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**H. Rosalind Cowie**

Dr. Cowie joined GAO's Office of Organization and Human Development in 1979 as chief of the Training Branch. She was formerly an educational administrator at Georgetown University and Newton College. She holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University and has taught at the university level. In 1981, the Federal Training Office's Conference presented her with a Distinguished Service Award.

# Training at GAO: A Systematic Approach

GAO's training programs have been undergoing extensive revision during the last 2 years. In the past, sound and valuable programs were offered, but the times and the needs of the agency changed and, in recent years, the lack of a comprehensive and systematic approach to training became a cause for concern. The question was raised: How do we know when we are training the right people to do the right things? In January 1979 the Training and Employee Development Branch of Personnel was reorganized and mandated to design and implement a training program that would dependably meet the present and future needs of the organization.

Concern for a more deliberate and systematic approach to training is not a new phenomenon at GAO. Dr. Leo Herbert, a former Personnel director in the early 1970's, wrote a paper entitled "Audits of Management Performance—A Conceptual Framework for Training," in which he hypothesized a framework for auditing which would be the basis of both classroom and on-the-job training.

One prior training effort which has had and continues to have a significant effect on the agency is the Writing Program, which is directed and staffed by professional teachers who are trained and have experience in the university setting. The Writing Program creatively adapts current college techniques for teaching writing to GAO's unique requirements for report writing. The program has given the agency a common language for discussing writing problems and has helped to standardize report writing practices. The POWER (Producing Organized Writing and Effective Reviewing) principles are now cited in the *Report Manual* and in the *Project Manual*.

## Assessing Training Needs

The first major step toward developing a comprehensive and systematic GAO training program was the *Training Needs Assessment of the Audit Function*, undertaken in 1978 by a task force working under the director of the former Organization and Management Planning Staff. The final report of the

task force is an invaluable document and is still the major source of information used for redesigning evaluator training courses.

The task force analyzed the job of the evaluator in terms of over a hundred discrete tasks described as precisely as possible. Then, through a survey of both evaluators and their supervisors, the task force gathered data showing both the existing and desired levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities for each of the tasks. The greater the discrepancy between these levels, the greater the need for concentrated training efforts.

Although the assessment data was used primarily in designing evaluator training courses, the performance appraisal staff used the same task statements in developing the behaviorally anchored rating scales. The Counseling and Career Development Branch used the task statements to develop workshops and seminars, and the Research and Analysis Branch is using them in its study of entry-level selection criteria. In addition to the assessment data, a copy of the last page of the GAO Form 563, "U.S. General Accounting Office End-of-Assignment Performance Appraisal," is forwarded to the Training Branch. Aggregate appraisal data collected in this way enables the branch to update courses annually in response to changing needs without the necessity of another massive training needs assessment.

Evaluators, although of central importance to GAO, are by no means the only staff who need training. The various nonevaluator series of employees and the secretarial-clerical staff are all vital for achieving the agency's mission. A formal training needs assessment has been completed for the secretarial-clerical staff and is underway for the other series in conjunction with the development of performance appraisal systems.

## Designing the Curriculum

As a guide to developing a comprehensive curriculum for all GAO staff, the Training Branch developed a training

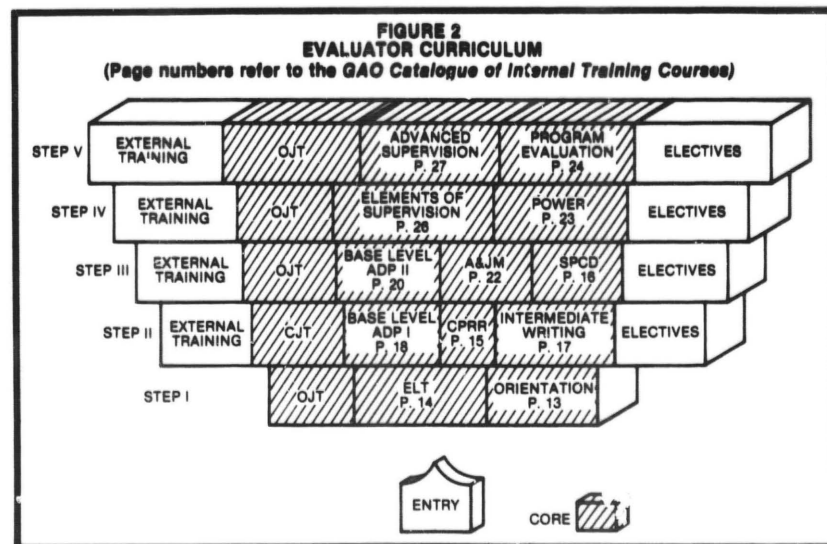
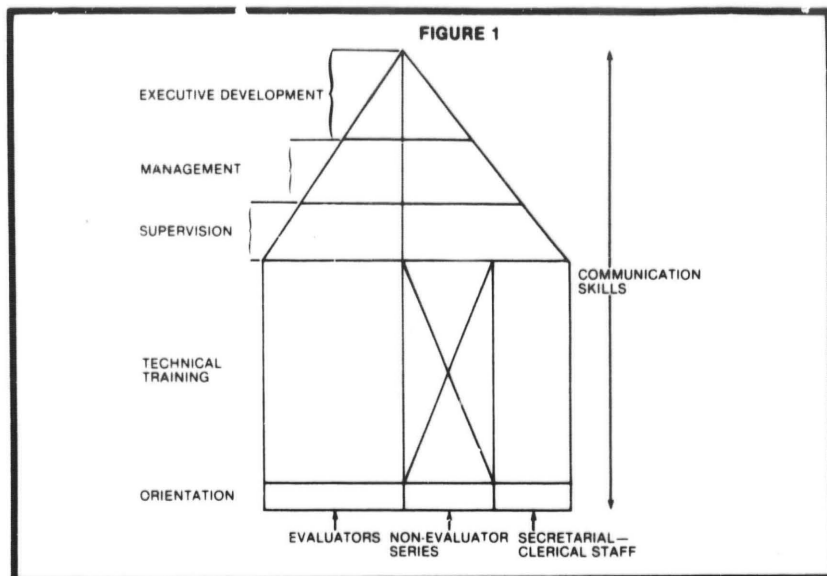
curriculum framework to encompass the entire population at GAO and to include the complete range of courses that could reasonably be offered. The framework is a simple modified matrix, illustrated in figure 1, and is derived from answers to the questions: Whom are we training? and What are we training them to do?

Our answers are that, broadly speaking, we train evaluators, nonevaluator staff, and secretarial-clerical staff and that we divide the topics these audiences need to know into five categories: orientation, technical courses, supervision, management, and executive development activities. In figure 1, the triangle over the rectangle illustrates the decreasing number of employees eligible for the latter three categories.

In the early stages of the development of this model, communication skills were listed as another course category. Apart from being taught in the Skills for Performance and Career Development course, communication skills are now taught as parts of other courses so that their applicability to the job becomes obvious.

As we proceed with our course design, every module, and therefore every course, can be placed in this framework. In addition, we can use the framework to see training as a logical and unified activity from two perspectives. We have designed a series of core orientation modules, for example, that can be presented to new employees ranging from clerk-typists at their first job to upper-level managers. This eliminates the need for the three distinct orientation programs that existed in the past. Core modules are supplemented by additional modules to meet the specialized needs of the distinct audiences. The framework also makes it possible for us to delineate clearly what core modules, courses, or programs each employee participates in as he or she proceeds from one grade level to the next, all the way from orientation to executive development. Core modules are supplemented by electives, on-the-job training, and external training. Figures 2, 3, and 4 depict, in building-block fashion, the core and elective curricula for the evaluator staff, the nonevaluator staff, and the secretarial-clerical staff.

In addition to the technical training for evaluators (figure 2), the branch administers a curriculum of ADP courses. An ADP training needs assessment is now in process, and these courses will soon be revised. Other technical training



areas under development are defense auditing and financial accounting.

Figure 3 shows that the internal training offered to the nonaudit staff is essentially generic. The number of employees requiring specialized training in many areas is too small to warrant an extensive internal training effort. To redress a potential imbalance between training for evaluators and training for other groups of employees, external training funds for nonevaluators are more generous than for evaluators.

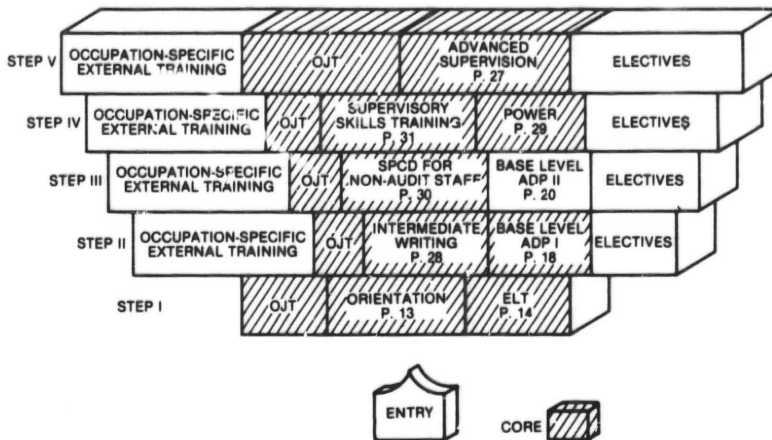
## Systematic Development

How do the education specialists

who make up the staff of the Training Branch go about designing a course in a systematic manner? The first step, after the training need has been identified, is to compare this need with the *Training Needs Assessment of the Audit Function*. The assessment may corroborate the need; if not, the need may still exist and may be the result of changes in policies or external technological changes.

Once the need is validated and documented, the Training Branch establishes a team to develop training activities (course, seminar, job aid, workshop). The team consists of education specialists, one of whom is the project leader responsible for planning, assigning tasks, and monitoring the progress of the project; subject

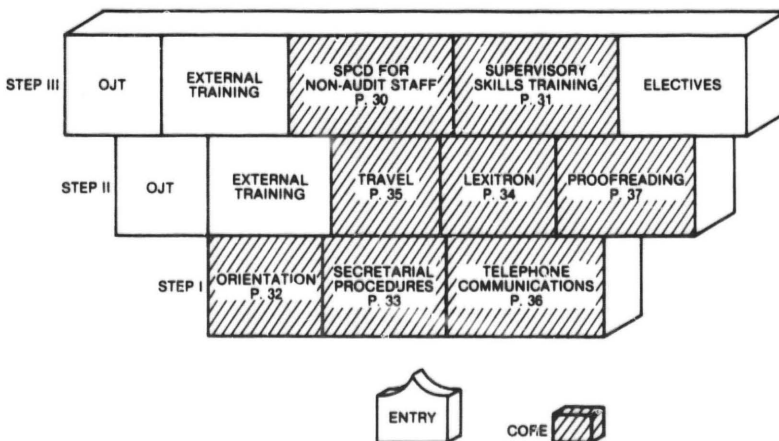
**FIGURE 3  
NON-EVALUATOR CURRICULUM**  
(Page numbers refer to the GAO Catalogue of Internal Training Courses)



teach participants in the most efficient and effective way, the subject matter experts are essential for credible presentation of the material. To help instructors understand the developmental and educational principles that inform the training program, the branch runs "training of trainer" programs stressing content mastery by the potential trainer and also presentation and group interaction skills.

To date, the redesign of GAO's training has focused on technical auditor/evaluator and secretarial training. As we move into fiscal year 1982, the focus will shift to the management and executive development area and to specialized technical areas, such as automatic data processing. However, the same systematic developmental principles will apply. The delivery of courses and programs in these areas is greatly enhanced by the acquisition of GAO's own Management Development Center in Georgetown. The Center's space, with its flexible classroom and seminar areas, is specifically designed for managerial training.

**FIGURE 4  
SECRETARIAL-CLERICAL CURRICULUM**  
(Page numbers refer to the GAO Catalogue of Internal Training Courses)



## Training Goals

Among the goals formulated by the staff of the Training Branch is the desire to upgrade the very notion of training in the agency and, in fact, our ideal is to create a model government training program in GAO. This effort requires a high-level commitment, and we must be able to show that, in fact, training does make a difference. It is not merely an excuse to escape the daily routine of the office; it is an opportunity to learn new techniques and skills for personal and career advancement and to improve GAO's overall work quality. Furthermore, with a uniform evaluation of training and the new performance appraisal systems, our programs will keep pace with the changes in GAO's work methods. In adapting to change, in continuing its effectiveness, and in carrying out its mission, training is GAO's crucial key.

matter experts drawn from the population for which the course is designed; an evaluation expert from the Evaluation Branch; an audiovisual technician from the Technical Resources Section; and a representative from the Office of Policy. (The Office of Policy is responsible for ensuring that all training conforms to the policy guidelines contained in the *CAM*, the *Project Manual*, and the *Report Manual*.) This team sees the activity through several pilot offerings, and when it is assured that the activity is meeting the identified need, the activity is turned over to the Training Branch for ongoing implementation. Periodically, evaluation personnel will assist in evaluating the course and its effectiveness.

Steps in the developmental process  
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include writing behavioral objectives, i.e., precise statements of what an employee will be able to do at the end of the training, and outlining subject matter, identifying appropriate learning methods, developing tests and other evaluation instruments, and finally, writing lesson plans. During the pilot stage, the developers also identify and train the instructors who will teach the course.

Although the Training Branch takes on the major administrative responsibility for courses, the branch is still dependent during the implementation phase on highly skilled GAO employees to carry out the classroom instruction. This is particularly important in the technical area. While the education specialist can design courses to