



MILITARY EDUCATION

DOD Needs to Enhance Performance Goals and Measures to Improve Oversight of Military Academies

Highlights of [GAO-03-1000](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Graduates of the service academies operated by the Army, Navy, and Air Force currently make up approximately 18 percent of the officer corps for the nation's armed services. The academies represent the military's most expensive source of new officers. The Department of Defense (DOD) pays the full cost of a student's 4-year education at the academies; and the related cost has increased over the past 4 years. Admission to the academies is highly competitive. The academies use a "whole person" method to make admission decisions. Recent studies by the Air Force raised questions about possible adverse effects of whole person admissions policies on student quality. GAO was asked to review all three service academies and specifically address the extent to which (1) DOD oversees the service academies, (2) applicants are granted waivers of academic standards, and (3) various groups of students differ in admissions scores and academy performance.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD/P&R), in concert with the services, to further enhance performance goals and measures to improve oversight of the operations and performance of the service academies. In comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1000.

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

What GAO Found

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD/P&R), the services, and the academies' boards of visitors conduct considerable oversight of the academies' operations and performance, but they lack a complete oversight framework. A complete oversight framework includes performance goals and measures against which the academies' performance could be better assessed. OUSD/P&R and the services use the number and type of commissioned officers as the primary measure of academy performance. OUSD/P&R requires and receives reports on academy performance from the services. While data submitted in these reports provide perspective on current performance compared with past performance, without stated performance goals and measures, these reports do not offer OUSD/P&R or the services as good an insight into the academies performance as they could. Additionally, though the academy boards of visitors serve as an external oversight mechanism to focus attention on a wide range of issues, they also do not assess the academies' performance against established performance goals and measures.

The academies do not grant waivers from academic criteria or have absolute minimum scores for admission. However, under the whole person approach, the academies can admit some applicants whose academic scores are lower than might normally be competitive for admission, but who in their totality (academics, physical aptitude, and leadership) are evaluated by academy officials as being capable of succeeding at the academy.

In our review of the academy classes that started in 1998 (class of 2002), we found that despite differences among various groups of students in their admissions scores and similar differences in their performance while at the academies, the differences in performance were not sizable. Some groups, such as females, performed better in some categories than the class as a whole and worse in others. Some groups (minorities, preparatory school graduates, recruited athletes, and students in the lower 30 percent of their class in terms of academic admissions scores) performed at lower levels on average in all categories than the class as a whole.

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

Academy	Cost category	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002
Military Academy	Total operating costs	\$301,058,452	\$330,603,820	\$336,416,716	\$364,971,975
	Cost per graduate	312,150	320,120	339,318	349,327
Naval Academy	Total operating costs	245,749,679	253,817,467	273,809,865	292,696,358
	Cost per graduate	254,983	256,931	266,033	275,001
Air Force Academy	Total operating costs	277,639,005	314,972,559	321,335,152	333,056,023
	Cost per graduate	305,945	305,133	313,456	322,750

Source: DOD.