

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-29](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

To facilitate unified operations across the services, DOD has provided JPME programs at departmental and service academic institutions for almost 30 years. In July 2012, the Director for Joint Force Development, who reports to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tasked the MECC to review DOD's joint education objectives and institutions to help ensure that outcomes match requirements for the strategic environment projected for Joint Force 2020. Subsequently, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 mandated GAO to report to Congress on the analytical approach used by the MECC not later than 90 days after the Director submitted the MECC's report to GAO, which the Director did on July 1, 2013. In this report, GAO (1) identifies the purpose of DOD's study of the JPME program, and (2) assesses DOD's methodology used to conduct the Joint Professional Military Education study and its planning for follow-on actions. GAO analyzed the MECC's final report and relevant planning documents, interviewed DOD officials who conducted portions of the study, and reviewed leading practices for evaluating programs by GAO and other entities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD establish well-defined timeframes for conducting any follow-on actions and include stakeholders necessary for implementation, and assess the costs of implementing recommendations made in the MECC's recent study of joint professional military education. DOD concurred with both of GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-14-29](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

October 2013

JOINT MILITARY EDUCATION

Actions Needed to Implement DOD Recommendations for Enhancing Leadership Development

What GAO Found

The purpose of the Department of Defense's (DOD) study of its Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) program was to identify (1) desired leader attributes as part of the JPME career-long learning experience needed to support DOD's strategic vision and (2) any gaps in the current educational program to facilitate the development of the leaders needed to achieve that vision. Specifically, a Military Education Coordination Council (MECC)—following direction from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director for Joint Force Development—proposed six desired leader attributes, including, for example, the ability to anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty, and concluded that the existing institutional structure for providing JPME should be retained. The MECC's gap analysis, however, indicated that in order to support the development of these attributes, a greater emphasis on career-long self-directed learning is also needed, among other things. In line with its findings, the MECC made 21 recommendations to improve the JPME program that address increased accessibility of educational programs, changes to teaching methodologies and assessment mechanisms, and enhanced use of technology.

DOD's methodology generally included leading practices for assessing training programs, but DOD has not yet fully planned for follow-on actions and engaged all stakeholders, nor has it assessed the costs of the MECC's recommendations to provide decision makers with more timely and complete information and help ensure that the study's results are implemented. Specifically, the MECC reviewed other related studies, conducted a gap analysis to identify gaps based on existing and future needs, used the best available data and acknowledged limitations—all practices identified by GAO and other government agencies and research institutions as leading practices for successful evaluations of training and other programs. By contrast, DOD documents state that the results of the study were intended to inform and shape the fall 2013 academic year, but the MECC did not complete its study until June 24, 2013 and provided its report to GAO on July 1, 2013. Further, DOD has not yet identified milestones and timeframes for implementing all of its recommendations. Subsequently, the department developed an update to inform actions for moving forward on its recommendations. DOD identified target dates for completion not later than September 2014 for 9 recommendations, but did not include interim milestones, and has not yet developed target dates for 12 recommendations. In addition, the MECC did not formalize plans to achieve the buy-in of all stakeholders for recommendation implementation. Without this information, it may be difficult for DOD to ensure that stakeholders agree on and are accountable for implementing the recommendations in a timely manner. Finally, the MECC did not analyze the costs or efficiencies associated with implementing its recommendations, but it identified 5 recommendations that could incur additional costs because they require further study. Leading practices such as accounting for program resources enable managers to better manage existing resources and plan for future programmatic needs. Without cost data on the study's recommendations or plans to assess cost in the near term as part of continued efforts to implement the results of the JPME study, decision makers could be hindered in determining the most efficient allocation of departmental resources for JPME.