



Highlights of [GAO-03-1017](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

MILITARY EDUCATION

DOD Needs to Align Academy Preparatory Schools' Mission Statements with Overall Guidance and Establish Performance Goals

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Military Academy, and the U.S. Naval Academy combined spend tens of millions of dollars to operate preparatory schools that provide an alternative avenue for about 700 students annually to gain admission to the service academies. Service academy officials screen all applicants to identify those who they believe could succeed at the academies but who would benefit from more preparation. The Department of Defense (DOD) pays the full cost of providing this preparation. GAO was asked to review the three service academy preparatory schools, and this report specifically assesses (1) the adequacy of their current mission statements, (2) the effectiveness of these schools in accomplishing their missions, and (3) the effectiveness of DOD oversight of these schools.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct DOD, in concert with the services and the service academies, to align the preparatory schools' mission statements with DOD guidance and the academies' expectations; establish quantified performance goals and measures for the schools; and enhance the existing oversight framework for assessing the schools' performance. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with the recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1017.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The three service academy preparatory schools' current mission statements do not clearly articulate the purpose for which the schools are being used by their respective service academies. In accordance with DOD guidance and the service academies' expectations, the preparatory schools give primary consideration for enrollment to enlisted personnel, minorities, women, and recruited athletes. However, the preparatory school mission statements are not clearly aligned with DOD guidance and the academies' expectations. This is a continuing problem, which GAO first reported in 1992. Without clear mission statements, the service academies and their respective preparatory schools cannot establish goals that fully reflect the preparatory schools' intended purpose.

It is difficult to evaluate how effective the preparatory schools have been in accomplishing their missions because the service academies have not established performance goals for the preparatory schools. Without specific performance goals, there is no objective yardstick against which to gauge preparatory school effectiveness, as would be consistent with the principle of best practices for ensuring optimal return on investment.

The effectiveness of DOD, military service, and service academy oversight is limited because the existing oversight framework for assessing preparatory school performance does not include performance goals and measures against which to objectively assess performance. DOD and the services receive annual reports from the academies on preparatory school performance. Without stated performance goals and measures, however, the reports do not offer DOD, the services, or the service academies as good an insight into the preparatory schools' performance and their return on investment as they could.

Academy Preparatory School Operating Costs and Cost Per Graduate, Fiscal Years 1999-2002

Academy preparatory school	Cost category	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002
U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School	Total operating costs	\$6,381,169	\$5,385,619	\$5,628,625	\$5,459,059
	Cost per graduate	36,673	32,057	30,425	30,842
U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School	Total operating costs	6,544,277	6,993,648	7,087,020	7,325,311
	Cost per graduate	34,263	35,144	38,727	41,859
U.S. Naval Academy Preparatory School	Total operating costs	7,212,997	8,136,649	8,549,809	9,395,421
	Cost per graduate	35,015	43,982	42,117	40,850

Source: DOD.