

Why GAO Did This Study

Professionalism and sound ethical judgment are essential to executing the fundamental mission of DOD and to maintaining confidence in military leadership, but recent DOD and military service investigations have revealed misconduct related to, among other things, sexual behavior, bribery, and cheating.

House Report 113-446 included a provision for GAO to review DOD's ethics and professionalism programs for military servicemembers. This report examines the extent to which DOD has developed and implemented (1) a management framework to oversee its programs and initiatives on ethics and professionalism; and (2) tools and performance metrics to identify, assess, and measure progress in addressing ethics and professionalism issues. GAO analyzed DOD guidance and documents related to military ethics and professionalism, reviewed literature to identify ethics issues and practices, and interviewed DOD, industry, and foreign military officials experienced in implementing ethics and professionalism programs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOD determine whether there is a need for a values-based program, assess the expansion of training, modify guidance, assess the use of a key tool for identifying ethics and professionalism issues, and develop performance metrics. DOD generally or partially concurred with these recommendations but did not agree to develop information to assess the Advisor's office. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are valid, as further discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-711](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or FarrellB@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Additional Steps Are Needed to Strengthen DOD's Oversight of Ethics and Professionalism Issues

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has a management framework to help oversee its existing ethics program and has initiated steps to establish such a framework to oversee its professionalism-related programs and initiatives, but its efforts could be strengthened in both areas.

- DOD has a decentralized structure to administer and oversee its existing, required compliance-based ethics program, which focuses on ensuring adherence to rules. However, DOD has not fully addressed a 2008 internal recommendation to develop a department-wide values-based ethics program, which would emphasize ethical principles and decision-making to foster an ethical culture and achieve high standards of conduct. In 2012, DOD studied the design and implementation of a values-based ethics program and in 2013 delivered related training to certain DOD personnel. DOD has decided to take no further actions to establish a values-based ethics program, but it has not demonstrated that additional actions are unwarranted or assessed the feasibility of expanding training to additional personnel. As a result, the department neither has assurance that it has adequately addressed the identified need for a values-based ethics program nor has information needed to target its training efforts appropriately.
- DOD established a 2-year, potentially renewable, position for a Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism, ending in March 2016, to oversee its professionalism-related efforts. Since 2014 the Advisor's office has identified and taken steps toward implementing some of its major tasks, which relate to coordinating and integrating DOD's efforts on professionalism. Professionalism relates to the values, ethics, standards, code of conduct, skills, and attributes of the military workforce. However, the office has not developed timelines or information to assess its progress in completing its major tasks. Thus, DOD does not have information to track the office's progress or assess whether the SAMP position should be retained after March 2016.

DOD has not fully implemented two key tools for identifying and assessing ethics and professionalism issues, and it has not developed performance metrics to measure its progress in addressing ethics-related issues. DOD has identified several tools, such as command climate and 360-degree assessments, that can be used to identify and assess ethics and professionalism issues. However, guidance issued by the military services for command climate assessments does not meet all statutory requirements and DOD guidance. As a result, the services do not have the required level of accountability during the performance evaluation process over the occurrence of these assessments, or assurances that all military personnel are able to anonymously participate in them. Further, the Navy, Marine Corps, and Joint Staff have developed and implemented 360-degree assessments for some but not all general and flag officers, and therefore some of these officers are not receiving valuable feedback on their performance as intended by DOD guidance. Finally, federal internal control standards emphasize the assessment of performance over time, but DOD is unable to determine whether its ethics and professionalism initiatives are achieving their intended effect because it has not developed metrics to measure their progress.