



Highlights of [GAO-04-873](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

As part of its transformation to prepare the armed forces to meet current and future challenges, the Department of Defense (DOD) is expanding its use of advanced distributed learning (ADL) techniques in senior- and intermediate-level officer professional military education (PME) (see table at right). ADL instruction does not require an instructor's presence, and it facilitates the use of varied learning management systems. To date, the application of ADL has been targeted to nonresident students. To determine whether DOD uses a systematic process for evaluating the results of ADL application, GAO was asked to examine DOD's metrics for assessing program effectiveness, to compare DOD's criteria for converting courses to ADL with those of private-sector institutions, and to identify the challenges to ADL implementation.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense promote (1) the development of specific performance effectiveness goals for ADL in PME schools and (2) the use of ADL technologies to provide and establish metrics for learning outcomes. DOD partially concurred with the first recommendation and fully concurred with the second. DOD supports the use of specific effectiveness goals for PME, but believes such goals are not appropriate for any specific delivery method.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-873](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-873).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal P. Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or [curtinn@gao.gov](mailto:curtinn@gao.gov).

## MILITARY EDUCATION

# DOD Needs to Develop Performance Goals and Metrics for Advanced Distributed Learning in Professional Military Education

### What GAO Found

DOD does not have specific performance goals and metrics with which to assess ADL effectiveness in PME. Furthermore, although GAO and private-sector organization have established frameworks for assessing the effectiveness of educational programs by focusing on metrics for learning outcomes—that is, the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students attain through learning activities—DOD's oversight focuses instead on educational inputs such as facilities, student to faculty ratios, and student body composition. Since ADL is still a new and evolving tool, systematic evaluative processes have not yet been required. Without clear goals and an effective process for evaluating the results of ADL application, DOD cannot ensure that its program is achieving an appropriate return on investment and other goals.

The criteria for converting PME courses and curricula to ADL vary by school and by military service, are based on subjective choices as to which content is suited for online delivery, and are focused solely on nonresident programs. The private sector similarly lacks systematic criteria in its use of ADL. However, DOD's implementation of ADL programs for PME compares favorably with private-sector institutions.

Cultural, technological, and resource challenges affect ADL implementation. For example, some military policies reflect a lower estimation of the value of nonresident PME, and many respondents to a survey of ADL students and alumni indicated that its quality and achievement of outcomes did not compare favorably, in their view, with those of resident education programs. The technological challenges of balancing computer access with network security, along with resource challenges of funding and increased burdens on limited administrative staff, are additional concerns.

<b>DOD Nonresident PME Programs Currently Using ADL Applications</b>				
	<b>When and how developed</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Program length</b>	<b>No. of courses</b>
U.S Army War College	1999 (In-House)	654	2 yrs.	10 + 2 resident courses
Naval War College	2002 (Contractor and In-House)	1,799	18-24 mos.	3
Air Command and Staff College	1999 (In-House)	12,069	Up to 18 mos.	6

Source: GAO.