

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

DIVERSITY WITHIN  
THE  
U.S. AIR FORCE SENIOR LEADERSHIP

*by*

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## *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
<b>DISCLAIMER.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLES.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>WHAT IS DIVERSITY AND IS IT IMPORTANT? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
DEVELOPING A BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY .....	4
THE U.S. AIR FORCE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY .....	6
<b>MEASURING DIVERSITY WITHIN THE U.S. AIR FORCE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
COMPARING THE U.S. LABOR FORCE AND THE U.S. AIR FORCE OFFICER CORPS .....	9
WHY A LACK OF DIVERSITY IN THE OFFICER CORPS?.....	11
DIVERSITY AND THE GENERAL OFFICER CORPS.....	16
<b>MANAGING DIVERSITY .....</b>	<b>21</b>
THE AIR FORCE’S DIVERSITY PROGRAM .....	22
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>23</b>

## ***Illustrations***

	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1. U.S. Air Force vs. U.S. Labor Force Demographics .....	11
Figure 2. U.S. Air Force Officers by Gender and Rank, 2009 .....	12
Figure 3. U.S. Air Force Officers by Race and Rank, 2009 .....	12
Figure 4. U.S. Air Force Officers by Ethnicity and Rank, 2009.....	13
Figure 5. Below the Promotion Zone Rates (2003-2009).....	17
Figure 6. In-Residence SDE Rates (Cols and Col Selects).....	18
Figure 7. Wing Commander Experience (Cols) .....	19
Figure 8. Percent Pilots .....	20

## ***Tables***

	<i>Page</i>
Table 1. U.S. Air Force Officer Demographics by Rank, 2009.....	13
Table 2. U.S. Air Force Officer Retention Rates (1994-2000).....	14
Table 3. U.S. Air Force Officer Promotion Rates (2003-2009).....	14
Table 4. U.S. Air Force Officer Demographics by Rank, 1994 vs. 2009 .....	15

## Introduction

The United States Air Force is committed to equal opportunity and diversity within its ranks. According to the Secretary of the Air Force, “The strength of the Air Force comes from our people – and in large measure from our diversity.”<sup>1</sup> The Air Force Chief of Staff expressed his belief that Air Force capabilities and warfighting skills are enhanced by diversity among its airmen; that diversity provides the Air Force a source of strength, capabilities and perspectives; and that each airman should be enabled to succeed and reach their full potential.<sup>2</sup> With such a strong endorsement for the value of diversity from the Air Force’s topmost leadership, one would expect the diversity of the officer corps, and more importantly, the general officer corps to be comparable to that of the American labor force with a similar educational background. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Both females and minorities are under-represented in the officer corps and its most senior ranks.

This paper will explore the issue of female and minority under-representation within the senior ranks of the Air Force. The costs and benefits of diversity will be examined and the business case for diversity will be explored. Next, the demographics of the U.S. labor force and the Air Force officer corps will be compared focusing on gender, race, and ethnicity. The diversity of the officer corps will then be compared to the diversity of the general officer corps. In order to investigate differences between the two, several factors that influence the selection of Air Force general officers will be examined. Finally, the results and insights will be summarized and the process of managing diversity will be presented.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael B. Donley, Secretary of the Air Force. Letter to Airmen, 17 February 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Air Force Strategic Diversity Office. *Diversity and Equal Opportunity in Our Air Force*. AFTV Video. 9 min., March 2009.

## What is diversity and is it important?

When considering human diversity, the primary dimensions of diversity are: age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, race, and sexual orientation. These attributes reflect unchangeable human differences that are either inborn or developed in our early socialization. Secondary dimensions of diversity are those attributes that can be changed such as: educational background, marital status, religious beliefs, and work experience.<sup>3</sup> Human diversity can therefore be described as a combination of characteristics shaped by cultural backgrounds and life experiences.

Workforce diversity within an organization is typically associated with policies and practices designed to recruit, retain, and develop employees from diverse social groups. Organizations adopt these policies and practices for three types of reasons: ethical (it is considered the right thing to do), regulatory (complying with anti-discrimination laws), and economic (generating economic benefits that exceed implementation costs).<sup>4</sup> Although it is possible an organization may pursue diversity for purely ethical or regulatory reasons, most organizations will at least consider the benefits and costs when deciding whether to implement diversity policies.

Diversity within an organization has the potential to deliver numerous benefits. The most important benefits arise from strengthening organizational, human, and knowledge capital and are summarized as follows:

- The full utilization of the organization's human capital.
- Reduced interpersonal conflict as respect for diversity increases.

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<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Loden and Judy B. Rosener, *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Homewood, IL: Business One Irwin, 1991), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Service, *The Costs and Benefits of Diversity: A Study on Methods and Indicators to Measure the Cost-Effectiveness of Diversity Policies in Enterprises Executive Summary*, European Commission Report (Kent, United Kingdom: Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Service), 9.

- Enhanced work relationships based on mutual respect and increased employee knowledge of multicultural issues.
- A shared organizational vision and increased commitment among diverse employees at all organizational levels and across all functions.
- Greater innovation and flexibility as minorities participate more fully in key decision-making and problem-solving groups.
- Improved productivity as more employee effort is directed at accomplishing tasks and less energy is spent managing interpersonal conflicts and culture clash.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the benefits received from having a diverse workforce, an organization also experiences specific benefits associated with diverse leadership. For example, diverse leadership is more likely to attract and retain a diverse workforce. Also, strategic innovation is the result of diverse voices at the strategic leadership level as it is the leaders who shape organizational decision making. Finally, diverse leadership provides role models for the entire workforce.

There are also disadvantages associated with a lack of diversity. Organizations may experience high turnover as employees from among the minority leave in search of a more supportive work environment. This may be compounded by a growing inability to recruit the most talented new workers as the organization's divisive image and reputation precede it. Lastly, the workforce may experience low morale due to persistent culture clash and on-going conflicts between the mainstream employees and the minority.<sup>6</sup>

The benefits of diversity are not guaranteed. Empirical research conducted by Anne S. Tsui and Barbara A. Gutek documented that various types of diversity can be a liability and negatively effect individuals and relationships between individuals. They noted that demographic diversity is often associated with less interpersonal communication, poorer social relations, lower psychological commitment to the organization, and higher turnovers. Tsui and

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<sup>5</sup> Loden and Rosener, *Workforce America*, 220.

<sup>6</sup> Loden and Rosener, *Workforce America*, 220.



Guttek concluded that “diversity is a liability until and unless processes are in place to manage the negative dynamic and to release diversity’s hidden potential.”<sup>7</sup>

There are, of course, costs associated with the implementation of diversity policies. These include the cash costs of implementing the programs to change internal cultures such that a diverse workforce is recruited, retained, and developed. The main cash costs include: specialist staff, education and training, facilities and support, communication of new policies, and monitoring and reporting processes. Cash costs can be one-time or short-term costs, but most are long-term, recurring expenses. In addition to cash costs, there are also opportunity costs resulting from the diversion of management and employee time, and execution risks since many programs associated with major organizational change take longer than anticipated or ultimately fail.<sup>8</sup>

### **Developing a Business Case for Diversity**

When developing a business case for a policy, one typically measures the costs and benefits and then makes an assessment of whether the benefits outweigh the costs. With respect to diversity policies, one can measure the cash costs and estimate the opportunity costs fairly readily. Within the Air Force, costs include those incurred by the Air Force Equal Opportunity Office, the Strategic Diversity Integration Office, and their associated education and training programs. These costs are somewhat mitigated by the fact that the Air Force has robust education and training processes, communication systems, and monitoring and reporting processes.

The measurement of diversity’s benefits is much more difficult as most are intangible. According to Laura Liswood, senior adviser to Goldman Sachs on diversity issues and a senior

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<sup>7</sup> Anne S. Tsui and Barbara A. Guttek. *Demographic Differences in Organizations: Current Research and Future Directions* (New York: Lexington Books, 1999), 113, 143.

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Service, *The Costs and Benefits of Diversity*, 10.

scholar at the University of Maryland's Academy of Leadership, "There is a connection between diversity and financial success, but typical profit-and-loss systems don't capture the benefits that diversity creates."<sup>9</sup> Thomas A. Kochan, a professor of management at MIT's Sloan School of Management, contends that in order to gather the needed data and analysis, "human resources executives must run experiments within their organizations. They must invest in efforts to train departments in group processes, and then follow their performance over time, comparing the performance of groups that have been trained with that of groups that have not, using hard performance measurements based on the goals of the unit."<sup>10</sup> Conducting such experiments is difficult and time consuming, so organizations tend to look for other types of evidence to support the benefits of diversity.

Organizations typically rely on several types of evidence when building a business case for diversity: testimonials, case studies, and surveys of companies.<sup>11</sup> For example, macro level research indicates that organizations with diversity management policies have benefited in terms of workforce productivity and overall profitability. A survey conducted in 1995 of over 1,000 organizations found that such practices contributed to increased firm performance through lower turnover and higher productivity.<sup>12</sup> In another study conducted in 1995 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission analyzed the Standard and Poors 500 companies. They found that the top fifth of the companies, in terms of regulatory nondiscrimination compliance, enjoyed an average stock return of 18.3%. On the other hand, companies in the lower fifth experienced an average stock return of only 7.9%. The study also found that, "The 20% of organizations rated highest for hiring women and people of color outperformed the stock market by 2.4 percentage

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<sup>9</sup> Fay Hansen, "Diversity's Business Case Doesn't Add Up," *Workforce* (April 2003): <http://www.workforce.com/section/11/feature/23/42/49/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> Hansen, "Diversity's Business Case Doesn't Add Up"

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Service, *The Costs and Benefits of Diversity*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline A. Gilbert and Bette Ann Stead, "Stigmatization Revisited: Does Diversity Management Make a Difference in Applicant Success?" *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 1999): 241.

points from 1988 through 1992, whereas the worst 20% trailed by eight points.”<sup>13</sup> Although these studies do not provide hard evidence of a causal link between diversity policies and increased organizational performance, they do lend support to the business case for diversity.

### **The U.S. Air Force Business Case for Diversity**

The business case for diversity within the United States Air Force tends to rely on the experience and observation of military leaders and the fact that it is considered the right thing to do. Support for this argument can be found in the 2003 Supreme Court case *Grutter v. Bollinger* in which the Supreme Court upheld the affirmative action admissions policy of the University of Michigan Law School. Numerous former high-ranking officers and civilian leaders of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, including former military-academy superintendents, Secretaries of Defense, and present and former members of the U.S. Senate, filed an *amicus curiae* brief supporting limited consideration of race in certain contexts. They wrote: “Based on decades of experience, *amici* have concluded that a highly qualified, racially diverse officer corps educated and trained to command our nation’s racially diverse enlisted ranks is essential to the military’s ability to fulfill its principal mission to provide national security.”<sup>14</sup>

Additional support is provided by a 2008 RAND Corporation study on diversity within the Department of Defense (DoD). Although the study found empirical evidence that both supported and disparaged diversity, it nevertheless recommended that the DoD and the services incorporate diversity as part of the DoD mission. The study also documented discussions from the 2007 DoD Diversity Summit. Summit participants declared that the senior DoD workforce

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert and Stead, “Stigmatization Revisited,” 242.

<sup>14</sup> Consolidated Brief of Lt. Gen. Julius W. Becton, Jr. et al. as *Amici Curiae* in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, United States Supreme Court, 2003, 5.

should better reflect the populace the military is intended to serve, and that diversity is both a mission and business imperative.<sup>15</sup>

While the envisioned benefits of diversity are considered mission critical, Air Force senior leadership appears to consider the costs to be relatively low. As previously mentioned, the cash costs are mitigated by well established education, training, measurement, and reporting processes. The opportunity costs, while more difficult to measure, are considered minor increments to existing training and managerial duties. It is not surprising then that Air Force leadership is committed to equal opportunity and diversity within its ranks. According to the Air Force Chief of Staff, “Commitment to diversity and equal opportunity are mission critical to the Air Force.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, per DoD Directive 1020.02, dated 5 February 2009, it is DoD policy that “The Department of Defense must maximize the productive capacity represented in the diversity of those recruited, hired, developed, and promoted.”

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson Lim, Michelle Cho, and Kimberly Curry. *Planning for Diversity: Options and Recommendations for DoD Leaders*. RAND Corporation Report (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 63.

<sup>16</sup> Air Force Strategic Diversity Office. *Diversity and Equal Opportunity in Our Air Force*. AFTV Video. 9 min., March 2009.

## **Measuring Diversity within the U.S. Air Force**

Ideally the success of a diversity policy would be judged by measuring whether or not the benefits of diversity exceed the costs. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the benefits of diversity are not easily measured. It is therefore common practice to establish the goal of a diversity policy as the alteration of the mix of people employed, retained, and subsequently promoted in order to ensure a diverse workforce. While a diverse workforce is difficult to define in practice, one commonly accepted definition is that a diverse workforce mirrors the population from which it draws. This is consistent with the notion that a military which reflects the population it is intended to serve is more likely to garner public support for its mission. Ultimately, most diversity policies are judged by measuring their intermediate outcomes—workforce demographics.

The level of diversity within the Air Force could be measured by analyzing the diversity of the entire total force or any number of its sub-populations. Since the success of many policies and programs depends on the support and direction of leadership, this paper will focus on the diversity of the Air Force's leadership, namely the officer corps (O-6 and below) and the general officer corps. Because the officer corps is a profession with specific entry requirements, it demands a benchmark comparison group with similar entry requirements. A subset of the U.S. labor force provides an appropriate comparison group. The U.S. labor force consists of all persons 16 years and older residing in the United States who are not inmates of institutions and are not on active duty in the Armed Forces. The officer corps will therefore be compared to the subset of the U.S. labor force who are 25 years and older, and possess at least a bachelors degree. The demographics of the Air Force's most senior leadership, the general officer corps, will then be compared to the officer corps and the labor force. Due to the additional entry requirements of

the Air Force medical, chaplain, and lawyer career fields, this analysis will encompass only the Line of the Air Force (LAF), which excludes these specialized career fields.

When evaluating the diversity of a population one must determine which dimensions of diversity to consider. This paper will focus on the primary dimensions of race, ethnicity, and gender. Previous research recognized that these bases of diversity are extremely important in understanding human transactions and are among the most powerful origins of unfair treatment. They are also powerful differences from the point of view of the individual's psychology.<sup>17</sup> Finally, they represent the sources of major change within the military's personnel composition and organizational structure: due to racial desegregation in the 1940s and 1950s, the influx of women in the 1970s following the founding of the All Volunteer Force, and with the opening of combat aviation to women in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup>

### **Comparing the U.S. Labor Force and the U.S. Air Force Officer Corps**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the subset of the U.S. labor force that is at least 25 years old and possesses a bachelor's degree or higher consists of 52.3% men and 47.7% women. The racial breakdown is 82.3% white, 7.9% black, and 8.3% Asian.<sup>19</sup> Hispanic ethnicity refers to persons who identified themselves as being Spanish, Hispanic or Latino and may be of any race. Approximately 6.3% of the labor force (who are at least 25 years old and possess a bachelor's degree or higher) is of Hispanic ethnicity.<sup>20</sup> If the Air Force officer corps is to mirror the population from which it draws, one would expect it to possess a similar demographic profile to this benchmark.

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Herriot and Carole Pemberton, *Competitive Advantage Through Diversity: Organizational Learning from Difference* (London: SAFE Publications Ltd., 1995), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Judith Reppy, eds., *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discrimination in Military Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 19.

<sup>19</sup> The percentages for the racial groups do not sum to 100% because data are not presented for all races.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2008*. Report 1020. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, November 2009), 8-10.

The Air Force officer corps is dominated by white males. While the labor force was divided almost evenly between men and women, the officer corps is 86.8% male and 13.2% female.<sup>21</sup> In order to fully appreciate the difference between the officer corps and the labor force, consider that the number of male officers would have to be reduced 40%, and the number of female officers would have to be increased a whopping 361%, in order to mirror the labor force. The differences with respect to race and ethnicity are not as drastic, but they are still present. The officer corps is 84.0% white, 5.5% black, and 2.9% Asian compared to 82.3% white, 7.9% black and 8.3% Asian for the labor force. Approximately 5.3% of the officers are of Hispanic ethnicity whereas 6.3% of the labor force is of Hispanic origin.<sup>22</sup> If the goal of the Air Force's diversity program is to mirror the U.S. population then clearly females and minorities are under-represented in the officer corps.

The lack of diversity within the Air Force leadership is even more dramatic at the most senior levels. Of the 303 general officers on active duty in September 2009, only 26 were women for an 8.6% rate.<sup>23</sup> Comparing this percentage to that of the officer corps, 18.5%, and the labor force, 47.7%, reveals the dominance of the male population within Air Force senior leadership. Racial and ethnic diversity also shrinks at the senior ranks. Only 14 general officers are black, 2 are Asian, and 5 are Hispanic.<sup>24</sup> The corresponding percentages are all below that of the officer corps and the labor force. In summary, it becomes obvious when one considers the demographic data of the labor force, officer corps, and general officers (Figure 1), that females and minorities are under-represented within the officer corps and especially within the senior ranks. The obvious follow-on question is why?

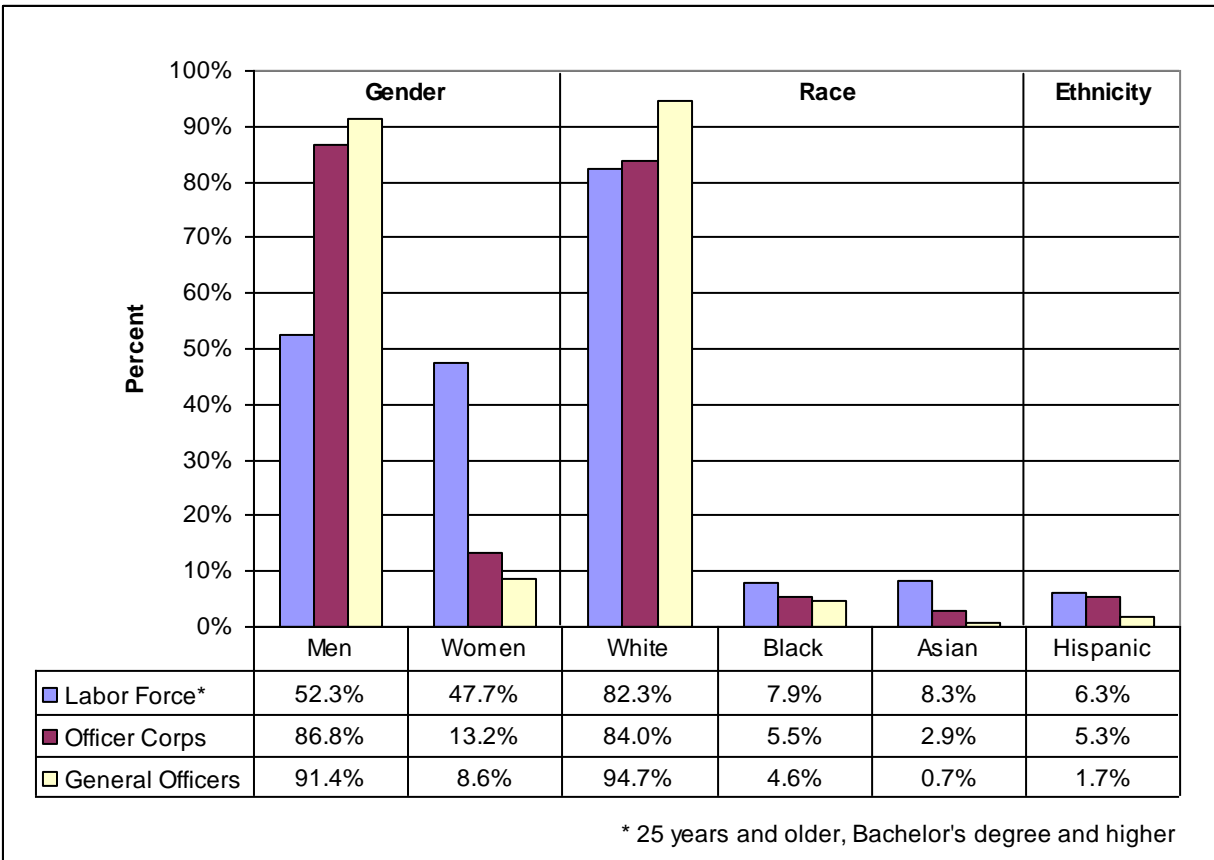
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<sup>21</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, Retrieval Applications Website, "Officers by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity." Data as of 7 Aug 09.

<sup>22</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, Retrieval Applications Website, "Officers by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity." Data as of 7 Aug 09

<sup>23</sup> Air Force Military Personnel Data System, *Officer Extract*, 30 September 2009

<sup>24</sup> Air Force Military Personnel Data System, *Officer Extract*, 30 September 2009



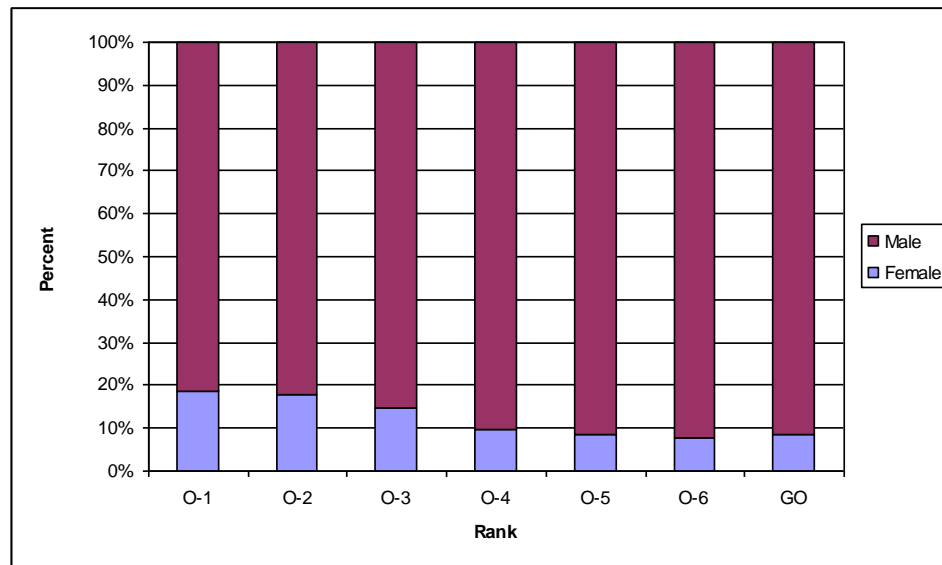
**Figure 1. U.S. Air Force vs. U.S. Labor Force Demographics**

### Why a Lack of Diversity in the Officer Corps?

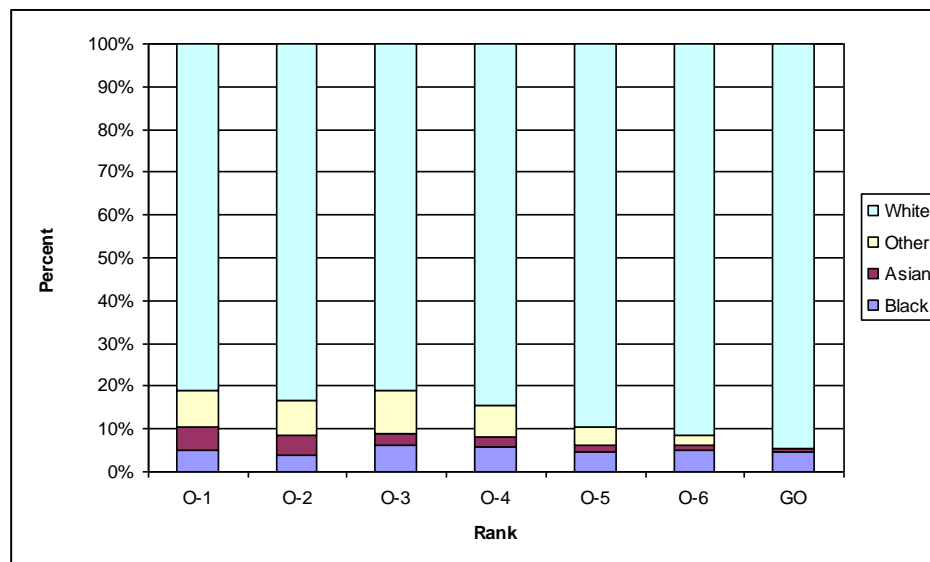
In order to gain insight into the lack of diversity of the officer corps one must analyze the demographic data by rank. Figures 2 through 4 illustrate the diversity of the officer corps and general officers by gender, race, and ethnicity. Focusing on the second lieutenant (O-1) data, one can see that the difference in gender and racial diversity between the labor force and the officer corps is primarily attributable to recruiting and accessions. The ratio of females to males entering the Air Force as second lieutenants, 18.6%, is well below that of the labor force's 47.7%. Likewise, the percentages of black and Asian second lieutenants, both 5.2%, are below the percentages of black and Asian members of the labor force, 7.9% and 8.3% respectively.



Interestingly, the percentage of Hispanics entering the Air Force as second lieutenants, 5.9%, is close to that of the labor force, 6.3%.<sup>25</sup> Unless the Air Force increases the number of female, black, and Asian accessions it will never mirror the diversity of the labor force.

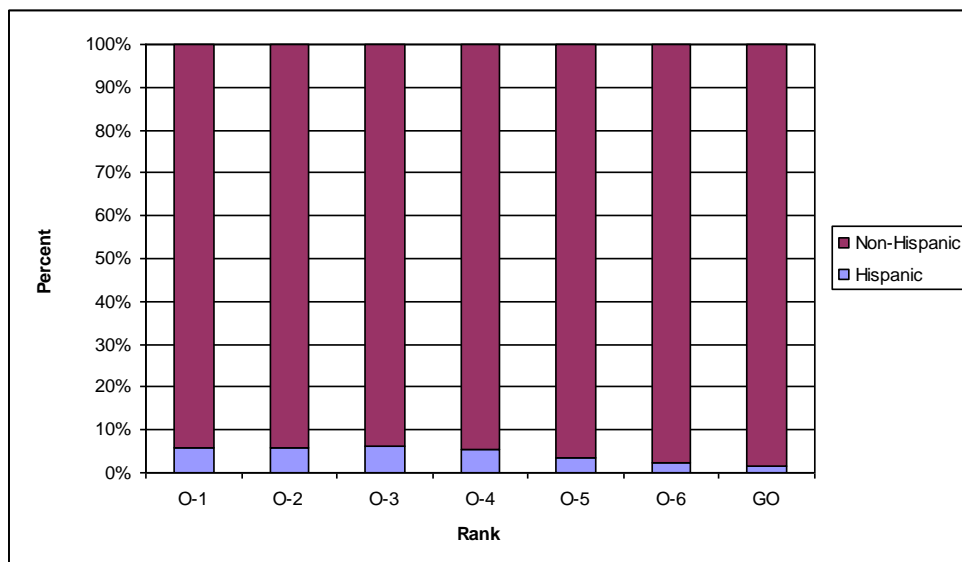


**Figure 2. U.S. Air Force Officers by Gender and Rank, 2009**



**Figure 3. U.S. Air Force Officers by Race and Rank, 2009**

<sup>25</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, Retrieval Applications Website, "Officers by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity." Data as of 7 Aug 09



**Figure 4. U.S. Air Force Officers by Ethnicity and Rank, 2009**

The demographic data by rank also illustrates that the diversity of the Air Force leadership decreases as one moves up the ranks. In general, Table 1 shows that the diversity of the force decreases with each rank increase. A number of factors could contribute to this trend: retention rates, promotion rates, and the initial diversity of each grade group when it entered the Air Force as second lieutenants. For example, the percentage of female colonels today will be lower than the percentage of female second lieutenants today, if females were promoted at a lower rate, left the service at a higher rate, or the colonels were less diverse to begin with as second lieutenants.

**Table 1. U.S. Air Force Officer Demographics by Rank, 2009**

	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
O-1	81.4%	18.6%	81.2%	5.2%	5.2%	5.9%
O-2	82.0%	18.0%	83.2%	3.9%	4.5%	5.8%
O-3	85.4%	14.6%	81.2%	6.2%	2.8%	6.1%
O-4	90.1%	9.9%	84.6%	6.0%	2.2%	5.3%
O-5	91.7%	8.3%	89.5%	4.7%	1.5%	3.6%
O-6	92.3%	7.7%	91.6%	5.2%	1.2%	2.5%
GO	91.4%	8.6%	94.7%	4.6%	0.7%	1.7%

The average officer retention rates for the seven-year period from 1994 to 2000 are presented in Table 2.<sup>26</sup> The data illustrates that gender, race, and ethnicity do not significantly impact the rate at which officers attrit. Retention can therefore be eliminated as a source of the decreasing diversity at the senior ranks. It is worth mentioning that one of the disadvantages associated with a lack of diversity is the inability to retain minority employees. While the Air Force Officer Corps is not as diverse as the labor force, the retention rates imply that minorities are not so disenfranchised as to depart in search of a more supportive work environment.

**Table 2. U.S. Air Force Officer Retention Rates (1994-2000)**

Overall	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	Hispanic
90.5%	90.5%	89.6%	90.4%	90.8%	91.6%	90.2%

A review of the historical in-the-zone promotion rates displayed in Table 3 leads to several interesting conclusions.<sup>27</sup> Notice that female promotion rates exceed the board average for promotion to O-5 and O-6, and are within 1% of the board average for promotion to O-4. It is therefore likely that promotion rates are not a contributing factor to the declining female representation at the more senior ranks. The same is not true with respect to the racial and ethnic promotion rates. In every instance the promotion rates for blacks, Asians, and Hispanics trail the board average. One can conclude that reduced promotion rates for blacks, Asians, and Hispanic contribute to their reduced representation at the more senior ranks.

**Table 3. U.S. Air Force Officer Promotion Rates (2003-2009)**

	Board Avg	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
O-4	93.3%	93.4%	92.5%	94.0%	88.0%	88.2%	91.2%
O-5	73.8%	73.6%	76.6%	74.7%	67.6%	69.4%	69.3%
O-6	45.1%	45.0%	46.5%	45.6%	42.6%	41.0%	37.7%

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*. (Washington DC: Secretary of Defense, 2001), F-16.

<sup>27</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, "Active Duty Officer Promotions Line of the Air Force," <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/reportsearch.asp> (Accessed 22 Sep 09).

The final potential factor for the shrinking diversity as one moves up the Air Force ranks is the initial diversity of each grade group. In other words, if the Air Force officer corps was less diverse in the past, the more senior grades would naturally be less diverse today. Table 4 compares the Air Force officer demographics by rank from 1994 and 2009.<sup>28</sup> With the exception of the black racial group, the officer corps was less diverse in 1994 than it is today. This insight supports the conclusion that the declining diversity at the higher ranks is at least partially due to the fact that the Air Force was less diverse in the past.

***Table 4. U.S. Air Force Officer Demographics by Rank, 1994 vs. 2009***

	Female		Black		Asian		Hispanic	
	FY94	FY09	FY94	FY09	FY94	FY09	FY94	FY09
O-1	14.1%	18.6%	5.9%	5.2%	0.2%	5.2%	1.2%	5.9%
O-2	13.2%	18.0%	4.9%	3.9%	0.2%	4.5%	1.7%	5.8%
O-3	10.0%	14.6%	5.3%	6.2%	0.0%	2.8%	0.8%	6.1%
O-4	11.2%	9.9%	8.2%	6.0%	0.0%	2.2%	2.8%	5.3%
O-5	5.8%	8.3%	5.0%	4.7%	0.0%	1.5%	2.1%	3.6%
O-6	2.0%	7.7%	2.0%	5.2%	0.0%	1.2%	0.9%	2.5%

In summary, the Air Force does not access enough females, blacks, and Asians to mirror the U.S. labor force. Next, the declining gender diversity at the higher grades can be attributed to the fact that there was less diversity in the past. This factor also contributes to the declining racial and ethnic diversity, but does not fully explain it. Poor promotion rates also contribute to the decline in black, Asian, and Hispanic representation at the more senior grades. Interestingly, promotion rates showed little gender bias. Finally, retention rates do not appear to be a factor as they are comparable for each gender, racial, and ethnic group.

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<sup>28</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, Retrieval Applications Website, “Officers by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity.” Data as of 7 Aug 09

## Diversity and the General Officer Corps

General officers, as the most senior leaders in the Air Force, are responsible for establishing the Air Force's diversity policy. They also serve as the most visible evidence of the policy's success or failure. The diversity of this group is therefore of the utmost importance. Unfortunately, the current general officer corps is less diverse than the labor force and the officer corps. This is not surprising as the current general officer corps entered the Air Force at a time when the service was less diverse than it is today; however, lower promotion rates for racial and ethnic minorities also contribute. An analysis of the general officer selection process offers additional insight into this issue.

Prominent "quality" indicators which influence an officer's selection for promotion to general officer include: below the promotion zone (BPZ) selection, selection for in-residence Senior Developmental Education (SDE), wing commander experience, and whether or not the officer is a pilot. The positive correlation between these quality indicators and selection for general officer is evident. As of September 2009, 94% of general officers were BPZ to O-5 and/or O-6, 94% attended SDE in-residence, 69% are graduated wing commanders, and 63% are pilots.<sup>29</sup> Evidence of gender, racial, or ethnic bias within these quality indicators would highlight lower level processes that contribute to a lack of diversity within the general officer ranks.

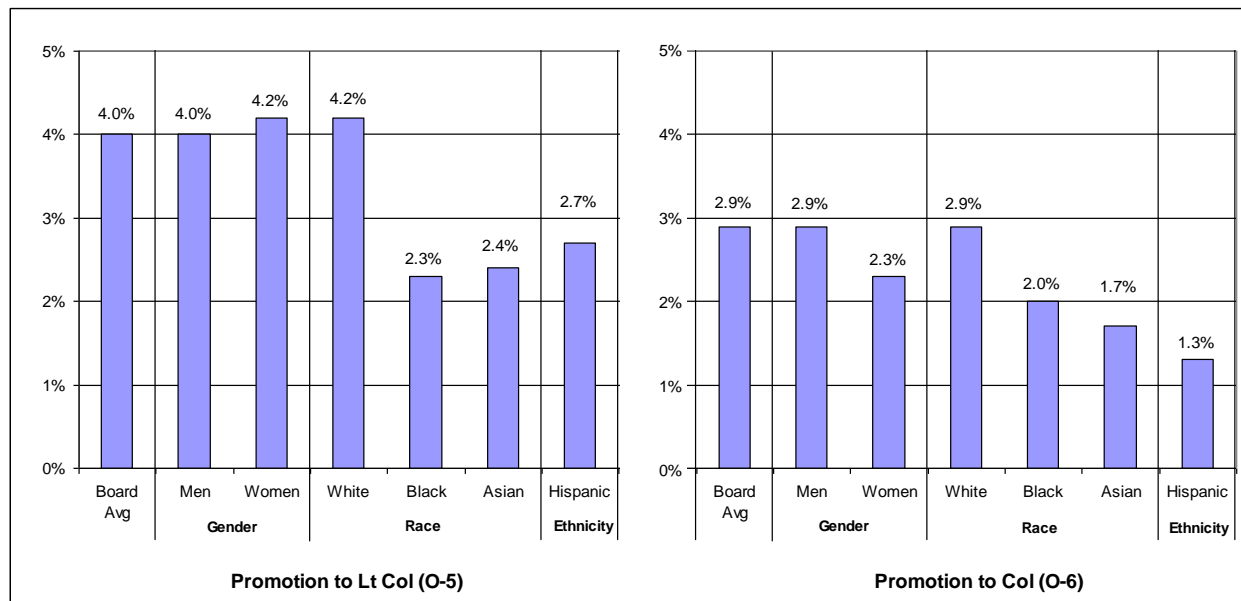
Below the zone promotion is considered a sign of superior potential and is almost a prerequisite for promotion to general officer. The most recent seven-year average of the below the promotion zone rates to O-5 and O-6 are presented in Figure 5.<sup>30</sup> Females were promoted BPZ to O-5 at a rate slightly higher than were males, the reverse was true for BPZ promotion to

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<sup>29</sup> Air Force Military Personnel Data System, *Officer Extract*, 30 September 2009

<sup>30</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, "Active Duty Officer Promotions Line of the Air Force," <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/reportsearch.asp> (Accessed 22 Sep 09).

O-6. Racial and ethnic bias is evident for BPZ promotion to both O-5 and O-6. Blacks, Asian, and Hispanics were promoted at a significantly lower rate than were whites.<sup>31</sup>



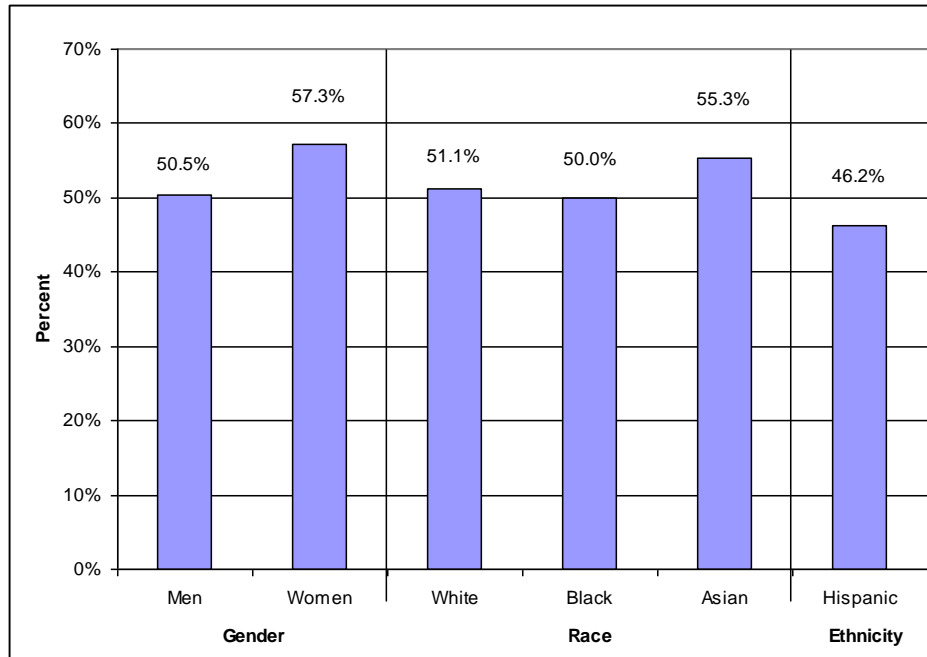
**Figure 5. Below the Promotion Zone Rates (2003-2009)**

Selection for SDE in residence demonstrates an investment in the leadership potential of an officer and is close to mandatory for promotion to general officer. Figure 6 displays the percentages of current colonels and colonel selects who have attended SDE in residence.<sup>32</sup> The overall average in-resident SDE rate is 51% for this population. While the percentages vary across gender, racial, and ethnic groups, the differences are statistically insignificant indicating the SDE selection process is not a significant contributor to the lack of diversity within the general officer corps.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Based on a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test at the 0.05 significance level.

<sup>32</sup> Air Force Military Personnel Data System, *Officer Extract*, 30 September 2009

<sup>33</sup> Based on a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test at the 0.05 significance level.

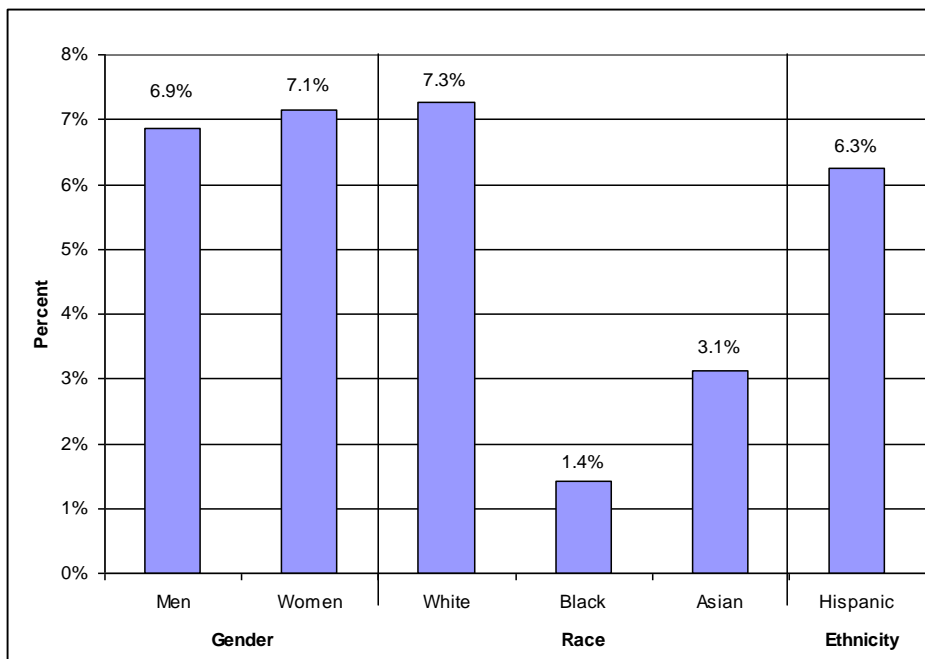


**Figure 6. In-Residence SDE Rates (Cols and Col Selects)**

Selection for wing command is very competitive; only 6.9% of all colonels are graduated wing commanders.<sup>34</sup> Passing the wing commander test demonstrates leadership traits that are deemed essential in a general officer. Figure 7 identifies the percentage of each demographic group that has wing commander experience. There is little gender or ethnic bias with respect to wing commander experience. On the other hand, there is a significant difference among the racial groups.<sup>35</sup> While 7.3% of white colonels have wing commander experience, only 1.4% of black colonels and 3.1% of Asian colonels are graduated wing commanders. The lack of wing command experience among blacks and Asians likely contributes to the lack of diversity within the general officer corps.

<sup>34</sup> Air Force Military Personnel Data System, *Officer Extract*, 30 September 2009

<sup>35</sup> Based on a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test at the 0.05 significance level.

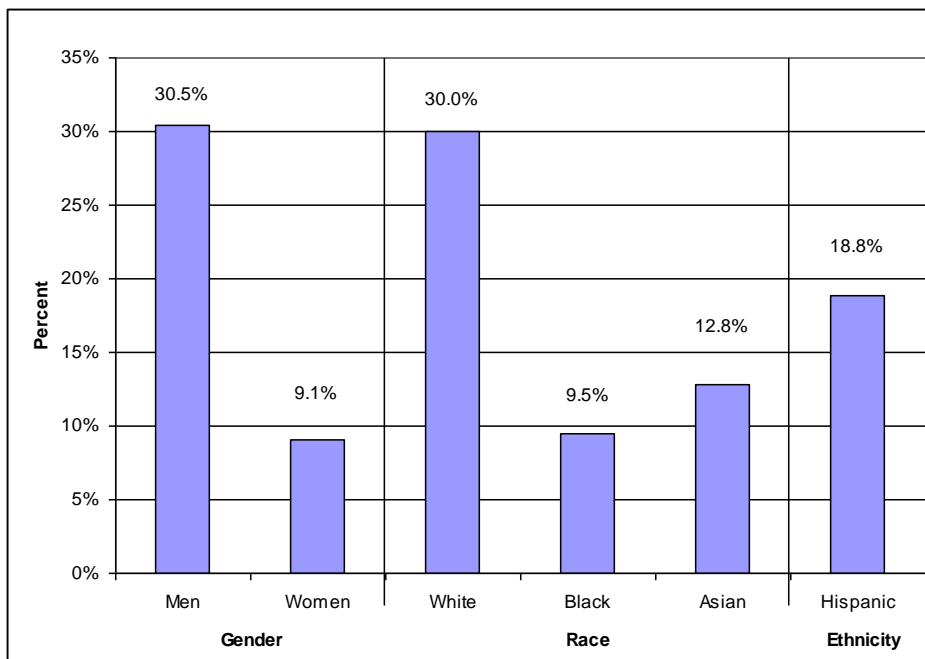


***Figure 7. Wing Commander Experience (Cols)***

The skills, experience, and leadership traits an officer acquires in the pilot career field are considered highly valuable within the general officer corps. While only 27.6% of all officers are pilots, they comprise 63% of the general officers.<sup>36</sup> Figure 8 illustrates the proportion of each gender, racial, and ethnic group that are pilots. For example, 30.5% of all Air Force male officers are pilots. It is apparent that females, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics are all under-represented within the pilot ranks. The fact that the pilot career field is dominated by white males contributes to the lack of diversity within the general officer corps.

<sup>36</sup> Air Force Personnel Center, Retrieval Applications Website, "Officers by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity." Data as of 7 Aug 09





***Figure 8. Percent Pilots***

In conclusion, the diversity of the general officer corps is impacted by BPZ promotion rates, the selection for wing command, and membership in the pilot career field. Consistent with the promotion analysis of the previous section, the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within the general officer corps can be attributed to the lower BPZ promotion rates of those groups. In addition, the lack of wing commander experience within the black and Asian colonel population also contributes to less general officer diversity. Finally, the dominance of white males within the pilot career field negatively impacts gender, racial, and ethnic diversity within the general officer ranks.

## Managing Diversity

Diversity must be managed in order to enjoy its benefits. Managing diversity involves the planning and implementation of organizational systems and practices such that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized and the potential disadvantages are minimized. The objective is to maximize the ability of all employees to contribute to organizational goals and to achieve their full potential unhindered by group identities such as gender, race, or ethnicity.<sup>37</sup> This is accomplished through an organizational process by which human resources are identified, allocated, and expanded in ways that make them more efficient and thereby improve organizational productivity. While diversity programs may be tailored to a specific organization, successful programs of managing diversity typically include the following actions:

- Leadership must champion the cause of diversity and link it to the strategic vision.
- Development of a communication strategy notifying the organization of the diversity policy.
- Research/measurement of the organizational culture and diversity trends.
- Accomplishment of an employee education program starting with senior leadership.
- Employment of systems and procedures that support diversity: recruitment, training and development, and performance assessment and promotion.
- Accountability for results and explicit mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Taylor Cox Jr., *Cultural Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research & Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Cox, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 230-239.

## **The Air Force's Diversity Program**

The Air Force's diversity program is managed by the Office of Strategic Diversity Integration and Performance, SAF/MRD. The office published the Air Force's approach to diversity in October 2007, which supplemented Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force letters to airmen concerning diversity. The office also produced a video in which senior Air Force leaders voiced their perspectives on diversity and linked its importance to the Air Force mission. Finally, the Strategic Diversity Office has produced diversity training aids and commissioned independent studies to research and measure the Air Force's climate and culture.

Clearly the Air Force has embarked on the initial steps of managing diversity and the Strategic Diversity Office's efforts are well aligned with the tenets of managing diversity mentioned above. However, there is much more work to accomplish. If the Air Force is to reflect the diversity of the citizenry it serves, the personnel systems and procedures involving recruitment, training and development, and performance assessment and promotion must be evaluated and modified to better support diversity. The lack of diversity among accessions, especially with respect to the pilot career field, must be addressed. Also, the development and promotion rates of racial and ethnic minorities must be investigated and root causes of the imbalances determined.

## **Conclusion**

If the goal of the Air Force is to mirror the diversity of the public it serves, then clearly the gender, racial, and ethnic diversity within the officer corps and senior ranks is lacking. The research presented in this paper has shown that females, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics are under-represented in the officer corps, and even more so at the general officer grades. Multiple factors, such as accessions, retention, promotion, and development, were analyzed to identify areas of concern and to focus further research.

Accessions and promotion are the largest contributors to the lack of gender, racial, and ethnic diversity within the officer corps. The officer corps will never mirror the labor force unless recruiting programs increase the number of female, black, and Asian recruits. The recruiting programs must also place greater emphasis on recruiting females, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics into the pilot career field. The promotion and evaluation system must be further studied to determine why blacks, Asians, and Hispanics consistently fare poorly in both IPZ and BPZ promotions. Retention rates do not vary significantly by gender, race, or ethnicity, and are not a prominent contributor to the lack of diversity. Likewise, SDE selection also varies little by gender, race, or ethnicity. Other developmental components such as assignments, training, and education require further study, especially considering their role within the promotion system.

The Air Force's commitment to diversity is readily apparent. Senior leadership, to include the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force are championing the cause of diversity and have linked it to the mission and strategic vision. The Air Force must now evaluate and modify the personnel systems and procedures to ensure a more diverse force is recruited, developed, and promoted. Only then will the Air Force fully enjoy the benefits of diversity.

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