ways:



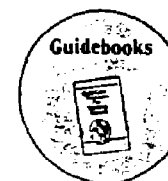
Counseling

(1) The Solution features a TOLL-FREE CHILD CARE HOT LINE 1-800-VIP-KIDS, staffed by trained child care counselors who can answer your child care questions and help you with child care problems.



Referrals

(2) The counselors can give you REFERRAL INFORMATION on licensed and registered caregivers in your neighborhood and help you find ones who can best meet your needs.



Guidebooks

(3) The Solution provides you with GUIDEBOOKS, CHECKLISTS and other useful information on choosing, managing, and even paying for child care.



Workshops

(4) The Solution offers PARENTING WORKSHOPS at worksites where sufficient interest is expressed. The workshops present ideas for making your role as both parent and employee easier.

You may use any of The Solution's four services as often as needed, and while you still have to pay for your own child care, your employer covers the cost of the four Solution services.

Important Notice

Information provided to you about a particular child caregiver does not imply and is not an endorsement of the particular child caregiver by the resource and referral organization, Child Care Systems, or your employer. You should know that the caregivers you are told about have not been evaluated, screened, or recommended by the resource and referral organization, Child Care Systems, or your employer. The information on and description of any particular caregiver has been provided by the caregiver. The final decision about your child care arrangements must be made by you, the parent or guardian. Moreover, the quality of a particular child caregiver must be solely determined and monitored by you, the parent or guardian.

Testimony on GAO's Child Care Initiatives

GAO

United States General Accounting Office

Testimony

April 24, 1987

GAO's Child Care Initiatives

Statement for the Record

For the
House Subcommittee on Government
Activities and Transportation
Committee on Government Operations



GAO/T-OCG-87-3

As requested by the Subcommittee staff on April 17, 1987, this statement contains a description of the General Accounting Office's efforts to address the child care needs of its employees.

The workplace has changed over the past three decades. One of the most important changes has been the increasing number of women in the workforce. With this change, have come other changes in the types of benefits and services that employers need to consider to attract and retain high quality staff. Child care is one major area where employers have the opportunity to provide expanded benefits to their employees. As a result, some employers have begun to take an active role in providing some type of child care service to their employees.

GAO management, recognizing the changing needs of its employees, conducted a survey in 1983-84 to determine the level of interest its employees would have in an agency-sponsored child care facility. A questionnaire was sent to all GAO staff. Eighty-two percent (4,332 employees) responded to the questionnaire with approximately 46 percent (1,992) of the respondents located at or near the GAO building. Of those located at or near the building 11.8 percent (168) expressed interest in a GAO-sponsored child care facility.

In 1985, GAO management formed a Child Care Task Force to look into the child care needs of its employees. The purpose of the task force was to determine the legal, financial, and logistical requirements for providing child care services to the GAO workforce.

In November 1985, the task force presented its findings to the Comptroller General. They made two recommendations: (1) contract for a child care information and referral service and (2) support any efforts by parents to organize a cooperative child care facility. Subsequently, GAO's Women's Advisory Council held a series of seminars on day care and, in January 1986, a self-initiated Working Parents Group was formed. This group decided it would be beneficial to develop a child care center proposal. While the Working Parents Group was developing its proposal, GAO management began looking into the feasibility of contracting for a child care information and referral service. However, because of budget cuts GAO sustained as a result of Gramm-Rudman, the award of the contract was delayed until FY 1987.

The Working Parents Group, now known as the Child Care Center Development Board, completed its proposal and submitted it to GAO management in October 1986. In November, that proposal was sent to a consulting firm specializing in child care centers. In their response to GAO, they expressed concern about the level of GAO employee interest in an

on-site child care facility. They pointed out that their experience shows that actual parent utilization of on-site child care is usually less than expressed interest. Furthermore, they said that their research shows that parents strongly prefer child care near their residence. They recommended that we consider other alternatives such as an information and referral service, a voucher system or contracting for spaces in existing high quality centers.

We decided to obtain advice from a number of other outside groups to see what those with experience in this area had to say before we made a decision regarding a child care facility. We sent the proposal to four groups, asking for their assessment and recommendations. We also sent the proposal to several top executives and managers in GAO and to all of GAO's employee councils (the Women's Advisory Council, the Career Level Council, the Advisory Council on Civil Rights, the Secretarial/Clerical Council, and the Management and Policy Advisory Council).

We anticipate that the final comments from all the groups identified above will be received during the next few weeks. Initial reactions from managers and employees have been very positive regarding the concept of employer-assisted, on-site child care. However, concerns have been expressed by some employees which could indicate that actual use of the

facility could be affected by some of the following factors: the proposed \$85 a week/per child cost; an on-going asbestos removal program in the GAO building; and the lack of space immediately outside the building for an outdoor play area.

As mentioned earlier, GAO has contracted for a child care information and referral service. The procurement process began in December 1986, and the contract was awarded in March 1987. The service is available to all GAO employees throughout the U.S.

The contractor, Child Care Systems, Inc. of Lansdale, Pennsylvania, provides employees and spouses with (1) immediate, practical information about choosing and managing quality child care; and (2) referrals to alternative child care programs meeting their needs. The contract offers GAO employees and spouses four services.

1. Counseling: a nationwide, toll-free Child Care Hotline staffed by trained child care counselors who can answer parents' questions and help them with child care problems.
2. Referrals: counselors that can give parents referral information on child caregivers in their neighborhoods and help them determine the caregivers who can best meet their needs.

3. Guidebooks and checklists: guidebooks, checklists and other useful information on choosing, managing and even paying for child care.
4. Parenting Workshops: workshops offered at GAO locations throughout the U.S. on ideas for making the dual role of parent and employee easier.

The workshops cover topics such as:

- choosing the best child care for your child;
- strategies for coping with separation;
- stress management for working parents;
- making it through the teenage years;
- strategies for step-parents;
- strategies for single parents;
- handling divorce, loss and death;
- dealing with aging parents; and
- identifying care options and resources for elderly parents.

We are particularly pleased with the wide range of issues covered by the workshops. Issues such as coping with aging parents provides information and assistance to a wider range of employee concerns and needs. Employees and their spouses may use any of the services provided by the contract as often as they like.

In contracting for the child care information and referral service, it was not GAO's intent to provide the contract in lieu of an on-site facility. We have included the possibility of an on-site facility for an estimated 65 children in our long-range building renovation plans and have identified the approximately 4,000 square feet on the first floor of the building required for that number of children. If we should decide to build the facility, the earliest that the space could be renovated under our existing proposal to GSA would be 1990.

The Comptroller General and his top managers are very supportive of any initiatives designed to assist the GAO employee in meeting his or her child care needs. A great deal of thought is going into deciding whether GAO should build an on-site facility at its main headquarters building because, if we decide to move ahead with such a facility, we want it to be of the highest quality for our staff.

