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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-151678

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The Honorable Robert E. Hampton
Chairman, United States Civil Service Commission 13



Dear Mr. Hampton:

During fiscal year 1973 we reviewed the administration of the Civil Service Commission Executive Seminar Centers (ESCs) and Regional Training Centers (RTCs) to determine whether improvements could be made in the training they provide to Federal agencies.

We obtained information from the Commission's Bureau of Training, three ESCs, and the Dallas, New York, and San Francisco RTCs. We also used a questionnaire which was returned by about 75 percent of a random sample of fiscal year 1972 Berkeley ESC graduates. The questionnaire showed a favorable reaction to that training program. However, certain management weaknesses existed in the administration of the Commission's training programs. On November 6, we discussed this report with the Director of the Bureau of Training who agreed with our findings and proposed recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SEMINAR CENTERS

The goals of the ESCs--to broaden the attending mid-level executives' management perspectives and to open communication and interchange among the executives--are generally being met. Many agencies would like to send additional employees to the courses.

At the centers we learned that 2 ESCs conducted twenty 2-week sessions and that the third center conducted 18 sessions during fiscal year 1973, using the facilities only 40 and 36 weeks a year, respectively, for course presentations. Because there were more than 500 unfilled requests for the training during fiscal year 1973, we discussed with ESC officials the possibility of adding two 13-day sessions at each center, during weeks containing holidays. We are pleased to learn that this plan has now been put into effect, along with our proposal that the workload of the program directors be increased to meet the offerings generated by this rescheduling. Little new development effort would be required since the additional sessions would offer "Management of Organizations," a course taught 40 percent of the time in fiscal year 1973.

We discussed having program directors specialize along functional lines. Some of the present directors believed that specialization would reduce professional motivation, continuity of staff expertise in the event of attrition, and interchange of ideas. However, one program director believed stagnation would not occur because keeping proficient in a specialization would be stimulating. He also said that specialization along educational and professional backgrounds would add to the quality of the program because more in-depth research could be done in developing a particular course. We believe that increased specialization by program directors would lessen duplicate efforts and more fully use the directors' expertise.

We also discussed the selection process with officials and participants. Thirty-three percent of the questionnaire respondents said that they had attended a comparable course. Possibly they could have benefited more from a different course. Some participants were last-minute substitutes for original nominees the agencies chose to fill spaces purchased at the beginning of the year. According to ESC officials, late substitutes may not have the 1 to 3 weeks needed to adequately prepare for the course. This lack of preparation can detract from the seminar's overall quality.

ESC participants are to be selected from among GS-15s, GS-14s, and carefully selected GS-13s. We found examples, however, of GS-12s attending the sessions. In response to a question on criteria for admission, participants favored admission based on responsibilities, position, and potential. We agree.

The enclosure lists the characteristics of our sample group and a summary of responses to a question asking participants to rate 13 items according to the significance each had on the overall effectiveness of the ESC program.

REGIONAL TRAINING CENTERS

Certain practices in 3 of the 10 RTCs we reviewed adversely affect the economy and availability of their training programs.

Because many agencies depend on the Commission for training, they are affected when the cost of training increases or its availability decreases. The Commission could improve the cost and availability of its training services by applying its training regulations more carefully and by considering alternatives to some of its operating practices. Some examples follow.

The Commission requires that use of nongovernment instructors be limited to times when additional instructors are needed temporarily or when needed expertise is not available from Commission staff or other

Federal employees. We found some courses presented by nongovernment instructors where these criteria were not met. This practice may result in higher training costs.

Payment of special preparation fees to nongovernment instructors was not applied consistently in accordance with Commission guidelines. Commission regulations define special preparation as the development or modification of course materials or content, in whole or in part, to meet specific needs. In numerous instances, special preparation fees of \$50 a day were paid to nongovernment instructors for presenting topics repetitively.

The use of training contracts between the Commission and single agencies has expanded beyond Bureau of Training guidelines. In many instances, single-agency contracts meet identified Government training needs economically and efficiently. In other instances, however, they cause agencies to

--continue to use the Commission on a contract basis, although internal training capabilities could and should be developed, and

--pay more for training by contracting with the Commission rather than by contracting directly with an outside contractor.

When the Commission commits its resources to a single-agency contract, it may force other agencies dependent on the Commission to seek other, perhaps more costly, training resources or to cancel training altogether.

Although headquarters generally develops and revises training courses, RTCs also do part of this work. Each institute within each RTC must complete at least one course development or revision project annually, under headquarters' general guidelines.

In addition to developing courses which satisfy only local needs, RTCs also develop about 25 percent of the courses with nationwide application. In the past, each RTC had some latitude in deciding which courses it would develop or revise, often resulting in duplicate effort.

We identified titles of courses developed in one region which were the same as those developed in other regions or offered by the training centers in Washington, D.C. Some examples are: (1) Position Classification and the Management Process, (2) Office Management, (3) Advanced Secretarial Seminar, and (4) Workshop in Job Element Examining Systems. We did not determine whether the contents as well were similar or identical but several subjects appear to be sufficiently singular to suggest that their contents were alike.

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Few courses are so affected by area variances that they warrant local development. The system implemented in fiscal year 1973 whereby the Commission headquarters delegates and coordinates regional development efforts should minimize unnecessary duplication.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent Commission action increasing ESC offerings by rescheduling sessions using existing program director manpower will help fill the many agency training requests.

Duplicate efforts could be reduced by having program directors specialize in topic areas.

Admission to ESC training should be based on responsibilities, position, and potential rather than solely on grade level, and selection procedures should insure that the course meets organizational and individual needs. Moreover, last-minute substitution of ESC training participants limits preparation time and therefore has a detrimental effect on the program.

Administration of RTCs could be improved by more closely monitoring the use of nongovernment instructors, special preparation fees, and single-agency contracts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We propose, for your consideration, the following changes in the training operations:

- Have program directors specialize in assigned areas to better use their backgrounds and experience and to reduce unnecessary duplicate development effort.
- Establish a reasonable advance-notice period to insure that ESC participants have sufficient preparation time.
- Review selection procedures with the agencies to insure that courses meet organizational and individual needs.
- Base admission to ESC training on applicants' responsibilities, position, and potential rather than solely on grade level.
- Monitor employment of nongovernment instructors to avoid overuse.
- Specify what constitute special preparation fees for courses and insure that such fees are paid according to these guidelines.

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--Monitor the guidelines under which single-agency contract courses are accepted.

We appreciate the cooperation our representatives received during our review.

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Copies of this report are being sent to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Post Office and Civil Service, and Government Operations.

Sincerely yours.

Forrest R. Browne

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Forrest R. Browne
Director

Enclosure

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE BERKELEY EXECUTIVE SEMINAR CENTER

We asked the respondents to rate 13 items according to the significance each had on the overall effectiveness of the ESC program.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Item</u>	Percent of responses (note a)			
		<u>Highly signif- icant</u>	<u>Signif- icant</u>	<u>Minimal</u>	<u>Not at all</u>
1	Resource lecturers	70	28	2	-
2	"Off the Record" approach to training	50	41	9	-
3	Course director	46	46	8	-
4	Interaction with other federal executives	43	47	10	-
5	Casual atmosphere	42	49	9	-
6	Newness of material	39	50	10	1
7	Live-in environment	35	48	15	1
8	Geographic and headquarters/ field mixture of participants	29	55	15	1
9	Berkeley geographic location	32	46	16	6
10	Applicability of material to present job environment	19	56	26	-
11	Hotel facilities and food	20	54	25	1
12	Reading assignments	20	46	33	1
13	Strict GS grade limit of participants	7	47	42	4

^aSome items may not total 100 percent, due to rounding.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

- Size was 199 of the 692 fiscal year 1972 graduates of the Berkeley Center.
- Returned questionnaires totaled 151, or about 75 percent of the sample.
- Participants were drawn from more than 30 Federal, State, and local agencies. Sixteen percent were from the Department of the Interior; 12 percent from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; 10 percent from the Department of the Treasury; and the remainder from 27 other agencies. About 3 percent were from State and local governments.

ENCLOSURE

- Thirty-four percent were from the West Coast; 22 percent from the Washington, D.C., area; 15 percent from the Rocky Mountain States; and the remaining 29 percent from other locations.
- More than 50 percent attended one of the "Management of Organization" course sessions.
- About 16 percent had previously attended an ESC course.