



Highlights of [GAO-08-296](#), a report to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Incidents of sexual harassment and assault contradict the academies' core values to treat all with dignity and respect. Yet, since 2003, each of the Department of Defense (DOD) academies and the Coast Guard Academy has experienced at least one incident. In 2003, Congress directed DOD to establish programs and to submit annual reports, and although not required, the Coast Guard Academy, within the Department of Homeland Security, has taken similar action. GAO was asked to review sexual harassment and assault programs at the academies. This report evaluates (1) the academies' programs to prevent, respond to, and resolve sexual harassment and assault cases; (2) the academies' visibility over sexual harassment and assault incidents; and (3) DOD and Coast Guard oversight of their academies' efforts. GAO analyzed data for program years 2003 through 2006, reviewed requirements, met with service and academy officials, and interviewed randomly selected students at each academy.

What GAO Recommends

GAO suggests that Congress consider requiring the Coast Guard Academy to submit data for DOD's annual report and to participate in assessments methodologically comparable to those administered by DOD. GAO is also making recommendations to DOD and the Coast Guard to improve oversight of sexual assault and harassment at their academies. Both agencies concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-296](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

The DOD and Coast Guard Academies Have Taken Steps to Address Incidents of Sexual Harassment and Assault, but Greater Federal Oversight Is Needed

What GAO Found

The academies have taken steps to prevent, respond to, and resolve sexual harassment and assault incidents. Each DOD academy, for example, has created and staffed the position of Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. Additionally, the DOD and Coast Guard academies have established training programs aimed at preventing and responding to future incidents. The academies have also established alternatives for responding to and resolving reported incidents, depending on whether the incident involves harassment or assault, and in cases of assault, whether the victim wishes to make a restricted report—privately disclosing the incident to select response service providers without triggering an investigation—or an unrestricted report—which involves investigative authorities and the chain of command. A few of the reported sexual assault cases have resulted in formal charges.

The academies collect sexual harassment and assault data, but student perceptions in surveys administered in 2006 indicate that incidents may be underreported, suggesting that the academies may not have full visibility over all sexual harassment and assault incidents. For academy program years 2003 through 2006, the DOD academies' military equal opportunity offices reported 32 sexual harassment cases, the Sexual Assault Response Coordinators reported 25 restricted cases of sexual assault, and the military criminal investigators reported 96 unrestricted sexual assault cases. However, estimates from DOD's most recent survey of its academy students, which was administered in March and April 2006, suggest that approximately 200 female and 100 male students may have experienced "unwanted sexual contact" in the previous year alone. Coast Guard Academy data show similar results.

While DOD has established an oversight framework for its academies' sexual harassment and assault programs, its oversight has not been integrated and comprehensive, and the Coast Guard headquarters has not established an oversight framework. For example, inconsistencies exist in the way sexual harassment and assault data have been collected and reported because the department has not clearly articulated data reporting requirements. Further, DOD is unable to fully evaluate the academies' programs because it has not established measures to analyze incident data, survey results, and academy programs. Also, DOD has been only minimally addressing congressional interest in academy programs because it has not been conducting a comprehensive and integrated analysis of academy data or programs before forwarding academy reports to Congress. As a result, it has been difficult for DOD and Congress to judge how well the academies are addressing these important issues. It appears that DOD has very recently taken steps to address these concerns. Although the Coast Guard has performed a limited assessment of its academy's sexual harassment activities, it does not report statistics to Congress. In addition, the Coast Guard headquarters has not established guidance with which to oversee and evaluate its academy's efforts. Consequently, the Coast Guard headquarters lacks measures of how well its academy may be addressing incidents of sexual harassment and assault.