

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD), which includes the military services, selects mid- to upper-career-level military officers to participate in fellowship and training-with-industry programs conducted at non-DOD organizations such as universities, think tanks, private corporations, federal agencies, and Congress. For some fellowships, the military departments pay a fee or tuition to the host organization. GAO was directed to review DOD's use of these programs. GAO's objectives were to determine: (1) the statutory provisions that authorize DOD's fellowship and training-with-industry programs for military officers, (2) the extent of the Office of the Secretary of Defense's (OSD) visibility over these programs, and (3) the extent to which the services are able to determine that they derive benefits from these programs. GAO analyzed relevant laws and DOD policies, collected data, and interviewed OSD and military service officials on their oversight and management roles and responsibilities for these programs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 11 recommendations to DOD for improving oversight and management of DOD's fellowship and training-with-industry programs—for example, submitting DOD-required annual reports and performing service-required program reviews—that would enhance OSD's visibility over the programs and better position DOD to determine the extent to which it derives benefits from them. In response to a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the 11 recommendations and stated its action plan to implement the recommendations.

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MILITARY EDUCATION

Improved Oversight and Management Needed for DOD's Fellowship and Training-with-Industry Programs

What GAO Found

GAO determined that DOD primarily uses two explicit statutory authorities—section 2603 of Title 10 of the United States Code, which authorizes servicemembers to accept fellowships from certain organizations, and section 2013 of Title 10 of the United States Code, which authorizes the training of servicemembers at nongovernmental facilities—for its fellowships and training-with-industry programs for military officers. For two specific types of fellowships—Legislative and Interagency—the underlying authorities are less explicit than they are for the others.

OSD has limited visibility over its fellowship and training-with-industry programs for several reasons. First, OSD has not developed a mission statement that would clearly define the respective key purposes for these programs. Having a clear mission statement is critical because it defines an organization's purpose in language that states desired outcomes. Additionally, OSD has not consistently enforced its requirement for the military departments to provide an annual report on fellowship and training-with-industry programs. Further, not all fellowship and training-with-industry programs have a designated office within each department for preparing the annual report. OSD's visibility is also limited by not having a reliable inventory of these various programs, and by not having a clear and commonly shared definition of a fellowship. Without improved oversight, OSD's visibility over the military departments' compliance with its requirements governing these programs will remain limited. Additionally, visibility is limited over the legislative fellowship program in particular because oversight responsibilities are not clearly delineated, and because OSD does not have documented criteria for the placement of DOD fellows with the offices of congressional committees and members. OSD officials agree that such criteria would be helpful since it does not have enough available fellows to meet the full congressional demand.

The military services are not well positioned to determine the extent of the benefits they are deriving from their participation in these programs for four principal reasons. First, not all of the services conduct periodic program reviews, as are required for some programs. In addition, the reviews that are conducted are not comprehensive in that they do not assess the program against program goals using quantifiable performance measures, review the needs that prompted the program, incorporate feedback from fellows into the review, or document the results of the review. Second, they do not have clear guidance as to what qualifies as a postfellowship assignment—an assignment that uses the skills and knowledge developed during the fellowship program—or criteria for when such assignments can be postponed or waived, thus limiting the extent the services' are able to determine they are deriving benefits from these programs. Third, the services do not know their overall program costs, so it is difficult to know whether these programs are cost-effective. Finally, some of the services do not have memoranda of understanding with the non-DOD host organizations, such as think tanks, so they cannot be assured that expectations are clearly understood and the intended benefits are obtained. Without better management controls, the services' ability to determine the benefits of these programs will remain limited. However, service officials believe that they obtain benefits from fellowships and training-with-industry programs.