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CAREER ATTITUDES OF ROTC CADETS AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The research reported in this paper is part of a larger research program being conducted by the US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) on cadet retention in the Senior Army ROTC Program. In this research variables that influence the cadets' decisions to join, remain in, or leave the program will be identified. Based on the findings of this research, it is anticipated that a number of strategies to enhance retention in the ROTC program can be formulated.

Earlier ARI-sponsored research (Armstrong, Farrell, & Card, 1979) investigated the attitudes and characteristics of ROTC cadets and college students and made comparisons between the two groups on a variety of dimensions. The purpose of this investigation, as in the 1979 effort, was to evaluate and compare the attitudes and values of ROTC cadets and other college students with respect to career aspirations, the Army, and the Army ROTC program. An additional purpose was to contrast these attitudes and values with those of cadets and college students over a three-year period. The information obtained as a result of this research will be combined with other information obtained through literature review and focus group interviews to form the basis for the development of instruments that will be used in the ROTC cadet retention research.

METHOD

A sample of 1,120 students from 11 colleges participated in the research. Selection of the colleges attempted to replicate those used in the 1979 research and accommodated college size (e.g. large, small) and representation by ROTC geographical region. This was accomplished even though 13 colleges were used in the 1979 research.

A slightly modified version of the 1979 questionnaire (Armstrong, Farrell & Lord, 1979), developed for ARI by American Institutes for Research, was used. The questionnaire was divided into four sections that covered

¹The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Army Research Institute or the Department of the Army.

(1) background information, (2) school life, (3) career plans, and (4) knowledge about and attitudes toward the military and ROTC. The last section was divided into two parts, one for cadets and the other for non-cadets.

The original questionnaire was updated in two ways. In two media questions regarding magazine readership and radio program preferences, the pre-coded answer categories on the 1979 questionnaire were expanded to incorporate all previously volunteered answers. That is, if students in 1979 reported reading a magazine not then listed, it was included in the modified questionnaire. The second update involved three new items regarding possible changes in the program that might enhance the attractiveness of the ROTC program.

On each of the college campuses, a coordinator for the research was designated from the staff of the ROTC unit. The coordinators made arrangements for questionnaire administration in the ROTC classes and also contacted college instructors to have the questionnaire administered in required freshman or sophomore classes for non-cadets. Completion of the questionnaire required approximately 45 minutes. Participation in the research was voluntary and subjects were not asked to identify themselves.

All questionnaires were returned to a central location. The analyses reported in this paper involved a series of cross-tabulations to determine differences in response patterns between ROTC cadets and college students who were not cadets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample of 1,120 students was predominantly male (66%) and white (68%) as in the 1979 survey. Unlike the previous survey which was almost equally divided between cadets and non-cadets, about 60% of this sample were enrolled in either Military Science I or II. Most of the students were reared in the South in a small town or city. This same pattern occurred in the 1979 survey and is the result of overrepresentation of southern colleges.

Students in the present survey are older by a year than they were in the previous effort, with the ROTC cadets being significantly younger (19.85 years) than the non-ROTC cadets (21.06 years). Mean parental income is reported to be higher now than before, but in line with inflation since the previous survey.

Cadets and non-cadets share the same media habits. They direct their attention mainly to newspapers, general radio, campus newspapers, and TV. ROTC cadets are more likely to read sports and outdoor magazines, while non-ROTC cadets are more likely to read home service and women's magazines. However, this is probably merely a function of the gender composition of the samples. Campus newspapers and radio were included in this survey (and not in the 1979 effort) as potentially useful types of media. The campus newspaper is clearly a popular choice with all students, although campus radio broadcasting receives very little audience support. Students report exposure to numerous magazines and appear to be "reachable" through several general

and focused vehicles. Across the campus, the most popular magazines are the weekly news-oriented ones: Time, Newsweek, and Sports Illustrated. Also widely read are TV Guide, Reader's Digest, U.S. News and World Report, National Geographic, and People. Although ROTC cadets report more exposure to more magazines than non-ROTC cadets, their choices of reading materials do not differ importantly.

The TV preferences of students in many ways parallel those of the American public at large. M*A*S*H is the overwhelming first choice among all groups of students. Other popular choices are the continuing dramatic series of Hill Street Blues, Dynasty, and Dallas. Also popular is 60 Minutes. This pattern is somewhat different than two years ago, when student TV viewing was heavily skewed toward comedy series. These changing patterns are in line with the shifting tastes of the general TV audience. FM programming is a universal favorite among students and will provide the widest reach into the campuses.

Cadets have closer ties to the military and are more knowledgeable about Army life than non-cadets. A finding from the 1979 survey, confirmed in the present study, is that ROTC cadets have more contacts with the military. They more often have good friends and relatives who either were or are ROTC cadets themselves or who have seen military service.

Information about ROTC reaches students through multiple channels-- some of which are interpersonal and some media-based. Friends, ROTC personnel on campus, and recruiters all play a role in getting out the message. On the other hand pamphlets, radio/T.V., magazine, and newspaper ads also serve to make students aware of the program. Program awareness and scholarship awareness are not gained concurrently. Students hear about ROTC before becoming aware of scholarships. In fact, it may be because of their awareness and interest in ROTC that they learn about the Scholarship Program. This relationship is demonstrated by the types of information sources used to learn about the Scholarship Program; they are primarily military-related-- ROTC personnel on campus, recruiters, and brochures. It is also supported by the fact that one in five non-cadets are totally unaware of ROTC scholarships. As the scholarship is perceived to be an attractive feature of the ROTC program, early and consistent communications about it across all groups will be desirable.

Not surprisingly, ROTC cadets professed more knowledge about ROTC than non-cadets and demonstrate this knowledge. Cadets answer more ROTC/Army knowledge questions correctly. As found in the earlier survey, non-cadets tend to overestimate the obligations of ROTC and underestimate some of the benefits. For example, non-cadets think summer camp is required every year of college but do not recognize that cadets receive a \$100 stipend as freshmen and sophomores. The patterns of response to the 1982 and 1979 surveys are remarkably similar. Nearly all respondents know that ROTC is available to men and women and that postgraduate training is available to officers. They consistently err in thinking that all officers are obligated to serve four years of active duty.

As would be expected, cadets find the ROTC program more attractive than non-cadets. However, all students rate highly the guarantee of a job after college and the Scholarship Program. Cadets and non-cadets are consistent in that the requirement for obligated duty after college is valued least by both groups. It should be noted that one feature of the ROTC program, that is, subsequent military service, is perceived as both a plus and a minus. When students think of service as guaranteed employment in this uncertain economy, they find that to be very positive. However, when their attention is focused on the fact that this commits them to a specified period of service, they tend to dislike the obligation. Communications about the ROTC military service requirement need to be particularly sharp when addressing this issue and to convey the opportunities without the perceived liabilities.

Echoing their concerns for employment, students say job security is the most attractive feature of Army life. Officer pay and fringe benefits are also highly rated. Overall, ROTC cadets find the Army more to their liking than non-ROTC cadets. This is shown through higher ratings given to individual features and more aspects of Army life being positively evaluated. Although half of all students would serve in the military if needed, cadets are more likely to perceive it as their duty, whereas most non-cadets have not given military service much thought.

Only about three in ten students had Junior ROTC available to them, and, for the most part, this was an Army program. Only one in ten participated in any Junior program. The attractive and unattractive features of the Junior program parallel those of college ROTC. That is, instructors and the quality of the program are valued, whereas the ROTC cadets and the image of the program are not.

On campuses today, popular college majors are business administration and engineering. The sources of financial aid to college students are multiple, and similarities are found between those used by cadets and non-cadets. The family represents the most important source of money to students. Cadets report ROTC scholarships as an important source, where non-ROTC cadets are more likely to mention other scholarships.

Those closest to the students have the most influence on their educational and career plans. The role model provided by someone in the field is more important to cadets than to non-cadets. This may explain why more cadets have friends and relatives connected to the military and have more contacts and information from ROTC personnel and recruiters.

Cadets have higher salary goals than non-cadets and career choices are congruent with the course of study being pursued in college. Thus, business is a frequent career choice, as is engineering. Cadets, as a group, often seek a career as an Army officer. The ROTC cadets' higher salary expectations may be tied into their views of ROTC and an Army career as a secure position which provides the opportunity for advancement and leadership. On the other hand, it may be that they believe the experience they gain in ROTC and the Army (in addition to their college degree) will contribute to an increased marketability of their skills, should they enter the civilian job market ten years after college.

It is not clear whether students realize that there is opportunity in the Army to pursue activities that draw on their educational training and career interest. It is as if one could not consider a military and technical career at the same time.

Aspects of a job which are highly valued by students include the opportunity to advance, interesting and challenging work, job security, and self-improvement. Essentially, these are the same job factors rated highly in the 1979 survey, only now job security has increased in importance. Cadets also value the chance to be a leader and to be associated with a prestigious organization more than non-cadets. Rating the Army's potential to satisfy various needs along these same job dimensions, it seems that, at least for cadets, the Army can satisfy most of their important criteria. The Army is seen as offering job security, the opportunity to advance and to perform as a leader. In addition, the Army is much more positively rated on most dimensions by cadets than non-cadets, and particularly high ratings are by black cadets. The aspects of the Army which detract from its value in the minds of both cadets and non-cadets are perceived restriction on personal freedom, less opportunity for a stable home life and involvement in the community, and uncertainty in geographic location.

Given that cadets have more friends and relatives with exposure to the military and that the Army is rated highly on many dimensions, it is consistent that cadets think their friends and parents would all rate a military career positively. In general, the cadets are consistent in their positive orientation to the military. They are knowledgeable about and value aspects of a military lifestyle. The dimensions of a job that are important to them are also ones which they think the Army will satisfy. Moreover, the Army is perceived to satisfy many of the aspects which they look for in a job.

Cadets, although aware of and interested in the program by the time they are in high school, tend to delay their decision to join the program until college. This is a departure from the 1979 survey where it was noted that the majority of cadets decided to join ROTC in their high school years. The factors influencing a student to join ROTC are similar to those leading him or her to continue into the Advanced Course--that is, there is support to join from family and friends. Being in the program is consistent with the student's personal system of values and beliefs, and with career objectives. Advertising and information from military personnel do not figure in as factors influencing the decision. It is likely the message that is communicated about the program does not "persuade" anyone to join or continue in the program--rather, it provides information or clarification for students to see how ROTC will meet their personal goals and needs. Slightly less than half of the cadets intend to continue through the Advanced Course, which is about the same as reported in the 1979 survey. Fully one-quarter will not sign up, which again is consistent with the earlier research. The bulk of these who do not intend to continue are female, and a relatively higher proportion are white. It may be that those who joined ROTC found that it did not meet their needs as expected, and therefore they decided not to continue, while those who intend to make the transition believe it will be consistent with their goals.

When four variations on service obligations were linked to the decision to make the transition to the Advanced Course, little impact was noted. Options which offer guaranteed Reserve or National Guard service, a two-year commitment, or a scholarship with an extended or variable tour were presented. The most attractive alternative as measured by the interest shown in it is a two-year service obligation instead of three. About one-third of the cadets state such an alternative would increase their likelihood of continuing in MS III and MS IV. For the most part, the alternatives tested are met with indifference. More than half state the changes would neither increase nor decrease their likelihood of continuing in the program. This reinforces the notion that participation is maintained if it appears to fit one's needs, and if that link cannot be established in the cadet's mind, then the program is abandoned. Cadets are split equally about whether or not to continue ROTC without subsistence. A surprisingly small group of cadets say they would join the Army even if they were not required to do so by contract. As with the previous survey, cadets show a slight inclination toward not joining. For the most part, cadets have not given much thought to their military service. A sizable group are unsure which type of Army service they would prefer and the majority do not know how long they would serve if they joined, and nearly half would not seek a career in the Army. The same optional program changes presented to cadets were evaluated by non-ROTC cadets. In all cases--whether the choice was guaranteed Reserve or National Guard duty, a two-year obligation, or a scholarship with extended or variable tour--more than half of the non-cadets would not be persuaded to join or stay (if they were dropouts) in the Army. Less than one in five would be attracted by any of the proposed alternatives. The students' needs and ROTC or the Army's perceived ability to meet these desires may be the key to attracting and retaining more students. The program changes will give an added appeal but are unlikely to function as inducement if the basic compatibility between needs and satisfaction is not perceived.

REFERENCES

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