

December 1999

# BORDER PATROL HIRING

## Despite Recent Initiatives, Fiscal Year 1999 Hiring Goal Was Not Met



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G A O

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-280858

December 17, 1999

The Honorable Spencer Abraham  
Chairman  
The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Immigration  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate

Illegal entry into the United States, particularly along the southwest border, has been a long-standing national problem. The illegal alien population in this country, estimated at more than 5 million people, is estimated to be growing by 275,000 annually.<sup>1</sup> As such, concerns exist over the ability of the Border Patrol, part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), to defend our borders. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996,<sup>2</sup> among other things, directed the Attorney General to increase the number of Border Patrol agents onboard by not less than 1,000 in each fiscal year from 1997 through 2001.

You asked us to review INS' efforts to increase the number of new Border Patrol agents. Specifically, we agreed to provide information and analysis on (1) INS' ability to meet its 5-year goal to increase the Border Patrol's onboard strength by 1,000 agents each year from fiscal years 1997 through 2001; (2) INS' efforts to improve its recruiting efforts and hiring process; (3) changes in the years of experience and level of supervision of Border Patrol agents during INS' increased hiring; and (4) the ability of INS' basic training program to support the pace at which Border Patrol agents have been hired, including whether the Border Patrol Academy anticipates having the capacity to meet future growth.

## Results in Brief

INS' recruitment program yielded a net increase of 1,002 Border Patrol agents in fiscal year 1997 and a net increase of 1,035 agents in fiscal year 1998 after accounting for attrition. Although INS met its goal to increase the Border Patrol's onboard strength by 1,000 agents each year in these 2 years, it saw a net increase of only 369 agents in fiscal year 1999 because it

<sup>1</sup> Not all illegal aliens have entered the United States illegally. Some have entered legally but violated their conditions for entry (e.g., over-stayed their visa).

<sup>2</sup> P.L. 104-208.

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was unable to recruit enough qualified applicants<sup>3</sup> and retain them through the hiring process. Thus, for the 3-year period ending September 30, 1999, INS experienced a net hiring shortfall of 594 agents.

INS has had difficulties attracting and retaining qualified applicants. Although INS has attracted large numbers of applicants, few individuals who apply to the Border Patrol successfully complete the application process. Some fail to pass the rigorous entry examination, medical examination, or background investigation, while others withdraw from the process. In fiscal year 1999, failure and drop-out rates were higher than in the past. To address its hiring problems, INS has redirected \$2.2 million to enhance its recruiting and hiring program, which includes initiatives to increase Border Patrol agents' involvement in recruitment and fine-tuning INS' hiring process. As part of this effort, INS plans to survey Border Patrol applicants who register for the written examination—an early step in the hiring process—but do not report for testing to find out their reasons for not reporting, as well as those who do report for testing to obtain their views on the initial part of the hiring process. In addition, INS officials said that, in April 1999, staff began asking applicants their reasons for declining Border Patrol job offers. However, INS does not have plans to survey applicants who voluntarily withdraw at other stages later in the process—such as after passing the interview or the background investigation. These additional surveys could be beneficial because, at these later stages in the hiring process, INS has invested funds in medical examinations and initiated costly background investigations for applicants. We are recommending that INS collect information at key junctures later in the hiring process to better understand why applicants are withdrawing at these points in the process.

INS assigns all new Border Patrol agents to the southwest border, where 92 percent of all agents are located. As hiring has increased, the average experience level of Border Patrol agents has declined agencywide, as well as along the southwest border. The percentage of agents along the southwest border with 2 years of experience or less almost tripled—from 14 percent to 39 percent—between fiscal years 1994 and 1998. During the same period, seven of the nine southwest border sectors experienced some increase in the average number of nonsupervisory agents (GS-5 through GS-11) assigned to each GS-12 supervisory agent. The Tucson sector experienced the greatest increase, with its ratio of nonsupervisory

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, we use the term “qualified applicant” to refer to an applicant who meets all INS' hiring criteria, including passing an examination and background investigation.

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agents to one supervisory agent rising from 8 to 1 in fiscal year 1994 to about 11 to 1 in fiscal year 1998.

By relying on a temporary training facility in Charleston, South Carolina since 1996, the Border Patrol Academy has been able to provide newly hired agents with required training and, according to a Border Patrol official, it is prepared to meet the training needs associated with future growth. However, INS and Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC)<sup>4</sup> officials have different views on how long INS will need to rely on the Charleston facility. FLETC believes the facility can be closed by the end of fiscal year 2004, if not earlier—as soon as FLETC has the capacity to absorb the Border Patrol training that is taking place at the Charleston facility. INS estimates it will need to keep the facility open until sometime between fiscal years 2004 and 2006—when it believes FLETC will be ready to accommodate all of INS' training needs, including any unanticipated needs that might arise in the future.

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## Background

The Border Patrol is the mobile, uniformed, enforcement arm of INS. Its mission is to detect and prevent the smuggling and illegal entry of undocumented aliens into the United States and to apprehend persons found in the United States in violation of immigration laws. With the increase in drug smuggling operations, the Border Patrol has become the primary drug interdiction agency along United States land borders between ports-of-entry. Border Patrol agents perform their duties near and along about 8,000 miles of United States boundaries by land, sea, and air. The Border Patrol is divided into 21 sectors, 9 of which are along the southwest border. Sectors are further subdivided into stations.

To stem the growing flow of illegal entry into the country, the Attorney General announced in 1994 a five-part strategy that included strengthening border enforcement. To support this strategy, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, among other things, required that the Attorney General increase the onboard strength of Border Patrol agents by not less than 1,000 each year for fiscal years 1997 through 2001. Deployment of new agents to particular sectors along the southwest border has generally corresponded with INS' implementation of its border strategy.<sup>5</sup> However, because the strategy was designed to allow

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<sup>4</sup> FLETC is operated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and serves as an interagency law enforcement training organization for over 70 federal agencies, including the Border Patrol.

<sup>5</sup> The strategy deploys Border Patrol agents to the nine sectors along the southwest border in three phases. During phase I, which INS began implementing in fiscal year 1994, agents were deployed to the San Diego, CA, and El Paso, TX, sectors. INS completed phase I and transitioned to phase II in fiscal year 1998. Under phase II, INS is deploying agents to the Tucson, AZ, sector and three sectors in south

for flexibility in responding to unexpected changes in the flow of illegal immigration, some sectors have received additional agents before the strategy was implemented in their sectors. With increased hiring, the Border Patrol has experienced dramatic growth in recent years. From the end of fiscal year 1994 to the end of fiscal year 1999, the size of the Border Patrol nearly doubled—from 4,226 to 8,351.<sup>6</sup>

INS uses a variety of approaches to attract applicants to the Border Patrol, including advertising in magazines and newspapers, on the Internet, in movie theaters, and on billboards; targeting key colleges and universities with degree programs in law enforcement, criminal justice, and police science; attending recruitment events; and visiting military bases to recruit departing military personnel. Although INS has recruited in different parts of the country, it is now focusing its efforts on locations near the southwest border.

Those applying to be Border Patrol agents must initially complete a self-screening questionnaire for basic eligibility (i.e., age, education, and citizenship), after which they must successfully complete a multistep hiring process. This process is comprised of a written examination, which includes a Spanish test or an artificial language test designed to measure an applicant's ability to learn a foreign language (e.g., Spanish); a structured interview with a panel of Border Patrol agents; a medical examination; a drug screening; and a full background investigation.

## Scope and Methodology

To determine if INS is on track in meeting its hiring goals, we analyzed hiring and attrition data from INS' Budget Office. We met with Human Resources officials to discuss INS' latest hiring shortfall projections.

To learn about INS' recruiting efforts, hiring process, and plans to meet future goals, we met with INS officials in the National Recruitment Program, Special Examining Unit, National Hiring Center, and Office of Security. We attended two hiring sessions and reviewed documents regarding INS' recruiting and hiring processes. We did not evaluate INS' criteria for hiring Border Patrol agents. We also reviewed INS' recruiting and hiring initiatives and discussed them with agency officials. In addition, we discussed INS' hiring process and personnel classification issues with officials from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Furthermore, to

Texas—Del Rio, Laredo, and McAllen. Under phase III, INS plans to deploy agents to El Centro, CA, Yuma, AZ, and Marfa, TX.

<sup>6</sup> The 1994 fiscal year-end count of 4,226 does not include Border Patrol pilots; the 1999 fiscal year-end count of 8,351 does include pilots.

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help put INS' processes and experiences into perspective, we obtained recruiting and hiring information from seven other law enforcement agencies.<sup>7</sup>

To provide information on how levels of experience and supervision of Border Patrol agents changed during INS' hiring build-up, we analyzed INS budget data and compared fiscal year 1994 data (before the hiring build-up began) to fiscal year 1998 data (2 years after the start of the hiring mandate). To analyze experience, we used data on Border Patrol agents' years of service with INS because INS does not maintain data on agents' length of service with the Border Patrol. However, agency officials told us that most Border Patrol agents begin their INS careers with the Border Patrol, and it is unusual for other INS personnel to transfer into the Border Patrol. To provide information on supervision, we analyzed changes in the ratio of nonsupervisory agents (GS-5 through GS-11) to first-line supervisory agents (GS-12). Such an analysis provides an indication of how supervision may have changed as more agents have been hired, although it may not provide a complete picture of supervision. INS does not centrally maintain data that would enable us to determine the grade or experience of agents who are actually assigned to work with new agents.

To provide information on whether the Border Patrol Academy has kept pace with increased hiring and has the capacity to meet the basic training needs associated with future growth, we visited the Border Patrol Academy and FLETC in Glynco, Georgia, and the Border Patrol's temporary training facility in Charleston, South Carolina. We met with the Chief of the Border Patrol Academy, instructors, database managers, and FLETC officials. We analyzed Academy databases containing demographic profiles of newly hired agents, final grades, and instructor data. In addition, we reviewed Border Patrol training projections and renovation plans for the Charleston facility and FLETC. We discussed the Charleston facility plans with INS and Border Patrol officials, and we discussed FLETC plans with Treasury officials.

To verify the consistency of Border Patrol Academy data, we performed reliability checks on the Academy's demographic profile, final grade, and instructor databases. We verified that the data entry was complete and that

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<sup>7</sup> We judgmentally selected the following federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies based on factors such as the agencies having activities similar to those of the Border Patrol or recruiting from similar applicant pools: the U.S. Customs Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Texas Department of Public Safety (which hires State Troopers), and the Los Angeles and El Paso Police Departments. We obtained information from each agency through interviews or the agency's Internet web site.

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data had not been duplicated. Academy database managers told us that they verify the data entry of all grade data, and that demographic profile data are electronically scanned from trainee-completed answer sheets. We did not verify the accuracy of the grade or instructor data with Academy class records.

We conducted our work at INS Headquarters; its training facilities in Glynco, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina; and two hiring sessions in San Diego, California, and El Paso, Texas, from September 1998 to September 1999 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The Department of Justice provided technical comments on a draft of this report, which we incorporated where appropriate.

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## INS Did Not Meet Its Fiscal Year 1999 Border Patrol Hiring Goal

INS was able to increase the onboard strength of the Border Patrol by more than 1,000 agents in the first 2 years of its 5-year hiring goal, but in the third year (fiscal year 1999) it was only able to increase its onboard strength by 369 agents. This resulted in a net shortfall of 594 agents for the 3-year period ending September 30, 1999. Because of attrition, INS would have had to hire 1,757 agents in fiscal year 1999 to meet that year's hiring goal.

As shown in table 1, to account for attrition, INS has had to hire far more than 1,000 agents in each year to meet its hiring goal. During fiscal year 1997, the first year of its goal to increase the Border Patrol's onboard strength by 1,000 agents, INS actually hired 1,726 agents, which resulted in a net increase of 1,002 agents. In fiscal year 1998, it hired 1,919 agents for a net increase of 1,035. In fiscal year 1999, INS hired 1,126 agents, but because 757 agents left the Border Patrol during the year, the size of the Border Patrol only increased by 369 agents. The Border Patrol's 9-percent attrition rate for fiscal year 1999 was actually lower than the 13 percent INS originally anticipated. According to an INS official, during fiscal year 1999, some Border Patrol agents applied for, and were accepted to, other INS positions. However, in August 1999, an INS official told us that due to funding difficulties, INS would not be transferring these agents until fiscal year 2000. Had the agents transferred as planned, INS would have faced an even larger shortfall of about 900 Border Patrol agents in fiscal year 1999.



**Table 1: Annual Border Patrol Hiring and Attrition, FYs 1990 Through 1999**

	FY 1990	FY 1991	FY 1992	FY 1993	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999
Agents onboard at start of fiscal year	3,781	3,733	3,651	4,076	3,965	4,226	4,881	5,878	6,947 <sup>a</sup>	7,982
Agents hired <sup>b</sup>	172	196	692	102	461	1,005	1,517	1,726	1,919	1,126
Attrition <sup>c</sup>	220	278	267	213	200	350	520	724	884	757
<b>Percentage of Attrition</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Agents onboard at end of fiscal year	3,733	3,651	4,076	3,965	4,226	4,881	5,878	6,880 <sup>a</sup>	7,982	8,351
Net gain/(loss)	(48)	(82)	425	(111)	261	655	997	1,002	1,035	369

Note: Border Patrol pilots are not included in data for fiscal years 1990 through 1997; pilots are included in data for fiscal years 1998 and 1999.

<sup>a</sup>The number of agents onboard at the end of fiscal year 1997 does not match the number onboard at the start of fiscal year 1998 because, starting in fiscal year 1998, INS began including Border Patrol pilots in its hiring and attrition reports.

<sup>b</sup>Fiscal years 1990 through 1993 data on number of agents hired provided by the Border Patrol Academy. Fiscal years 1994 and 1995 data provided by INS' Human Resources and Development Division. All other years provided by INS' Budget Office.

<sup>c</sup>Fiscal years 1996 through 1999 attrition data provided by INS' Budget Office. GAO calculated attrition for all other years. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

The attrition rate among Border Patrol agents rose fairly steadily from fiscal year 1994 through fiscal year 1998, which increased the total number of agents INS needed to hire each year to meet its mandate. As shown in table 1, the annual attrition rate for Border Patrol agents was 5 percent in fiscal year 1994, but by 1998, the rate had risen to 13 percent. Although INS maintains data on categories of attrition, such as retirement and termination, it has limited information on why agents leave the Border Patrol. However, its data do show that in fiscal years 1994 through 1998, almost half of the agents who left the Border Patrol left within their first 10 months of service. Since fiscal year 1996, about one-third of the Border Patrol's attrition occurred during the initial 19-week training period at the Border Patrol Academy. Appendix I contains additional hiring and attrition data, as well as demographic information on newly hired agents.

## INS Cites Recruiting and Hiring Problems and Is Making Changes

A major goal of INS' National Recruitment Program, which was established in 1996, has been to generate enough qualified applicants to meet INS' hiring goal. The program's efforts have included tracking advertising sources that generated the greatest applicant response and identifying key schools at which it had past success hiring Border Patrol agents. In the first 2 fiscal years of the program, INS met its hiring goal. However, by November 1998, INS foresaw difficulties in meeting its fiscal year 1999 goal and was projecting a hiring shortfall. Much of the problem was INS' inability to attract sufficient numbers of eligible applicants<sup>8</sup> and retain qualified recruits through the hiring process. INS has been initiating actions to improve both its recruiting efforts and hiring process.

## INS Was Not Able to Attract Enough Eligible Applicants and Retain Enough Qualified Recruits

Difficulties finding eligible applicants and the high occurrence of applicants failing or dropping out of the hiring process resulted in INS not being able to meet its fiscal year 1999 hiring goal. Officials believe that the country's strong economy and job market have contributed significantly to the agency's hiring troubles. INS officials estimate that, historically, INS has hired about 4 percent of eligible applicants, but it hired only an estimated 2 percent in fiscal year 1999. Thus, officials estimated that INS would have needed to attract about 75,000 eligible applicants—far more than in the past—to meet the agency's fiscal year 1999 goal.

Being able to hire only a small percentage of applicants has clearly contributed to INS' hiring difficulties, but based on our discussions with other law enforcement agencies, this situation is not unique to the Border Patrol. For example, the Los Angeles Police Department typically hires about 5 percent of its applicants, the Texas Department of Public Safety about 3 percent of its State Trooper applicants, and the U.S. Coast Guard about 1 percent of its applicants, according to officials of these organizations. The U.S. Customs Service only hired 1 percent of its applicants for inspector positions in fiscal year 1999, although 2 percent of the applicants who applied were qualified to be hired.

A small percentage of Border Patrol applicants were hired because most failed the written or physical examination, the interview, or the background investigation, or they voluntarily dropped out of the hiring

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this report, we use the term "eligible applicants" to refer to those applicants who have passed an initial self-assessment screen through INS' automated telephone or on-line system. An applicant passes this initial eligibility screening if he or she has 1 year of qualifying experience or a bachelor's degree, is under 37 years of age, is a U.S. citizen, and has not been convicted of domestic violence or any felony.

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process. However, INS knows little about why some applicants chose to withdraw from the process.

The size of the Border Patrol's applicant pool declines with each stage of the hiring process, but losses are particularly heavy in its early stages. However, in fiscal year 1999, applicant losses were higher throughout the entire process. INS officials estimated that in fiscal year 1996, about half of those who were scheduled to take the written examination actually showed up for the test, and in fiscal years 1997 and 1998, about 60 percent of those scheduled did not report for testing. In contrast, INS estimated about 75 percent of applicants who were scheduled did not report for the written examination in fiscal year 1999. According to an OPM official, a 50-percent no-show rate for initial written testing has been considered typical among government agencies. INS officials do not know why INS' fiscal year 1999 no-show rate increased.

Furthermore, many Border Patrol applicants failed a step of the hiring process in recent years, and this was also true in fiscal year 1999. INS estimated about 72 percent of those who took the written test in fiscal year 1999 failed it, and according to an INS official, failure rates were even higher in the last quarter of the year.

In addition, a greater percentage of applicants failed the background investigation<sup>9</sup> in fiscal year 1999. INS estimated that about 15 percent failed the investigation in fiscal year 1998. However, it estimated about 40 percent of applicants failed it in fiscal year 1999. According to an INS official, the more stringent security requirements instituted in May 1998 have increased the background investigation failure rate.<sup>10</sup> INS instituted the tighter requirements to address security concerns.

INS officials cite other aspects of the hiring process that may have also contributed to INS' hiring difficulties. However, their identification of these contributing factors is largely based on anecdotal information from their program staff, and not on any systematic data collection effort. Officials believe that the length of the standard hiring process—typically 6 months to 1 year—may be a factor in the agency's inability to hire a greater percentage of Border Patrol applicants. Although most of the other law

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<sup>9</sup> Background investigation failure rates include those who failed to respond to investigators' inquiries, as well as those who failed the investigation.

<sup>10</sup> The tighter requirements added a limited, second background check for applicants just before being hired. INS also added arrest incidents to its criteria for disqualifying applicants. Earlier, in 1996, INS stopped issuing security "waivers" that allowed INS to hire certain applicants before a full background investigation was completed.

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enforcement agencies we contacted had hiring processes that fell within the range of 5 months to 1 year, recent recruiting literature point out that recruiters are shortening their hiring processes to avoid losing qualified applicants. Other aspects of the hiring process that INS officials believe may have contributed to hiring problems include the out-of-pocket costs applicants incur during the hiring process and in reporting for duty, and a lack of flexibility regarding location and start dates for newly hired agents. Appendix II contains additional information on these and other factors that may contribute to INS' problems attracting and hiring applicants.

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### INS Is Taking Steps to Address Recruiting and Hiring Problems

To improve its ability to identify and recruit applicants, INS has redirected \$2.2 million to enhance its recruiting and hiring initiatives and said it is prepared to redirect additional funds, if needed. However, INS developed these initiatives without adequate data on why it had been unable to retain and hire more Border Patrol applicants. Rather, INS officials said that, in an effort to meet INS' fiscal year 1999 hiring goal, they based most of their initiatives on their review of the hiring process and past recruitment experiences.

### Recruiting Initiatives

INS' recruiting initiatives include training more than 200 Border Patrol agents to serve as local recruiters and establishing a recruitment coordinator for each Border Patrol sector as part of INS' overall strategy to increase sector involvement in recruiting and attract more viable recruits. According to an INS official, these recruiting efforts have attracted more applicants, but a greater proportion of recent applicants has been failing the written examination.

INS is also considering additional actions that may help recruitment, such as providing hiring bonuses for recruits, and the possibility of raising the full performance level for Border Patrol agents from GS-9 to GS-11. According to INS officials, about 30 percent of the nonsupervisory agents are at the GS-11 level. INS officials believe the current classification standard could support an across-the-board increase to the GS-11 level, but recognize that sufficient GS-11 work must exist and be organized and assigned in a manner that would support the GS-11 level. These changes are being considered as part of a broader effort to bring parity to all INS law enforcement positions, as well as achieve parity with law enforcement positions in other federal agencies. Agency officials hope that raising the full performance level will also make joining the Border Patrol more attractive.

### Hiring Initiatives

Many of INS' hiring initiatives are geared toward reducing the time it takes to hire an agent, although INS does not have systematic data that confirm

its lengthy process has contributed to its hiring difficulties. In addition, to better understand why so many applicants who sign up for the written examination never report for testing, INS plans to conduct telephone surveys of those applicants as part of its hiring initiatives. INS also plans to survey applicants who took the written examination to obtain feedback on the initial steps of its application process. Since April 1999, INS has been asking applicants their reasons for declining offers to join the Border Patrol. However, INS does not have plans to collect data on why it is losing applicants at other stages later in the hiring process. Losing applicants at the later stages is costly to INS because it has already committed Border Patrol agents' time to conduct interviews, and it has spent about \$500 on each medical examination and drug screening, and another \$3,000 on each background investigation. (See app. II for additional information on INS' recruiting and hiring initiatives.)

## Agents' Average Years of Experience Declined and Average Number of Agents Per Supervisor Increased

As a result of the increased hiring of Border Patrol agents in recent years, the average years of experience among all Border Patrol agents has declined. This is true among agents assigned to all nine sectors of the southwest border. For example, between fiscal years 1994 and 1998, the percentage of agents stationed along the southwest border with 2 years of experience or less almost tripled, from 14 percent to 39 percent, and the percentage of agents with 3 years of experience or less more than doubled, from 26 percent to 54 percent.

With increased hiring, the average number of nonsupervisory agents (GS-5 through GS-11) assigned to each GS-12 supervisory agent has increased in seven of the nine southwest border sectors. For example, in Arizona's Tucson sector, which experienced the greatest increase, the ratio of nonsupervisory agents to each supervisory agent rose from 8 to 1 in fiscal year 1994 to about 11 to 1 in fiscal year 1998. In Texas' Marfa sector, which had the lowest ratio of nonsupervisory agents to one supervisory agent, this ratio remained at about 6 to 1 over the same period. INS requires that supervisors in the field supervise at least eight subordinate Border Patrol agents. Agencywide, from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 1998, the ratio of nonsupervisory agents to one supervisory agent increased from 7 to 1 to 8 to 1.<sup>11</sup>

Comparing the ratio of nonsupervisory agents to one supervisory agent from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 1998 may provide an indication of how supervision may have changed with increased hiring. However, this

<sup>11</sup> We did not evaluate how the Border Patrol implemented the requirement for an 8-to-1 supervisory ratio within the agency.

analysis may not provide a complete picture of supervision within the Border Patrol. New agents may be assigned to work with GS-9 or GS-11 Field Training Officers who have received special training, or with other nonsupervisory agents. However, even though these agents provide guidance to new agents, they are not officially classified as supervisors. Furthermore, according to Border Patrol officials, new agents may be assigned to work with other nonsupervisory agents who are not Field Training Officers. Because of a lack of data regarding agents who are assigned to work with new agents, and because sectors differ in how they assign new agents, we were unable to measure the level of experience of agents who work with new agents or analyze changes over time.

See appendix III for additional analyses comparing grade level and years of service of all Border Patrol agents and those assigned to southwest border sectors, for fiscal years 1994 and 1998. Appendix IV contains a map highlighting the Border Patrol's southwest border sectors.

## Training Capacity Has Kept Pace With Hiring

In anticipation of increased hiring, INS opened a temporary training facility in Charleston, South Carolina, to supplement the existing Border Patrol Training Academy, located at FLETC in Glynco, Georgia. Between these two facilities, the Border Patrol Academy has had the capacity to meet the basic training needs associated with its hiring goal. In fact, because INS was unable to maintain its hiring levels in fiscal year 1999, the Academy has had more than enough capacity. The Academy cancelled 10 training sessions in fiscal year 1999 because fewer agents were hired than planned. Furthermore, none of the 28 sessions it conducted were filled to capacity.

As of October 1999, the Academy was planning to train about 1,900 new agents in fiscal year 2000, although it may revise this estimate as the year progresses depending on the number of agents INS is able to hire.<sup>12</sup> According to a Border Patrol official, this training projection should allow the Academy to train new agents hired in fiscal year 2000, any additional agents who must be hired to replace those who leave the Border Patrol during that year, and about 600 agents who must be hired if INS is to make up for the fiscal year 1999 hiring shortfall.

INS has renovated parts of the Charleston facility to make it useable for training, and more renovations are planned. Both INS and FLETC officials have reaffirmed their commitment that Charleston should serve as a

<sup>12</sup> This estimate represents a departure from the training projection the Academy submitted to FLETC in March 1999, which planned for training 2,970 new agents in fiscal year 2000. According to INS officials, the revised projection more realistically reflects attrition rates and INS' ability to hire new agents.

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temporary facility and that FLETC should provide all INS training as soon as it has the capacity to do so. Renovations and expansions at FLETC are also planned. However, the agencies have come to different conclusions about when the Charleston facility can be closed. FLETC's position is premised on when it will have the capacity to absorb the Border Patrol training that is currently held at the Charleston facility. However, INS believes the facility cannot be closed until FLETC can accommodate all of INS' training needs, including any that might arise in the future.

Appendix V contains additional information on the capacity of the Border Patrol Academy, instructors, and trainees' class grades. It also contains more information on the future of the Charleston facility.

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## Conclusions

INS has initiatives under way and is considering taking additional actions to attract more Border Patrol applicants and improve its hiring process. The overall effectiveness of these measures cannot be assessed until INS has fully implemented them. However, even if INS is able to increase the number of applicants, shorten the hiring process, or upgrade the full performance level of agents, experience indicates that these actions alone may not ensure that INS can compensate for the hiring shortfall that has occurred and meet any future hiring goals that are established. Too many Border Patrol applicants may still be unable to pass the steps necessary to be hired, or may not maintain their initial interest in the Border Patrol throughout the hiring process. In the face of these challenges, INS is continuing to explore its options.

When faced with an impending hiring shortfall for fiscal year 1999, INS officials expanded their recruiting and hiring efforts in an attempt to meet INS' hiring goal. However, because INS had limited information on why applicants withdrew from the hiring process, it may or may not be addressing all the causes for the shortfall. INS plans to survey applicants who do and do not show up to take the written examination as one step toward helping the agency understand more about its recruiting and hiring problems.

At that early written examination stage of the hiring process, INS has spent relatively few funds on any one applicant. As an applicant moves further along in the hiring process, INS invests more of its resources, including making Border Patrol agents available to interview the applicant, and spending \$3,000 for a background investigation and almost \$500 for a medical examination and drug screening. In addition to surveying those applicants who do not show up for the written test and collecting information from those who decline a job offer, INS could find it

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informative and cost-effective to learn why some applicants drop out at other stages later in the hiring process. For example, INS could survey applicants, or a sample of applicants, who voluntarily withdraw from the process after passing the interview or the background investigation.

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## Recommendation

We recommend that the INS Commissioner broaden the agency's plans to survey applicants who register for the written examination by also collecting data on why applicants are withdrawing at other key junctures later in the hiring process.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation


On November 22, 1999, we met with representatives of the Department of Justice, including INS' Assistant Commissioner for Human Resources and Development, to obtain comments on a draft of this report. They generally agreed with our report and provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. With respect to our recommendation, they agreed that obtaining additional information on why applicants are withdrawing at other key junctures later in the hiring process would be beneficial. They plan to evaluate the feasibility of implementing the recommendation.

Copies of this report are being sent to Senator Orrin G. Hatch and Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary; Representative Henry J. Hyde and Representative John Conyers, Jr., Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the House Committee on the Judiciary; and Representative Lamar S. Smith and Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims. We will also send copies of this report to the Honorable Janet Reno, the Attorney General; the Honorable Doris Meissner, Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service; the Honorable Lawrence H. Summers, Secretary of the Treasury; and the Honorable Jacob J. Lew, Director, Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others upon request.



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The major contributors to this report are acknowledged in appendix VI. If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me or James M. Blume, Assistant Director, on (202) 512-8777.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard M. Stana". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

Richard M. Stana  
Associate Director  
Administration of Justice Issues

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**Abbreviations**

COP	Continuation of Pay
FLETC	Federal Law Enforcement Training Center
FY	Fiscal Year
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
OPM	Office of Personnel Management

# Border Patrol Hiring and Attrition Information and Demographic Profile of New Agents

This appendix provides an overview, by month, of Border Patrol hiring and attrition in fiscal year 1999; attrition information for fiscal years 1994 through 1998; and a demographic profile of new agents hired from fiscal years 1994 through 1998. The demographic information covers agents' age, sex, race, prior military and/or law enforcement training experience, and education level.

## Fiscal Year 1999 Monthly Hiring and Attrition Data

The rate at which INS hired Border Patrol agents fluctuated throughout fiscal year 1999. Table I.1 provides a monthly accounting of hiring and attrition for the year. As the table shows, the number of agents leaving the agency was greater in some months than the number of agents hired.

**Table I.1: Border Patrol Hiring and Attrition Data, by Month, FY 1999**

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.
Agents onboard at start of month	7,982	7,959	8,045	8,017	8,081	8,010	8,038	8,029	8,123	8,155	8,210	8,226
Agents hired	55	163	48	112	3	79	46	160	85	110	76	189
Attrition	78	77	76	48	74	51	55	66	53	55	60	64
<b>Percentage of attrition</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Agents onboard at end of month	7,959	8,045	8,017	8,081	8,010	8,038	8,029	8,123	8,155	8,210	8,226	8,351
Net gain/(loss)	(23)	86	(28)	64	(71)	28	(9)	94	32	55	16	125

Note: Data were calculated by 2-week pay periods to approximate monthly totals. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

## Border Patrol Attrition

Border Patrol annual attrition rates increased from 6 percent in fiscal year 1990 to 9 percent in fiscal year 1999, with some fluctuation in the years between. In fiscal years 1996, 1997, and 1998, attrition rates reached 11 percent, 12 percent, and 13 percent, respectively.

As shown in table I.2, close to half of the agents who left the Border Patrol between fiscal years 1994 and 1998 left by the end of their post-Academy training—the period that follows 19 weeks of basic training and concludes 10 months after being hired.

**Appendix I**  
**Border Patrol Hiring and Attrition Information and Demographic Profile of New Agents**

**Table I.2: When Border Patrol Attrition Occurred, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

	FY 1994		FY 1995		FY 1996		FY 1997		FY 1998	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Academy basic training	52	26%	103	29%	171	33%	226	31%	313	35%
Post-Academy training <sup>a</sup>	35	18	70	20	93	18	89	12	113	13
All other	113	57	177	51	256	49	409	56	458	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>100</b>

Note 1: Academy and post-Academy data provided by the Border Patrol Academy. Total attrition data provided by INS' Budget Office. GAO calculated the number and percentage of the remaining ("All other") agents who separated from the Border Patrol. Fiscal year 1999 data were unavailable at the time of our review. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note 2: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Post-Academy training takes place after agents are assigned to the field. Once a week, agents participate in Spanish and law classes that they must pass to stay with the Border Patrol.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

## Demographic Profile of New Border Patrol Agents

Demographic profiles of new Border Patrol agents have remained fairly constant during this period of increased hiring, as shown in table I.3. Among the changes that did occur from fiscal years 1994 through 1998 was a decline in the percentage of newly hired Hispanic agents.<sup>1</sup>

**Table I.3: Age, Sex, and Race of Border Patrol New Hires, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

	FY 1994 (n=461)	FY 1995 (n=1,005)	FY 1996 (n=1,474)	FY 1997 (n=1,656)	FY 1998 (n=1,901)
Age (average)	29 years	27 years	28 years	27 years	27 years
Sex (percent)					
Female	7%	8%	7%	5%	5%
Male	93	92	93	95	95
Race <sup>a</sup> (percent)					
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1	1	1	2
Black <sup>b</sup>	2	3	2	2	2
Hispanic	38	37	39	31	28
Native American	0	1	1	1	0
White <sup>b</sup>	59	55	54	65	67
Other	1	3	4	0	0

Note 1: Fiscal year 1999 data were unavailable at the time of our review. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>1</sup> Despite this decline, the actual number of Hispanic agents hired increased as INS increased its overall hiring of Border Patrol agents.

**Appendix I**  
**Border Patrol Hiring and Attrition Information and Demographic Profile of New Agents**

Note 2: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup>In fiscal year 1997, two records were missing, which accounted for 0.12 percent of the total. In fiscal year 1998, two records were missing, which accounted for 0.11 percent of the total.

<sup>b</sup>Not of Hispanic origin.

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol Academy data.

As shown in table I.4, the percentages of new agents who had prior military and/or law enforcement training experience declined between fiscal years 1994 and 1995. However, since then, the percentages have remained fairly constant.

**Table I.4: Prior Experience of Border Patrol New Hires, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

<b>Type of experience</b>	<b>FY 1994 (percent) (n=461)</b>	<b>FY 1995 (percent) (n=1,005)</b>	<b>FY 1996 (percent) (n=1,474)</b>	<b>FY 1997 (percent) (n=1,656)</b>	<b>FY 1998 (percent) (n=1,901)</b>
Prior military experience	47%	36%	36%	38%	36%
Prior law enforcement training experience <sup>a</sup>	38	30	30	30	30

Note: Fiscal year 1999 data were unavailable at the time of our review.

<sup>a</sup>Includes agents who had prior city, county, state, military police, and/or federal law enforcement training.

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol Academy data.

Table I.5 shows the education level of new Border Patrol agents hired from fiscal years 1994 through 1998. One notable change in the education profile of new agents was an increase in the percentage of agents who had a bachelor's degree when hired.

**Table I.5: Education Level of Border Patrol New Hires, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

<b>Education level</b>	<b>FY 1994 (percent) (n=461)</b>	<b>FY 1995 (percent) (n=1,005)</b>	<b>FY 1996 (percent) (n=1,474)</b>	<b>FY 1997 (percent) (n=1,656)</b>	<b>FY 1998 (percent) (n=1,901)</b>
GED	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
High school graduate	12	10	11	11	10
Technical school graduate	3	3	3	2	2
Some college	40	33	32	36	34
Associate's degree	9	8	8	8	8
Bachelor's degree	28	38	37	36	38
Some graduate school	4	4	5	4	4
Master's degree	2	1	2	2	2

Note 1: The following numbers of records were missing in each year: one in fiscal years 1994 and 1996 (0.22 percent and 0.07 percent, respectively, of the totals); five in fiscal year 1997 (0.30 percent of the total); and three in fiscal year 1998 (0.16 percent of the total). Fiscal year 1999 data were unavailable at the time of our review. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note 2: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol Academy data.



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# INS' Recruiting Efforts and Hiring Process

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This appendix provides an overview of INS' recruitment program, a summary of difficulties INS has faced in trying to meet its hiring goals, and a summary of new initiatives INS is implementing to improve its ability to recruit and hire agents.

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## Overview of Recruiting Program

Since 1996, Border Patrol recruiting efforts have been centralized in INS' National Recruitment Program. One of the program's major goals is to generate enough qualified recruits to reach INS' hiring goals. INS' national recruitment program includes a variety of activities:

- Advertising through a variety of mediums, including magazines, newspapers, the Internet, movie theaters, and billboards.
- Targeting key colleges and universities that have substantial numbers of students graduating with degrees in law enforcement, criminal justice, and police science.
- Attending recruiting events, such as job fairs and law enforcement officer conferences.
- Visiting military bases to recruit departing military personnel who have an interest in law enforcement.

In addition, to increase the diversity of the Border Patrol's workforce, INS' national recruitment program and equal employment opportunity staff work with Border Patrol sectors. Headquarters staff and Border Patrol agents work with interest groups at the local level and participate in conferences, job fairs, and other career events in an effort to attract female and minority applicants.

In the past, INS has had success recruiting Border Patrol agents from areas near the southwest border. In fiscal year 1998, INS focused its recruiting efforts on the central and eastern part of the country because it believed it might have exhausted the applicant pool in the southwest. However, recruiting in these other areas was not as successful as INS had hoped. As a result, in fiscal year 1999, INS once again focused its recruiting efforts on locations near the southwest border.

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## Recruiting and Hiring Problems

INS officials believe a number of factors exist that contribute to INS' difficulties in recruiting and hiring Border Patrol agents. Although not all are unique to the Border Patrol, they nevertheless present recruiting and hiring challenges, such as

- difficulty attracting enough eligible applicants,
- high failure and withdrawal rates during the hiring process,
- lengthy hiring process,

- expenses applicants incur, and
- little flexibility in assigned location and start date.

INS does not have data on the extent to which the last three factors affect its recruiting and hiring efforts.

### Difficulty Attracting Enough Eligible Applicants

INS must attract far more Border Patrol applicants than it intends to hire because most applicants either do not pass all of the required hiring steps or drop out during the process. However, attracting enough eligible applicants has been difficult. INS officials have pointed to the country's strong economy and job market as a major reason for INS' hiring problems. They believe the Border Patrol is competing with private and public employers who can offer jobs in better locations and/or with better pay. As shown in table II.1, the number of Border Patrol applicants increased each year through fiscal year 1999, although the number of agents INS hired increased only through fiscal year 1998.

Table II.1: Number of Border Patrol Applicants/Agents Hired, by FY

	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999
Eligible applicants	12,785	23,965	31,387	43,172	48,674	53,441
Agents hired <sup>a</sup>	461	1,005	1,517	1,674	1,971	1,126

<sup>a</sup>The agents hired each fiscal year did not necessarily apply in that same fiscal year.

Source: INS and OPM.

INS officials provided data on the number of eligible applicants they attracted each year and the number of agents they hired each year, but they did not have data on the number of each year's applicant pool that was hired in that same year.<sup>1</sup> However, using the data in table II.1, we estimated that, in fiscal year 1999, INS hired about 2 percent of its eligible applicants, compared to 4 to 5 percent in prior years. Although these percentages are estimates, they nevertheless provide an indication of INS' need to attract an increasing number of applicants each year. According to an INS official, the agency would have needed to attract about 75,000 eligible applicants in fiscal year 1999 if it was to meet its goal to increase the Border Patrol's onboard strength by 1,000 agents.

### High Failure and Withdrawal Rates

The vast majority of applicants are not being hired as Border Patrol agents—they either fail one of the steps in the hiring process, or they choose to withdraw. Although this is not unique to the Border Patrol and other law enforcement agencies also hire few of their applicants, high

<sup>1</sup> Because INS does not track applicants across fiscal years, officials could only provide us with the number of eligible applicants in each year and the number of agents hired in each year.

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dropout rates have made it difficult for INS to meet its hiring goals. To identify trends in the hiring process and to estimate the number of eligible applicants it would need to attract to increase the onboard strength by 1,000 agents each year, INS developed estimated dropout and failure rates for recent years.<sup>2</sup> According to INS' estimates:

- Seventy-five percent of eligible applicants did not show up for the written examination in fiscal year 1999. The percentage of applicants who did not report for testing increased most years since fiscal year 1996, when INS estimated that 54 percent of eligible applicants did not show up for the written examination.
- Thirty percent of applicants who passed the written examination in fiscal year 1999 did not return for their interview. In fiscal year 1998, 43 percent did not return for their interview; in fiscal years 1996 and 1997, about half the applicants did not return.
- Forty percent of applicants who passed the interview in fiscal year 1999 failed their background investigation. In fiscal year 1998, 15 percent of applicants failed the investigation.
- Sixteen percent of applicants who passed the background investigation in fiscal year 1999 failed or did not show up for the medical examination. In fiscal year 1998, 18 percent failed or did not show up for the examination.
- Six percent of those who received a final offer in fiscal year 1999 declined it. In fiscal year 1998, 10 percent declined a final offer.

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## Lengthy Hiring Process

According to an INS hiring official, it has typically taken 6 months to 1 year to hire a Border Patrol agent under INS' standard hiring process. Other law enforcement agencies have a similarly long hiring process, but because Border Patrol's full performance salary level is low compared to some agencies, INS officials believe its applicants may not be willing to wait 6 months to a year for a Border Patrol job offer.

Under the standard hiring process, most steps or tests occur sequentially, with various amounts of time elapsing between each. According to an INS official, scheduling the interview and completing the background investigation when suitability issues arise are the main factors affecting the time it takes to hire an agent. Other factors that can increase the time it takes are health issues or a lack of sufficient information provided by the applicant.

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<sup>2</sup> INS' estimates were limited, in part, because it did not begin to track applicants across fiscal years for all steps of the hiring process until January 1999. Dropout and failure rates for fiscal years 1996 and 1997 are based on estimates; rates for fiscal years 1998 and 1999 are based on a combination of estimated and actual data.

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Prior to November 1998, INS' Special Examining Unit oversaw the agency's hiring functions. However, this unit did not closely monitor the time it took to move an applicant through each stage of the hiring process. Without appropriate monitoring of the hiring process, INS was limited in its ability to identify potential inefficiencies and, thus, the process was longer than necessary. For example, INS officials told us that under INS' contract with OPM to schedule and provide the written examination, OPM must offer the examination within 5 weeks of an applicant's registration. However, according to an INS official, the Special Examining Unit was not monitoring this step, and OPM was taking 6 weeks or more to provide written testing. In addition, the Special Examining Unit would rely on INS' three administrative centers to schedule applicant interviews, and the centers, in turn, would either schedule the interviews themselves, or turn the task over to the sectors. According to an INS official, this scheduling process was averaging 8 weeks or more. INS officials said that the lack of central oversight allowed for chronic delays that significantly added to the total time it took to hire an agent.

INS also experienced delays in scheduling preemployment medical examinations for applicants. INS relies on an outside contractor for applicants' medical examinations. However, according to one INS official, the contractor was slow in assigning applicants to clinics and did not have a tracking system in place to identify delays. In some cases, it was taking 90 days from the time applicants passed their interview to the time they received the results of their medical examination. According to an INS official, at INS' insistence, the contractor has since established a self-monitoring system to avoid delays and identify situations requiring special attention.

### Expedited Hiring Session

In an attempt to shorten the hiring process and attract a greater number of applicants, INS began conducting expedited hiring sessions in fiscal year 1996. These expedited sessions, which INS offered in addition to the standard hiring process, were scheduled periodically in higher-activity locations. They allowed applicants to complete the written examination, interview, medical examination, drug screening, and fingerprinting over the course of 2 days. In fiscal year 1997, INS began arranging for media attention in the areas where expedited sessions would be held to heighten awareness of the Border Patrol and increase the number of potential applicants.

Initially, this strategy was fairly successful both in expediting the hiring process—typically 2 to 3 months were saved—and increasing the number of agents hired. In fiscal year 1997, 24 percent of all agents hired were

processed through expedited hiring sessions, and 4 percent of those who registered for the expedited sessions were hired. But subsequently, these sessions produced lower-than-expected turnouts and diminished results. In fiscal year 1998, only 10 percent of all agents hired resulted from the expedited process and 2 percent of those who registered for the expedited sessions were hired, according to INS estimates. According to an INS official, the expedited hiring sessions in fiscal year 1999 also produced disappointing turnouts and results. Because of poor results and the substantial costs associated with administering the expedited sessions, INS decided to discontinue them. INS officials did not know why the expedited hiring sessions held in fiscal years 1998 and 1999 yielded disappointing results.

INS held its last such session in May 1999. Table II.2 shows the results, as of July 14, 1999, of the last three expedited hiring sessions INS held. As the expedited hiring process typically takes 3 to 9 months, additional agents may be hired from these sessions.

Table II.2: Results of Last Expedited Hiring Sessions, as of July 14, 1999

	Tucson Jan. 1999	New York Mar. 1999	San Diego May 1999
Scheduled for expedited hiring sessions	2,900 (100%)	1,553 (100%)	1,430 (100%)
Took written examination	497 (17%)	235 (15%)	303 (21%)
Passed written examination	143 (5%)	63 (4%)	67 (5%)
Passed interview	136 (5%)	54 (3%)	65 (5%)
Still being processed	81 (3%)	43 (3%)	62 (4%)
Security/medical issues	64 (2%)	38 (2%)	42 (3%)
Accepted final offer	14 (< 1%)	4 (< 1%)	0
Hired <sup>a</sup>	32 (1%)	7 (< 1%)	0

<sup>a</sup> Numbers represent those hired as of July 14, 1999.

Source: GAO analysis of OPM and INS' National Hiring Center data.

### Expenses Applicants Incur

INS believes the expenses that applicants incur during the hiring process serve as a deterrent and, thus, have contributed to the agency's hiring difficulties. According to INS, Border Patrol applicants can spend up to \$1,500 of their own money travelling to the written examination site and the interview site, and reporting for duty. Recruits must get to their duty station at their own expense, and once there, typically incur the cost of several nights at a hotel before going to the Border Patrol Academy.

### Little Flexibility in Assigned Location and Start Date

INS officials believe that INS' lack of flexibility in assigning location and start date may have contributed to some applicants turning down Border Patrol offers in the past. They explained that INS provided newly hired

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agents with little choice in the location to which they were assigned, and provided short notice for new agents to report for duty.

Traditionally, INS offered newly hired Border Patrol agents little choice in their first duty station, in part, because the Border Patrol wanted new agents assigned to stations outside their home state. According to a 1989 INS study,<sup>3</sup> new agents were not assigned to their home state out of concern that those agents might be more susceptible to bribery and corruption. However, neither INS nor the Border Patrol had data to support this conclusion, and the study strongly recommended that the practice be eliminated.

According to a Border Patrol Academy official, as hiring problems developed and filling training classes became a problem, INS began giving newly hired agents relatively little time to report for duty and training. Officials told us they believed that providing short notice might have been a factor in Border Patrol recruits turning down job offers.

The Border Patrol Academy conducted a survey of 10 training classes that took place in fiscal year 1998 and found that new hires received an average of 14 days' notice to report for duty. The average notice time for new hires in one of the 10 classes was 7 days, and 1 agent said he received as little as 1 day's notice. Traditionally, INS had tried to give new hires 30 days' notice to make necessary personal arrangements. Agency officials told us that 30 days' notice seems appropriate, since agents must report for a 19-week training program in either Georgia or South Carolina within the first days of coming on duty, and training is typically followed by relocation.

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## New Recruiting and Hiring Initiatives

In the face of INS' hiring difficulties, the INS Commissioner convened a working group in January 1999 to review INS' recruiting plan and hiring process. The group made changes to both processes and has plans for further short- and long-term changes that it expects will improve INS' ability to recruit and hire Border Patrol agents. The Commissioner has redirected \$2.2 million to implementing these initiatives and is willing to redirect more funds if needed. The \$2.2 million became available after INS cancelled 10 fiscal year 1999 training classes due to insufficient numbers of new hires.

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<sup>3</sup> Why Are We Losing Our Human Resources: A Review of Attrition and Training Problems (U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service), October 1989.

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The following new recruiting initiatives are intended to increase Border Patrol sectors' involvement in the recruiting process and increase the number of people interested in the Border Patrol:

- training over 200 Border Patrol agents as recruiters,
- establishing recruitment coordinators in each sector,
- establishing a toll-free job information line, and
- considering future recruiting bonuses.

Most of the following hiring initiatives are intended to reduce the time of the entire hiring process, from the time the applicant signs up to take the written examination, to the time INS makes the applicant a final job offer:

- conducting written tests sooner,
- scheduling interviews centrally,
- monitoring the scheduling of medical examinations,
- offering "compressed testing" at six locations,
- surveying applicants who did and did not show up for the written test,
- allowing more choice in job locations among the southwest border sectors, and
- allowing more flexibility in start dates.

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## Recruiting Initiatives

The working group developed a series of recruiting initiatives aimed at increasing local outreach and heightening local awareness of the Border Patrol. Even before INS developed these new initiatives, it had significantly increased the number of activities in which its National Recruitment Program was involved during fiscal year 1999.

One of the major new initiatives involves using Border Patrol agents as recruiters. INS contracted with the same firm that trains U.S. Marine Corps recruiters to train Border Patrol agents as recruiters. In June and July 1999, the contractor provided such training to more than 200 Border Patrol agents. INS also established recruitment coordinators for each Border Patrol sector, who have developed local recruiting plans for the Border Patrol recruiters to implement. These local plans include universities, colleges, and community colleges; military bases and facilities; and local events. According to an INS official, these plans involve increased emphasis at the local level, including more recruiting at community colleges.

In May 1999, INS established a toll-free job information line for potential Border Patrol applicants. The information line provides the caller with the following information: how to apply, answers to frequently asked

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questions, duties and qualifications, physical requirements, and an overview of the hiring process. According to an October 1999 INS report, the toll-free line was averaging more than 2,000 calls per week.

As part of its initiatives, INS officials are also considering providing recruiting bonuses. Such a bonus would take the form of a "signing bonus" for newly hired agents.

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## Hiring Initiatives

INS officials have begun implementing a set of hiring initiatives aimed at retaining more applicants through the hiring process so that, in the end, they hire a greater percentage of applicants. Several of the initiatives are focused on reducing the time it takes for an applicant to move through the hiring process because officials believe the length of the process has hurt INS' ability to hire more Border Patrol agents. INS' transfer of Border Patrol hiring functions to its National Hiring Center in Twin Cities, Minnesota, in early fiscal year 1999, has improved monitoring of the hiring process.

The hiring initiatives include a goal to reduce INS' overall standard hiring process—from the point an applicant is scheduled for the written examination through the Telephone Application Processing System to the point an applicant receives a final job offer—by at least 1 to 2 months. Thus, an applicant could move through the hiring process in 4 to 5 months if no issues complicate the applicant's medical examination or background investigation. One focus of INS' initiatives has been to shorten the time from when an applicant is first scheduled for the written examination through the Telephone Application Processing System to the time the applicant takes the examination. INS' National Hiring Center has been tracking OPM's efforts and working with OPM to shorten this step by at least 1 week.

INS also expects to reduce the hiring process by 1 to 4 weeks through the centralized scheduling of applicant interviews. Under the new initiatives, INS' National Hiring Center is working directly with the sectors to schedule interviews, thus eliminating INS administrative centers from the process. The National Hiring Center has begun monitoring the time it takes sectors to schedule interviews and is producing internal reports that identify sectors that are lagging behind.

The National Hiring Center is now also involved in the process of referring applicants to INS medical contractors for the required medical examination. With the center's involvement, and its electronic tracking of this step, officials anticipate they can cut in half—from 90 to 45 days—the



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time between an applicant passing the interview and receiving the medical examination results.

In addition to its standard hiring process, INS is now offering "compressed testing" to reduce the time it takes to hire an agent. INS is conducting compressed testing at six locations, five of which are near the southwest border, that collectively account for more than half of the past Border Patrol applicants. Compressed testing will allow the written examination and interview to take place, independent of each other, at these locations at 2-week intervals. Officials hope that compressed testing will reduce the entire hiring process to 3 to 4 months in cases where no issues complicate the applicant's medical examination or background investigation.

In a further effort to improve hiring, INS has contracted with a firm to conduct telephone surveys of applicants who take the written examination, as well as those who are scheduled to take the written examination, but do not report for testing. The survey of applicants who take the examination will obtain feedback on the initial part of the application process, such as the amount of time that passed between applying to take the written examination and taking the examination. The survey of applicants who do not report for testing will ask for the applicants' reasons for not reporting. Officials hope these efforts will help them improve the hiring process and increase their understanding about why potential recruits seem to lose interest before the hiring process really begins. As of September 1999, the development of the two surveys was well under way.

Hiring initiatives also include allowing recruits a choice of location among the southwest border sectors to which they can be assigned in the hope that more recruits will accept job offers. INS has taken the position that the Border Patrol needs to be more flexible on this matter if hiring is to improve, and it is asking recruits to identify two preferences out of four general geographic locations along the southwest border. Even before the new initiatives, the Border Patrol agreed to begin allowing more flexibility, and this has increased under the new initiatives. Although new agents are not assigned to their home station, they can now be assigned to their home state or home sector.

As previously discussed, INS officials recognize that providing recruits with little notice to report for training may have contributed to job declinations or resignations during basic training. INS officials have the goal of providing recruits with 30 days' notice to report for duty. According to a National Hiring Center official, this goal is not always achieved, but

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**Appendix II**  
**INS' Recruiting Efforts and Hiring Process**

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staff work directly with recruits to arrange as much notice as possible and find a mutually acceptable reporting date.

# Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor

This appendix provides information on how the general composition of the Border Patrol has changed as it has increased in size. As the relative number of agents within each grade level has changed, so too has the average level of experience among agents. The average years of service among agents has declined both agencywide and in the sectors along the southwest border. Also affected by the Border Patrol's rapid growth has been the average number of nonsupervisory agents assigned to each GS-12 supervisory agent.

## Border Patrol Growth Led to Shifts in Grade-Level Composition

Between fiscal years 1994 and 1998, the size of the Border Patrol increased dramatically, causing a considerable shift in agents' average years of experience, both agencywide and along the southwest border. At the start of fiscal year 1999, 92 percent of all Border Patrol agents were assigned to the nine sectors along the southwest border. (See app. IV for a map showing the southwest border sectors.) Table III.1 provides data on how the number and percentage of agents at each grade level in the southwest border sectors changed from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 1998. Almost all of the nine sectors experienced notable increases in the number of agents onboard between these years, with one sector—Tucson—more than tripling the size of its workforce. More significantly, because all new agents are deployed to the southwest border after completing basic training, the relative number of GS-5 and GS-7 agents in these sectors increased dramatically.

**Appendix III**  
**Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor**

**Table III.1: Number and Percentage of Agents by Grade Level in the Southwest Border Sectors**

Southwest border sectors	Grade level of agents					
	GS-5		GS-7		GS-9	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>San Diego</b>						
1994	227	18%	85	7%	640	50%
1998	123	5	371	16	968	43
<b>El Centro</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	103	56
1998	50	13	120	32	76	20
<b>Yuma</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	120	59
1998	29	13	46	21	53	24
<b>Tucson</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	178	64
1998	117	12	190	19	437	43
<b>El Paso</b>						
1994	34	5	28	4	382	60
1998	52	5	164	17	388	40
<b>Marfa</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	70	56
1998	31	20	8	5	50	32
<b>Del Rio</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	167	59
1998	104	18	85	15	179	31
<b>Laredo</b>						
1994	0	0	0	0	206	62
1998	120	19	107	17	173	28
<b>McAllen</b>						
1994	0	0	2	1	256	66
1998	160	15	295	27	336	31

**Appendix III**  
**Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor**

<b>Grade level of agents</b>											
<b>GS-11</b>		<b>GS-12</b>		<b>GS-13</b>		<b>GS-14</b>		<b>GS-15</b>		<b>Total number of agents</b>	
<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>		
158	12%	132	10%	16	1%	12	1%	2	0%	<b>1,272</b>	
530	23	201	9	48	2	14	1	1	0	<b>2,257</b>	
46	25	22	12	7	4	6	3	1	1	<b>185</b>	
77	20	37	10	10	3	7	2	1	0	<b>378</b>	
36	21	22	13	6	3	5	3	1	1	<b>172</b>	
53	24	29	13	6	3	7	3	1	0	<b>224</b>	
54	20	29	11	6	2	7	3	2	1	<b>276</b>	
152	15	80	8	23	2	9	1	2	0	<b>1,010</b>	
119	19	59	9	9	1	8	1	2	0	<b>641</b>	
222	23	98	10	27	3	8	1	2	0	<b>962</b>	
30	24	17	14	3	2	3	2	1	1	<b>124</b>	
38	24	21	13	4	3	5	3	1	1	<b>158</b>	
61	22	35	12	11	4	7	2	2	1	<b>283</b>	
125	22	64	11	14	2	7	1	2	0	<b>580</b>	
73	22	37	11	6	2	8	2	2	1	<b>332</b>	
143	23	59	9	11	2	8	1	2	0	<b>623</b>	
73	19	36	9	8	2	8	2	2	1	<b>385</b>	
187	17	99	9	13	1	8	1	2	0	<b>1,100</b>	

Note: Data do not include Border Patrol pilots. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

## Agents' Average Years of Experience Declined

Agencywide, the percentage of relatively inexperienced Border Patrol agents increased significantly between fiscal year 1994 and fiscal year 1998. As shown in table III.2, the percentage of agents with 2 years or less experience almost tripled agencywide, from 12 percent to 35 percent. In contrast, the percentage of agents with 5 or more years of service declined, from 74 percent of all agents to 40 percent.

**Appendix III**  
**Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor**

**Table III.2: Years of Service of All Border Patrol Agents, FYs 1994 and 1998**

<b>Years of service</b>	<b>FY 1994</b>	<b>FY 1998</b>
1 or less	9%	20%
More than 1; up to 2	3	15
More than 2; up to 3	10	14
More than 3; up to 4	3	8
More than 4; up to 5	2	3
More than 5; up to 8	26	7
More than 8; up to 10	17	3
10 or more	31	30
<b>Number of agents</b>	<b>4,226</b>	<b>7,904</b>

Note: All data are as of the end of the designated fiscal year. Data do not include Border Patrol pilots. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

Table III.3 shows changes in the level of experience of agents assigned to the southwest border. For example, between fiscal year 1994 and fiscal year 1998, the percentage of agents with 3 years of service or less more than doubled, from 26 percent to 54 percent. In contrast, the percentage of agents with 5 or more years of experience declined, from 70 percent in fiscal year 1994 to 36 percent in fiscal year 1998.

**Table III.3: Years of Service of Border Patrol Agents on the Southwest Border, FYs 1994 and 1998**

<b>Years of service</b>	<b>FY 1994</b>	<b>FY 1998</b>
1 or less	10%	22%
More than 1; up to 2	4	17
More than 2; up to 3	12	15
More than 3; up to 4	3	9
More than 4; up to 5	2	3
More than 5; up to 8	28	7
More than 8; up to 10	17	3
10 or more	25	26
<b>Number of agents</b>	<b>3,670</b>	<b>7,292</b>

Note: All data are as of the end of the designated fiscal year. Data do not include Border Patrol pilots. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

As table III.4 demonstrates, between fiscal year 1994 and fiscal year 1998, all nine of the southwest border sectors saw increases in the percentage of relatively inexperienced agents, with some sectors experiencing dramatic increases. For example, in fiscal year 1994, 2 percent of the agents at the El Centro sector had 2 years of experience or less but, by fiscal year 1998, 59 percent of the agents had 2 years of experience or less. The McAllen sector also experienced dramatic increases—only 1 percent of its agents in fiscal year 1994 had 2 years of experience or less but, by fiscal year 1998, 54 percent of its agents had 2 years of experience or less. The percentage of

**Appendix III**  
**Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor**

agents in the Tucson sector with 3 years of experience or less increased from 18 percent in fiscal year 1994 to 64 percent by fiscal year 1998.

**Table III.4: Years of Service of Border Patrol Agents in Southwest Border Sectors, FYs 1994 and 1998**

Southwest border sectors	Years of service								Number of agents
	1 or less	More than 1; up to 2	More than 2; up to 3	More than 3; up to 4	More than 4; up to 5	More than 5; up to 8	More than 8; up to 10	More than 10	
<b>San Diego</b>									
1994	24%	5%	14%	6%	5%	19%	13%	15%	<b>1,272</b>
1998	12	18	25	8	8	8	4	18	<b>2,257</b>
<b>El Centro</b>									
1994	0	2	4	0	0	34	33	27	<b>185</b>
1998	39	20	4	6	2	2	1	25	<b>378</b>
<b>Yuma</b>									
1994	0	1	4	1	0	40	26	28	<b>172</b>
1998	31	12	2	5	1	3	1	45	<b>224</b>
<b>Tucson</b>									
1994	0	2	16	1	0	32	17	33	<b>276</b>
1998	20	18	26	8	1	5	1	21	<b>1,010</b>
<b>El Paso</b>									
1994	10	5	9	4	0	25	18	29	<b>641</b>
1998	15	14	14	12	3	7	3	33	<b>962</b>
<b>Marfa</b>									
1994	0	4	8	0	0	34	15	40	<b>124</b>
1998	24	13	6	8	0	7	2	40	<b>158</b>
<b>Del Rio</b>									
1994	0	0	0	0	0	40	25	35	<b>283</b>
1998	26	13	3	16	1	2	2	36	<b>580</b>
<b>Laredo</b>									
1994	0	4	14	0	0	38	17	27	<b>332</b>
1998	33	12	4	11	0	9	3	29	<b>623</b>
<b>McAllen</b>									
1994	0	1	22	3	0	29	16	28	<b>385</b>
1998	34	20	4	5	0	9	2	26	<b>1,100</b>

Note: Data do not include Border Patrol pilots. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.

## Average Number of Agents Per Supervisor Increased

As a result of the increased hiring of Border Patrol agents, the ratio of nonsupervisory agents (GS-5 through GS-11) to one GS-12 supervisory agent increased across the Border Patrol—from 7 to 1 in fiscal year 1994 to 8 to 1 in fiscal year 1998. The ratio of nonsupervisory agents assigned to one supervisory agent also increased among the southwest border sectors, from 8 to 1 to 9.2 to 1. Almost all of the nine southwest border sectors saw the span of supervision increase. As table III.5 illustrates, this increase varied among the sectors. At one extreme, in the Tucson sector, the ratio

**Appendix III**  
**Changes in Agents' Years of Experience and Ratio of Agents to Supervisor**

of nonsupervisory agents to one supervisory agent increased from 8 to 1 to 11.2 to 1. In contrast, in the El Paso sector, the ratio of nonsupervisory agents to one supervisory agent decreased between these years, from 9.5 to 1 to 8.4 to 1.

**Table III.5: Ratios of Nonsupervisory Agents (GS-5 to GS-11) to a Supervisory Agent (GS-12), FYs 1994 and 1998**

	<b>FY 1994</b>	<b>FY 1998</b>
All Border Patrol	7.0 : 1	8.0 : 1
Southwest Border	8.0 : 1	9.2 : 1
<b>Southwest Border Sectors</b>		
San Diego	8.4 : 1	9.9 : 1
El Centro	6.8 : 1	8.7 : 1
Yuma	6.3 : 1	6.2 : 1
Tucson	8.0 : 1	11.2 : 1
El Paso	9.5 : 1	8.4 : 1
Marfa	5.9 : 1	6.0 : 1
Del Rio	6.5 : 1	7.7 : 1
Laredo	7.5 : 1	9.2 : 1
McAllen	9.2 : 1	9.9 : 1

Note: Data do not include Border Patrol pilots.

Source: GAO analysis of INS data.



# Map of Border Patrol Sectors Along the Southwest Border

Figure IV.1: Southwest Border Patrol Sectors



Source: U.S. Border Patrol.

# Border Patrol Academy's Basic Training Capacity

## Overview of Border Patrol Academy Basic Training

New Border Patrol agents are sent to the Border Patrol Academy for a 19-week basic training program within days of reporting for duty at their assigned sectors. The basic training program covers six subject areas: (1) Spanish, (2) law, (3) operations, (4) physical training, (5) firearms, and (6) driver training, and agents must pass all subjects to graduate. As shown in table V.1, the number of agents who received basic training has grown substantially since fiscal year 1994.

**Table V.1: Border Patrol Agents Receiving Basic Training, FYs 1994 Through 1999**

Fiscal year	Began training	Resigned or terminated	COP <sup>a</sup>	Did not graduate (number)	(percent)	Graduated (number)	(percent)
1994	461	52	25	77	17%	384	83%
1995	1,005	103	27	130	13	875	87
1996	1,474	171	47	218	15	1,256	85
1997	1,654	226	33	259	16	1,395	84
1998	1,901	313	56	369	19	1,532	81
1999 <sup>b</sup>	587	106	13	119	20	468	80

<sup>a</sup>Continuation of Pay (COP) represents trainees who have been recycled to another Academy session due to a compensable injury incurred during training. No separation action was initiated and they should return to a later Academy session.

<sup>b</sup>Fiscal year 1999 data reflect only classes that had graduated as of September 30, 1999.

Source: INS and Border Patrol Academy.

Table V.I also shows the number and percentage of agents who did not graduate each year. Agents who do not graduate are those who (1) fail to receive a passing grade of 70 percent in any subject area and are, thus, terminated; (2) are injured during training and receive COP; or (3) resign.

The Academy has developed a training projection for fiscal years 2001 through 2005 for planning purposes. Table V.2 highlights the Academy's 5-year training projection, which calls for a gradually increasing number of new agents each fiscal year.

**Table V.2: Border Patrol Basic Training 5-Year Projection, FYs 2001 Through 2005**

Fiscal year	Trainees
2001	2,300
2002	2,417
2003	2,534
2004	2,651
2005	2,768

Source: Border Patrol Academy.

## Academy Instructors

The Academy relies on both permanent and detailed instructors to provide basic training. Detailed instructors are Border Patrol agents—GS-9 or

**Appendix V**  
**Border Patrol Academy's Basic Training Capacity**

above—who are recruited from the field to work as instructors on a temporary basis—usually for 1 or 2 of the 19-week sessions. Table V.3 shows the number of Border Patrol instructors assigned to the Academy for fiscal years 1994 through 1998.

**Table V.3: Number of Border Patrol Instructors, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

	FY1994	FY1995	FY1996	FY1997	FY1998
Permanent instructors	33	40	63	82	80
Glynco, Georgia	33	40	41	31	32
Charleston, South Carolina	N/A <sup>a</sup>	N/A <sup>a</sup>	22	51	48
Detailed instructors <sup>b</sup>	42	183	159	225	267
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>347</b>

<sup>a</sup>Not applicable. Border Patrol training did not begin at the Charleston facility until fiscal year 1996.

<sup>b</sup>Numbers only include detailed instructors who taught Spanish, law, and operations. The Border Patrol Academy could not provide the number of detailed instructors who taught driver training, firearms training, or physical training classes.

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol Academy data.

As the number of trainees has increased, the Academy has increasingly relied on detailed instructors. In fiscal year 1995, the Academy more than quadrupled the number of detailed instructors onboard. In fiscal year 1998, more than 75 percent of instructors who taught at the Academy were detailed from the field. Because the Academy could not provide us with data on all its detailed instructors, these percentages actually underrepresent the Academy's reliance on detailed instructors.

## Basic Training Grades

Trainees' overall grade averages have remained relatively constant since fiscal year 1994, as shown in table V.4, despite the large influx of trainees and detailed instructors.

**Table V.4: Border Patrol Basic Training Final Grade Averages, FYs 1994 Through 1998**

	FY 1994 <sup>a</sup> (percent)	FY 1995 <sup>b</sup> (percent)	FY 1996 (percent)	FY 1997 (percent)	FY 1998 (percent)
Overall final grade average <sup>c</sup>	87.6	86.5	86.6	86.5	86.2
Law grade average	85.1	83.7	83.0	83.6	84.0
Spanish grade average	89.3	88.3	88.8	88.1	87.8

<sup>a</sup>Data were not available for 1 of the 10 sessions conducted in fiscal year 1994.

<sup>b</sup>Data were not available for 2 of the 20 sessions conducted in fiscal year 1995.

<sup>c</sup>Includes grades for all six Academy subjects: physical training, firearms training, driver training, operations, law, and Spanish.

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol Academy data.

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## Charleston Facility As a Temporary Training Site

In fiscal year 1996, INS expanded its existing Border Patrol training capacity by opening a temporary, satellite training facility at a former naval station in Charleston, South Carolina. To make the facility suitable for training, INS spent more than \$5 million constructing new firing and driving ranges and reconfiguring existing structures into classrooms and dormitories, as well as a fitness center. In fiscal years 1998 and 1999, INS received about \$16 million for additional facility renovations, including the consolidation of management, instructor, and administrative offices into a single building, and the development of an "after-hours" study facility and an athletic center.

INS and FLETC officials have different views on how long the Charleston facility will need to remain open to provide training. When INS began using the facility in fiscal year 1996, it anticipated closing the Charleston facility once FLETC had the capacity to accommodate all of INS' training needs. At that time, both FLETC and INS expected the facility to operate for about 3 years. However, in April 1999, FLETC indicated that it would not be ready to assume the Charleston facility's training load until fiscal year 2001. In October 1999, a FLETC official told us that FLETC had readjusted its April 1999 estimate to the end of fiscal year 2004, or earlier if Border Patrol hiring is less than expected or if funds are appropriated sooner. He explained that the agency's estimate is based on its ability to reabsorb all Border Patrol training currently held at the Charleston facility. In October 1999, an INS official told us that INS expected the Charleston facility could be closed sometime between fiscal years 2004 and 2006. INS' estimate is premised on FLETC's ability to accommodate all of INS' training needs, which are dependent on INS' future hiring requirements and its ability to meet those requirements.

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