

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

A RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS OF
AIR FORCE OFFICER ACCESSIONS

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel David O'Malley is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. Before attending the Air War College, LtCol O'Malley completed a variety of assignments across 19 years of active service flying the F-16 and F-22. Most recently, he commanded the 325th Operations Support Squadron at Tyndall AFB, Florida. LtCol O'Malley received his undergraduate education at the United States Air Force Academy and completed a Master of Aerospace Science in Aviation Management from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master of Science in Systems Engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology. He is married with two children.



Abstract

The Air Force is about to undergo its most significant force structure reductions in nearly two decades. Drawdowns in both Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with an economic recession and sequestration, are creating an environment where the service cannot continue accessing officers at traditional rates. After all, the Air Force accessions strategy directly impacts the service's congressionally controlled end strength and the costs of personnel have increased significantly in recent years.

Any change to the Air Force's accessions strategy must involve a close look at each of its three accessions sources. The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), Officer Training School (OTS) and United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) combine to fill the Air Force with new officers each year. The resources, however, differ greatly between these three sources, as do the officers that they create. This study took a close look at recent production trends, along with propensity to serve, costs to produce, early promotion opportunities, and diversity from each of the sources in order to help inform future accessions-related decisions.

The data encouraged an accessions strategy that continues reductions in OTS production in an effort to sustain both ROTC and USAFA production. Additionally, the data identifies several areas that require more investigation in the near-term in order to more accurately inform mid-term strategic decisions. A careful approach that protects the production of the most successful and diverse pool of future officers will ensure accessions success, filling the ranks with tomorrow's Air Force leaders.

Introduction

The Air Force officer accessions strategy aims to field the candidates best-suited to develop into the service's future senior leaders. The Air Force is a closed personnel system and promotes from within its ranks. It does not hire mid- or senior-level officers from the competitive job market to fill critical leadership positions. Today's senior leaders entered the Air Force more than 20 years ago. The decisions made during the accessions process have a lasting impact on the service.

The Air Force must also ensure that accession levels are sufficient to meet the demands and match expected future end-strength levels. Since it takes 20 years to build a 20-year lieutenant colonel, the Air Force must make sure it has the right number of officer candidates to meet the requirement decades from now. The past 12 years of war enabled the Air Force to grow its ranks and exceed post-Cold War end strength numbers established in the 1990s. The reduction of hostilities in both Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with a recession-driven decline in annual budget levels, has the Air Force reassessing its accessions strategy.

This study utilized available data to evaluate the Air Force's accession sources and the relative success of each program. As the service looks for options to both reduce officer accessions and decrease associated development costs, this study will provide planners relevant information from which to make critical decisions that will enable a lasting impact on the Air Force's leaders of tomorrow.

Thesis

Recent declining defense budgets and reductions in military service end strengths highlight the need to make similar adjustments in the Air Force accessions strategy. Although

Officer Training School typically enables the Air Force to make real-time changes in annual officer accession numbers, it is important to analyze each accession source to determine the most cost-efficient approach. This research paper uses a quantitative approach to argue that the Air Force must adjust its accessions strategy in order to meet both current budgetary constraints and tomorrow's declining end-strength requirements.

A Look at Air Force Officer Accessions

Commissioning Sources

The Air Force utilizes three programs to produce officers to meet annual accessions goals: the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), Officer Training School (OTS), and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). This study will first step through each of the three to help better understand their unique programmatic differences. It will then present data to differentiate the level of impact each source's graduates have within the Air Force.

Both ROTC and OTS functionally reside within the Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development. This organization, led by a one-star general, is responsible to Air University for the production of nearly 75 percent of all Air Force line officers annually.¹ ROTC is the largest and the oldest officer accessions source in the Air Force. An important outreach program, it maintains 145 detachments that provide service to more than 1,100 universities throughout the United States.² ROTC provides three different paths towards a commission: a full four-year scholarship program, a two-year scholarship program that encompasses the candidate's junior and senior years of college, and a non-scholarship program.³ Upon graduating from college, all ROTC candidates receive a four-year active-duty service commitment.⁴

While ROTC operates detachments nation-wide, OTS is centralized at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. OTS sustains many different programs to meet the needs of Air Force accessions, as well as annual Air National Guard, judge advocates, chaplains, and health professional requirements.⁵ This study will focus on the line Air Force accessions, which complete a nine week program before earning a commission. OTS graduates enter the Air Force with a four year commitment, just like ROTC.⁶ Because the lead time for a nine week program is much more flexible than the multi-year constraint that both the ROTC and USAFA programs contain, the Air Force typically utilizes OTS as a buffer program. It is much easier for the service to either increase or decrease annual OTS production to offset expected production deficiencies from the other sources to meet projected goals.

The Air Force Academy is a four-year undergraduate program that produces approximately 1,000 new officers annually. All USAFA graduates enter the Air Force with a five-year active-duty service commitment. Located outside Colorado Springs, Colorado, its program falls under the purview of the superintendent, a three-star general. Interestingly, the Academy's superintendent reports directly to the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF). ROTC and OTS leadership, on the other hand, report to the Holm Center. The Holm Center must coordinate through Air University and Air Education and Training Command before it is able to reach the CSAF. The direct link to Air Force leadership puts USAFA in a much more advantageous position regarding resources, programs and influence.

Current Constraints on Officer Accessions

The drawdowns in both Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with the lasting effects of a recession, have congressional officials working with the Air Force to reduce future budgets and end-strength levels. Both the Acting Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Chief of Staff

expressed concern over potential reductions that could reach as high as 25,000 personnel over the next few years.⁷ Logically, should the Air Force need to reduce its end strength, similar reductions in annual accessions must follow.

All of this uncertainty falls within the greater context of sequestration and its associated impact on the Air Force. Although the near- and long-term effects of sequestration are unknown, the cuts are having a real impact on the Air Force today.⁸ The service took an immediate \$10 billion reduction from planned expenditures during Fiscal Year (FY) 2013.⁹ Additionally, it plans to reduce the active duty officer force by more than 4,000 personnel during FY 2014 alone.¹⁰ This reduction reflects concerns over ballooning personnel costs, which now account for 55 percent of the total Air Force budget.¹¹ Despite the uncertainty and looming force cuts, the Air Force still plans to continue accessions unabated in the near term.¹² Reductions in accessions create year-group shortages that can be difficult to overcome in future years.

Impact of Demographics and Diversity

The Air Force published its most recent diversity roadmap in the spring of 2013. Its stated goal was to enable the Air Force to “attract, recruit, develop and retain a high quality, talented, and diverse total force.”¹³ The document went further to define the term “diversity.” It broadly applied diversity to “personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity, and gender.”¹⁴

Applying the roadmap to accessions is a difficult process. The document focused on outreach to meet its “attract” priority centered on the best qualified candidates from a “diverse talent pool.”¹⁵ This talent pool is a small one since only 25 percent of America’s youth qualify for service in the Air Force.¹⁶ The Air Force aims to proportionally match its diversity to the

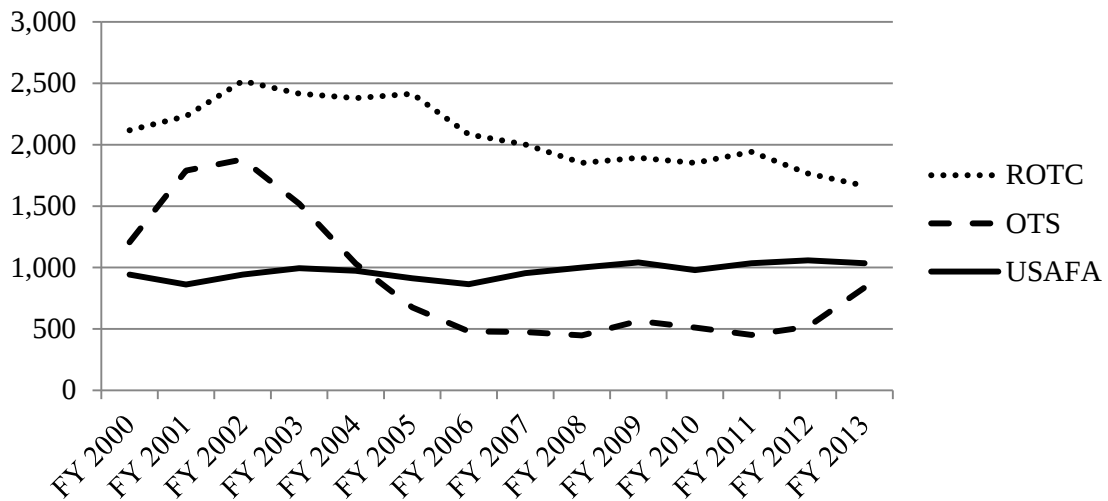
eligible 25 percent. To simplify the tracking of diversity within the service, the Air Force constrained the equation to only trace age, education, language, race, ethnicity, and gender. Since organizations typically track metrics in order to influence selected categories, the lack of a tracking mechanism for the other seven diversity attributes reflects their relative importance to Air Force decision-makers.

Accessions Program Data

The Accessions Program Data section will look at historic production from each of the three sources of officer accessions. It will further delve into length of service, promotion rates and diversity data as performance metrics to differentiate the three commissioning sources.

Annual production from both ROTC and USAFA has been extremely consistent throughout the past decade. ROTC normally assesses around 2,000 new officers each year and USAFA typically produces 1,000 new officers annually. OTS, however, has historically been the Air Force's surge factory since it requires months, not years, to increase annual totals. Although OTS normally produces around 900 new officers annually for the active force, some years have seen much higher totals. The high demand for new officers resulting from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, keyed growth above annual averages in FY 2002. Figure 1 depicts the past fourteen years of accessions from each source.

Annual Officer Production by Accession Source FY 2000 through FY 2013



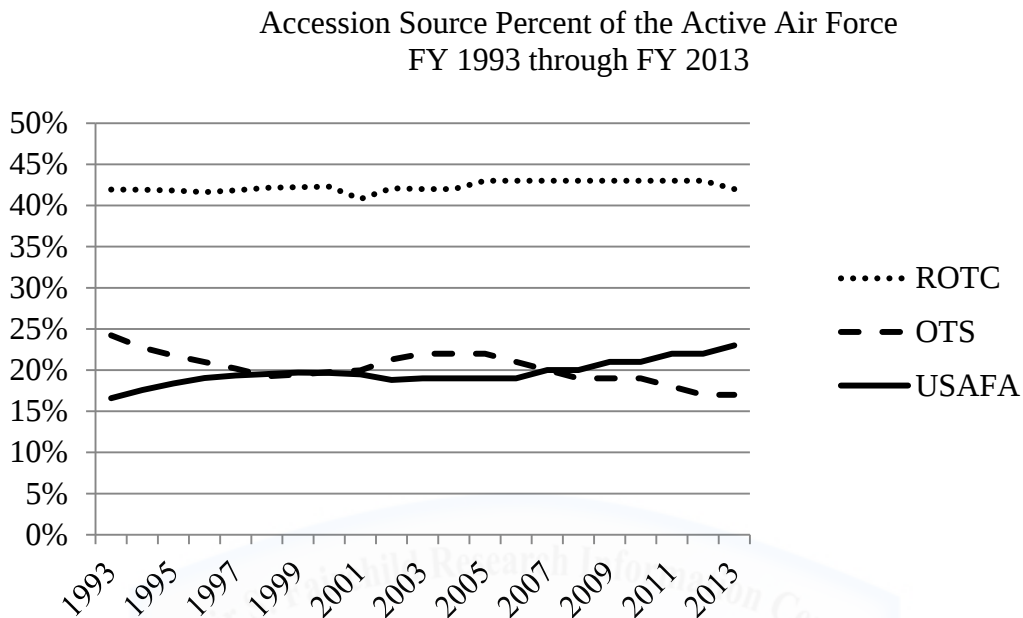
Source: Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development

Figure 1: Annual Officer Production by Accession Source¹⁷

When looking at percent of the active force, ROTC maintains a steady rate slightly above 40% (see Figure 2). OTS percentages decline with the post-Cold War force reductions of the early 1990s, increase again in the early 2000s, before once again settling below USAFA's rate. The Air Force Academy, in contrast, continued its steady annual production throughout this period. As OTS production waned to support a shift in Air Force accessions strategy, USAFA's relative influence grew.

Determining the cost to produce an officer from each source is a difficult task. The programs are unique and cost information tends to compare numbers containing different types of data. In FY 2013, it cost the Air Force \$17,251 to produce each graduate from OTS.¹⁸ That number only reflects pay and uniform allowances during the training course. It does not take into

account the costs associated with faculty or infrastructure for more accurate comparison with the other accession sources.



Source: Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center

Figure 2: Accession Source Percent of the Active Force Graph¹⁹

ROTC's calculation, however, is much more complicated. Because some graduates may be non-scholarship while others benefit from a full four-year scholarship, the associated costs differ greatly. A non-scholarship ROTC graduate costs the Air Force \$11,805, while a two-year scholarship graduate costs \$35,805, and a full four-year totals \$69,840.²⁰ These numbers mirror OTS costs, only adding associated scholarship, summer field training and academic book expenses.

The Air Force Academy advertises the cost to produce each graduate as \$185,564.²¹ Taking out unrelated costs for comparison with the other programs offers a slightly reduced total. With only cadet pay for comparison with OTS, the total is \$49,588. Adding the four-year

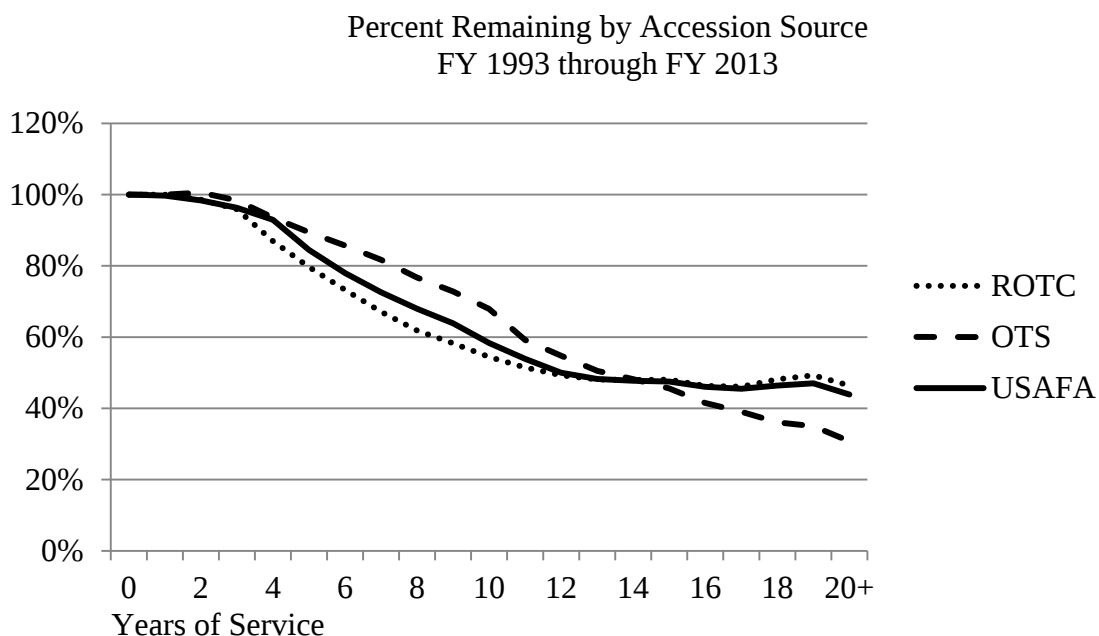
academic scholarship, meals and lodging for comparison to the full four-year ROTC graduate results in a total cost of \$132,932.²²

In the end, due to the length of the respective programs, it is best to compare OTS with the non-scholarship ROTC graduate. Neither is afforded tuition support and both only reflect pay, uniform, and book allowances associated with the officer training programs. The two-year ROTC scholarship graduate is an outlier. There are no direct comparisons within OTS or USAFA. The four-year ROTC scholarship and USAFA graduate hold the closest remaining comparison. Both programs offer their graduates a full collegiate scholarship on the way towards an Air Force commission.

Length of Service Data

In addition to production costs, the Air Force must carefully assess each commissioning source against its ability to fill service ranks for an individual's entire career. After all, a commissioning source whose graduates only serve through their required commitment and then separate does not benefit the Air Force as much as a source whose graduates remain in uniform for a longer period of time. Increased length of service reflects a greater return on the cost to produce a graduate.

Figure 3 traces data for accession years 1993 through 2013. It graphically shows the four year commitment for ROTC and OTS against USAFA's five year obligation. Each line remains relatively flat through the expiration of the initial commitments before any marked decrease is noted. Both ROTC and USAFA then decline linearly at similar rates up through 13 years of service before plateauing out to 20 years. Interestingly, OTS does not behave in the same manner. It decreases linearly from its four year service commitment straight through to twenty years of service.



Source: Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center

Figure 3: Percent Remaining by Accession Source²³

This trend is difficult to explain, and implies that retention programs and the lure of retirement benefits may have less influence on OTS officers than those from ROTC and USAFA, especially as the officers near 20 years of service. Another explanation may involve graduates who served within the enlisted ranks before entering their commissioning programs. Because Figure 3 reflects total years of active service, those personnel that spent time within the enlisted ranks prior to commissioning will enter the chart at the number of years already served, not zero, and OTS has the highest percentage of prior service graduates.

In FY 2013, for example, 54% of the OTS graduates commissioned with prior service time, compared to only 9% from ROTC and 3% from USAFA.²⁴ Within the 54% of prior service OTS graduates, 41% commissioned with more than four years of prior service.²⁵ Although the

prior time will not make an officer eligible to retire prior to twenty years of service, it will provide an artificial boost to Figure 3's retention numbers within the first ten years of service.

Additionally, different officer career fields increase service commitments to reflect training costs. For example, those officers attending flight training incur an additional 10 year concurrent service commitment once they complete training and are awarded their wings. These programs directly impact length of service. This study, however, did not differentiate between the different career fields, associated increased commitments and relative production levels from each accessions source due to scope constraints.

Lastly, Figure 3 (and the other performance metrics that follow) does not differentiate between the scholarship and non-scholarship ROTC graduates. Unfortunately, the data comes from unconnected sources. Table 1 depicts the current three-year participation average for scholarship and non-scholarship ROTC students. On average, 33% of enrolled ROTC students are on scholarship. Not knowing how those 33% impact the performance metrics makes it impossible to utilize the ROTC scholarship categories during program analysis.

Average ROTC Enrollment (FY 2013 data)

	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Non-Scholarship	8,805	9,959	8,975
Scholarship	3,950	5,155	4,416
Total Students	12,755	15,113	13,391

Source: Air Force Financial Management and Comptroller

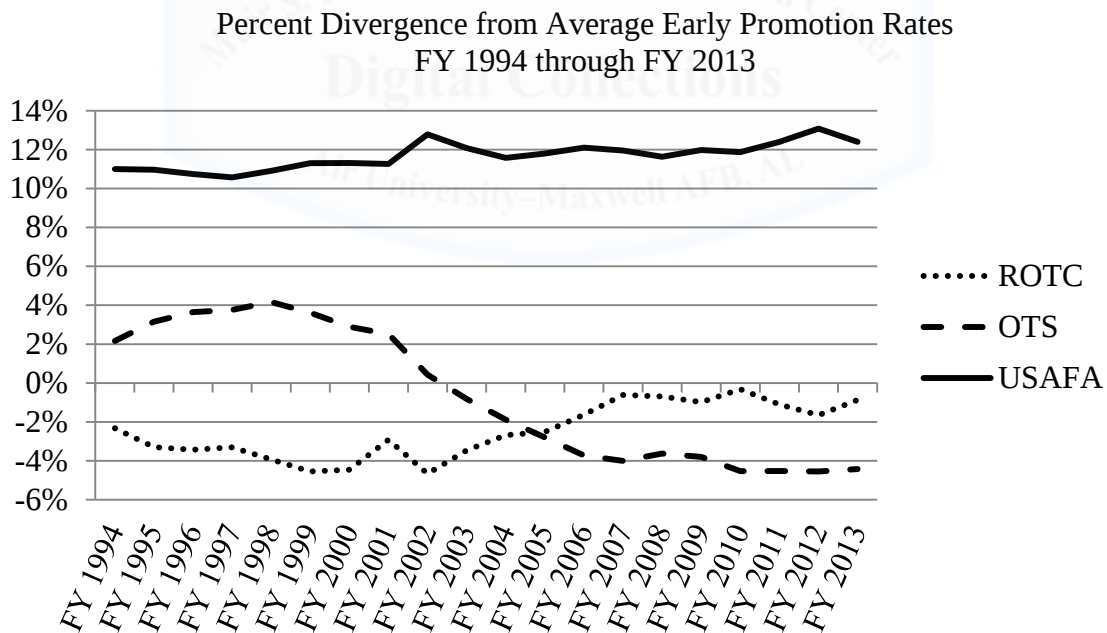
Table 1: Average ROTC Enrollment²⁶

Below-the-Zone Promotion Information

In addition to length of service, below-the-zone (BPZ) promotions are another important differentiating statistic for the accession sources. The Air Force only promotes their best and

brightest below-the-zone. Should one accessions source gain more BPZ promotions over another, then their product reflects a more successful officer for the service. Figure 4 looks at twenty years of BPZ data by accessions source. It compares the percentage of BPZ officers from each source to their relative weights within officer ranks. Any data points above the zero line reflect an accessions source with greater early promotion success than its peers.

USAFA far exceeds both ROTC and OTS in early promotion rates. The pool of USAFA graduates promoted early is 12% larger than the size of USAFA graduates within the officer force. Also, while OTS rates waned since 2002, ROTC rates slowly increased over the same period. Both OTS and ROTC, however, remained below the line since 2005. In short, USAFA graduates are more likely to promote early than officers from other accession sources.

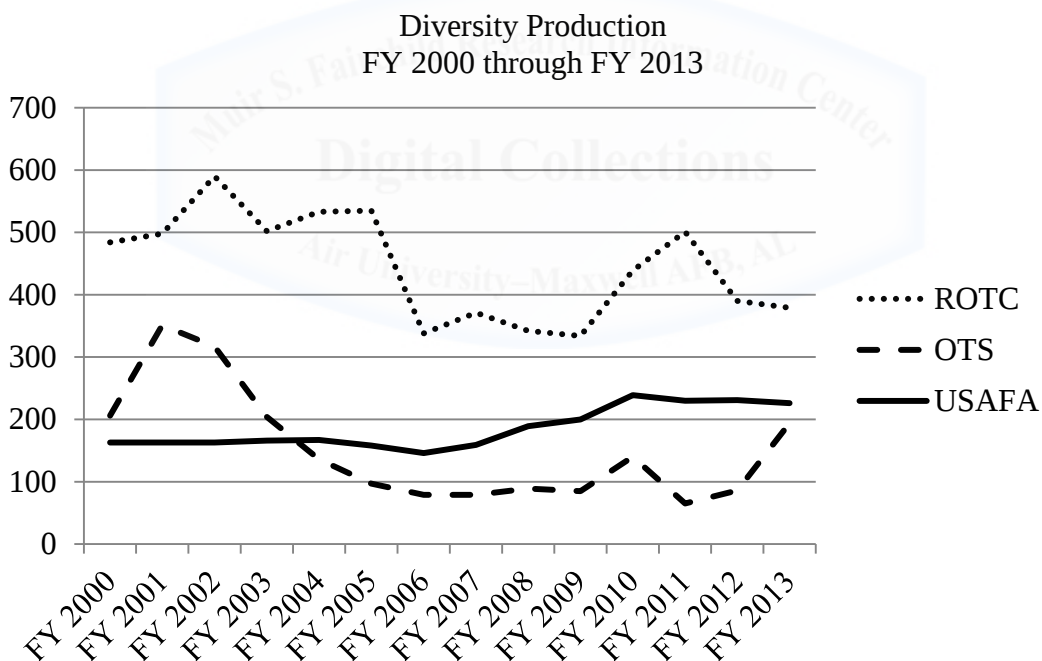


Source: Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center

Figure 4: Percent Divergence from Average Early Promotion Rates²⁷

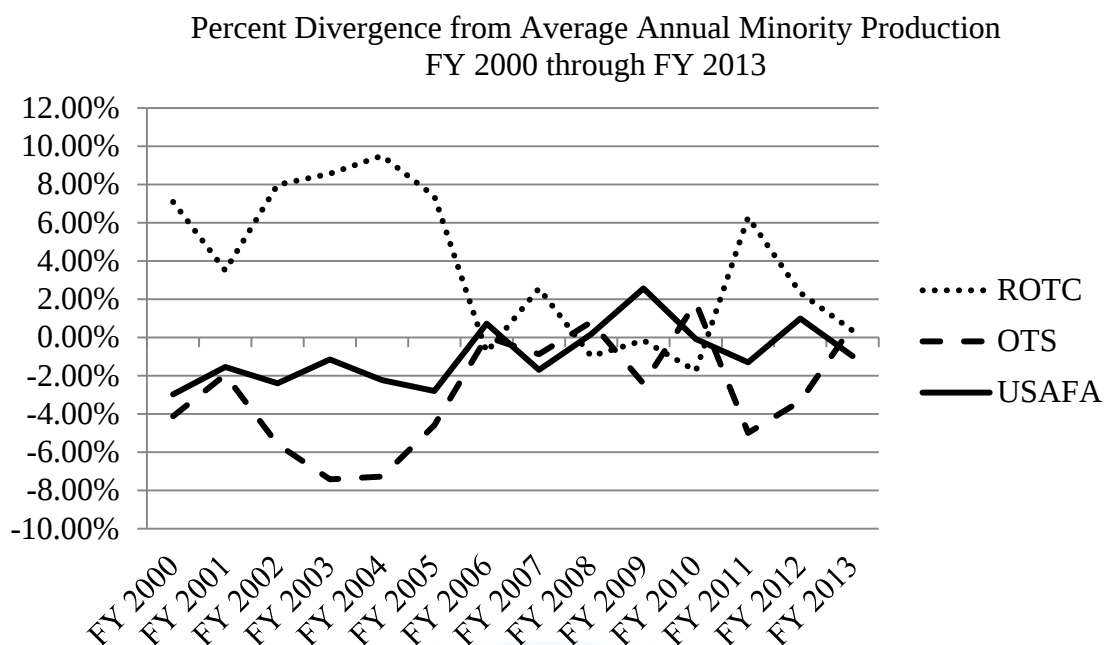
Diversity Data

As previously discussed, diversity is an extremely important part of the Air Force's accessions strategy. Figure 5 depicts Air Force officer diversity production through FY 2013. Figure 6 charts the percent each commissioning source deviated from the average annual production of minority officers. The minority percentages in both figures are characterized by individuals being classified as African American, Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American. A positive percentage in Figure 6 indicates a commissioning source that exceeded the Air Force accessions average for that particular FY.



Source: Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development

Figure 5: Diversity Production²⁸



Source: Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development

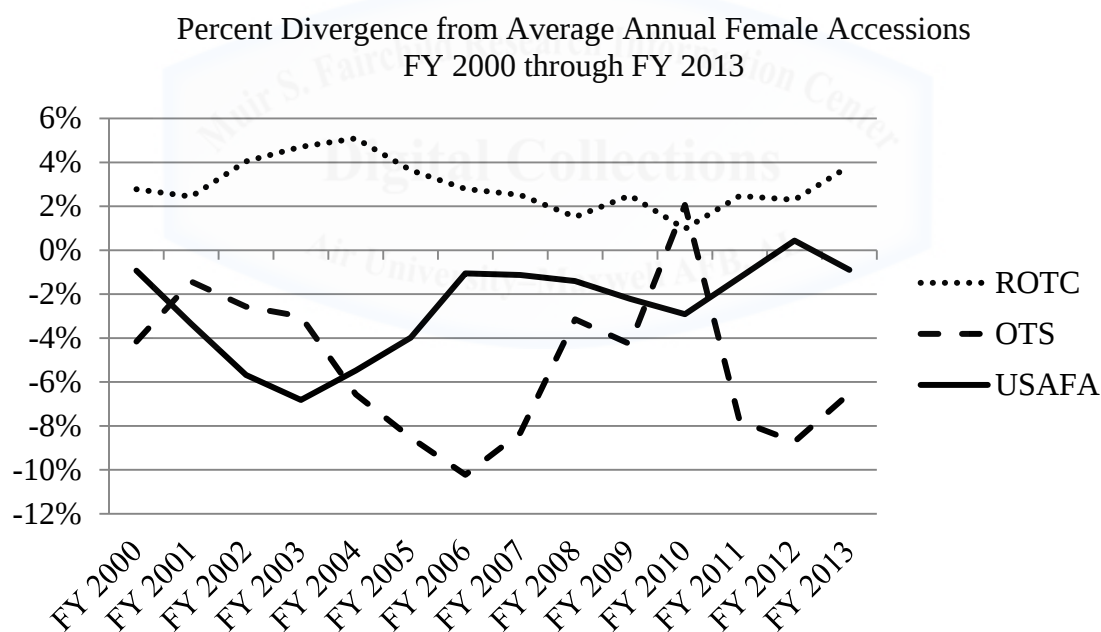
Figure 6: Percent Divergence from Average Annual Minority Production²⁹

While the Air Force Academy enjoys a positive trend line, ROTC and OTS share an intriguing relationship in Figure 6. Positive years for ROTC mirror an almost identical negative year for OTS. Although the Air Force works diligently to make uniformed service available to all Americans, independent of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, they similarly claim not to conduct accessions based on a quota system. Because the Holm Center owns both ROTC and OTS, the data, at a minimum, suggests otherwise. Because ROTC has a two-year lead time for graduation, the data suggests that the Holm Center may be using the OTS surge capacity to offset minority deficiencies within ROTC graduating classes each year.

It is important to view these percentages within the context of production numbers as well. In FY 2010, for example, Figure 6 depicts a rare year of ROTC underproduction and OTS overproduction. In that year, ROTC produced 439 minority officers for the Air Force of 1,852

graduates. OTS, on the other hand, produced 140 minorities of 511 officers. ROTC's production bounced back the very next year, with 501 minorities from their 1,942 graduates. ROTC's strong production did not necessitate a similar focus from OTS. In FY 2011, OTS production dropped to only 65 minorities from their total of 451 officers.³⁰

Although ROTC produces more officers annually, those two years help illustrate the interesting relationship between the two accessions sources. Despite the different individual production numbers, the two sources together produced 579 minorities in FY 2010 and 566 minorities in FY 2011. In a low minority production year for ROTC, OTS's real time surge capability appears to have balanced the requirement.



Source: Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development

Figure 7: Percent Divergence from Average Annual Female Accessions³¹

Another important minority group that continues increasing influence within the Air Force is the female demographic. Figure 7 charts a similar divergence from annual averages by

accessions source as the diversity data in Figure 6. In this case, ROTC is clearly the source that continually adds more females to active ranks each year. OTS is, once again, all over the chart while USAFA displays a gradual positive trend. Over the past 14 years, only ROTC consistently improved the Air Force's female numbers.

Analysis of Accessions Data

The next section will move beyond the description of the data in order to analyze the information and lay the groundwork for specific recommendations. When assessing program costs, there are two areas for comparison: non-scholarship and full four-year scholarship graduates. For the non-scholarship option, ROTC is less expensive per graduate than OTS. When relating four-year scholarship programs, ROTC is once again the cheaper option over USAFA.

The five-year commitment guarantee of \$132,932 post USAFA equates to \$26,586 per year of commissioned service. For ROTC's \$69,840 cost to produce a four-year scholarship cadet, the Air Force pays \$17,460 per year of obligated service. Even with the extended commitment, ROTC is still a cheaper option for the Air Force.

The cost data can be compared with average service length information from Figure 3 as well. The average length of service for ROTC is 11.5 years, for OTS is 13.3 years and for USAFA is 12 years. After calculating the production costs across the average length of service, the non-scholarship ROTC graduate (\$1,027 per year) is still less expensive than an OTS officer (\$1,297 per year). The four-year scholarship situation also does not change. For ROTC, the cost is \$6,073 per year while USAFA is almost twice as expensive at \$11,078 per year. In short, looking at the costs across the average length of service does not make USAFA appear any less expensive.

ROTC is not only cost effective, but also provides a greater degree of diversity to the Air Force than do the other two sources. On average, ROTC produces more minorities and females for active service each year. When looking at length of service, it is only the commitment that keeps more USAFA graduates in uniformed service during the first 10 years. During the second 10 years, USAFA retention rates are no different than those of ROTC.

USAFA graduates, however, excel at BPZ promotion opportunities. This may be a result of different admissions standards or separate training systems. It could also reflect the benefit USAFA's network of graduates has upon the system. That network will be difficult for ROTC and OTS to overcome. Although ROTC produces the largest component of the annual accessions matrix each year, it is a conglomeration of hundreds of college campuses. Even the largest ROTC detachments only produce less than ten percent of USAFA's annual active force input. OTS is not much different. Although centrally located at Maxwell AFB, its annual production consists of numerous nine-week classes. It would be extremely difficult for the small OTS class sizes and ROTC detachment graduating classes to equal USAFA's vast alumni network.

OTS, on the other hand, is relatively expensive. Their graduates are less-likely to stay in the service past 13 years and underperform all other commissioning sources in early promotion opportunities. Although they statistically produce less diversity and females for the service, this may be a result of Holm Center influence to sustain a comparatively diverse force. It is important to remember, however, that OTS is still the only source that can impact an accessions strategy in the current year. OTS may increase class size in near real time conditions to meet projected shortfalls while both USAFA and ROTC need years to change graduation numbers.

Before transitioning the information above into recommendations for future policy improvements, it is equally important to document what the data does not say. Although it breaks

down length of active service, the data does not differentiate between those separating for civilian life and others remaining in the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve or continued government civil service. These organizations rely on the active force as an important source of their personnel force and such transitions are a “win” for the Total Force.

The data also does not differentiate between the different types of ROTC graduates. Because each type has a drastically different cost associated with their education and training, understanding the differences between the non-scholarship, two-year scholarship, and full four-year scholarship students and their propensity to serve, relative diversity and promotability would help inform the comparative importance for each program.

The data also does not capture the different types of candidates each source draws into its program, nor does it trace specific demographics from accession through their service separation. This information would be extremely beneficial to help inform future marketing and recruiting efforts to ensure they target those best suited for successful service. This, of course, assumes that the Air Force retains its officers with the most potential, which may not be the case. The fact that more of a particular commissioning source stay in the Air Force longer than others may just indicate that those individuals have less options outside.

Lastly, the data does not differentiate between the different line officer career fields in the Air Force. An accessions source that produces more officers for pilot training, for example, will have an increased length of service due to greater obligations. Different career fields even have unique promotion rates. A deeper dive into the data may help determine if career field production metrics influence an accession source’s relative success.

Recommendations

It is important to move beyond the data analysis and determine what, if any, can be used to inform future Air Force accessions policies and strategies. The accessions strategy must focus on bringing in the most qualified candidates that reflect the American society that they serve. Additionally, the strategy should focus its energies on those candidates most likely to commit to the service for 20 years and beyond. The Air Force can implement programs to help reduce numbers, but it is nearly impossible to increase personnel in any age group other than in brand new accessions.

It is important to acknowledge that the Air Force will not divest itself from any of the three accessions sources. ROTC, OTS and USAFA will all continue to be a critical part of the officer input equation. One must also remember that ROTC is an important outreach program for the Air Force. It helps to make the service an everyday part of colleges and universities nationwide.

Although some of the participating schools are not as academically challenging and do not hold the same pedigree as others, the Air Force relies on all of them to produce representative graduates of the society that they serve. The detachments are part of the academic communities, much like bases are to local townships. Attempts to reduce ROTC detachments have as much support in Congress as efforts to decrease infrastructure through Base Realignment and Closure Committee actions. Any ROTC detachment realignment or closure immediately becomes a complicated political issue and is not an approach to be taken lightly.

One realignment that the Air Force has more control of, however, is its officer accessions organizational structure. Managing officer production through two distinct leadership chains is inefficient and prevents true comparative analysis. The Air Force could improve overall

enterprise program oversight by realigning all officer production under a single organization. Such restructuring could be as simple as shifting the Holm Center from the commander of Air University to the superintendent of the Air Force Academy. This would align officer accessions and production under a single three-star command.

The other adjustment that the Air Force has control of is the trade space from within the three accessions sources. USAFA brings in the most competitive candidates, as judged by superior early promotion rates. It also produces those officers (along with ROTC) with the highest propensity for long-term service. USAFA must continue to be a major production source for future officer accessions even though it is the most expensive. It must look for ways to decrease costs while continuing to invest in targeted marketing campaigns to ensure each graduating class has every opportunity to represent a diverse America.

ROTC is the most economical source and produces the greatest relative diversity from within its accessions classes. Its graduates, however, still only enjoy average early promotion success. Although outside the scope of this study, the Holm Center must dive deeper into the different ROTC detachments to identify those that outperform others. This should be an annual process that adjusts relative contracted upper-class detachment sizes adding allocations to those universities that historically have a more positive impact on the Air Force and targets scholarship opportunities accordingly.

This particular finding echoes a similar recommendation from the 2013 Government Accountability Office's (GAO) report on ROTC program oversight. In the report, the GAO highlighted ROTC's failure to maintain performance measures to inform program cost-effectiveness and efficiency decisions.³² Such performance measures would also improve ROTC's ability to identify unique differences between the programs taught at each university.

OTS is still the only opportunity for real-time right-sizing of the annual accessions class and remains an important piece of the accessions puzzle. It is, however, more expensive than the non-scholarship ROTC program, has the lowest rating in regards to long term service, and records the lowest early-promotion rates for its officers. OTS is the trade space for future reductions in accessions strategies.

Accessions source trade space is not the only method that the Air Force can use to affect the system. It is able to change entrance criteria for those interested in joining the Air Force. The service can also increase the length of time officers must serve after their commissioning ceremonies. Both of these options have been employed in the past and are equally applicable in this discussion. If choosing this option, however, the Air Force must look at precedent to ensure any adjustments do not have the opposite effect. Likewise, the Air Force must ensure increased service commitments do not deter its brightest candidates away.

Additionally, the Air Force must invest in further study to better understand the officer demographic that is most likely to serve successfully for a full career. This study must go beyond simple accession sources and dive into type of person most likely to serve. At the same time, the Air Force must expand the study to examine whether or not those officers are also the ones that are making the Air Force a career. If the most capable officers are leaving for other opportunities in the civilian sector, then the Air Force is not doing enough to retain its best talent. A part of this study must include those that transition to the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, or civil service. Although a short-term loss for the active force, such transitions are a long-term win for the Total Force.

Conclusion

The acting SECAF's December 2013 message alerted the force to the possibility of end-strength reduction of up to 25,000 personnel.³³ This amounts to nearly a ten percent cut to the force and would necessitate an immediate adjustment to accessions strategies. Any near-term reductions to input levels must be done within the OTS program. Not only does OTS offer the opportunity for the most immediate accessions impact, but it will also avoid stripping the force of valuable ROTC and USAFA graduates. These are individuals with commitments to serve that have shown the greatest propensity for long-term service and enjoyed the greatest levels of early promotion success during their careers. Failure to use OTS as the near-term regulator will hurt the Air Force in the mid- and long-term.

For the mid-term, the Air Force must invest in additional study to better understand and differentiate between its ROTC detachments. The Air Force also must look at the Total Force and better understand length of service as it applies to those transitioning to the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. Additionally, the Air Force must look into more stringent entry requirements paired with increased service commitment lengths, especially for USAFA. Doing so will help ensure that the Air Force draws strong candidates and enjoys a more advantageous return on its officer training investment costs. Failure to capitalize on this study will create ill-informed future decisions.

A well-informed approach looking at both near- and mid-term action will enable the Air Force to take advantage of today's increasingly constrained environment. Accessing successful officers is not a new process for the service and today's challenges are no greater than those faced in the past. Through a careful study of today's data with reflection on lessons learned

throughout the years, the Air Force is in a tremendous position to ensure the success of its officer force for decades to come.



Notes

¹ United States Air Force, “Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development Fact Sheet,” <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/FactSheets/Display/tabid/224/Article/104477/jeanne-m-holm-center-for-officer-accessions-and-citizen-development.aspx> (accessed 04 October 2013).

² United States Air Force, “Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Fact Sheet,” <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/FactSheets/Display/tabid/224/Article/104478/air-force-reserve-officer-training-corps.aspx> (accessed 4 October 2013).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United States Air Force, “Officer Training School Fact Sheet,” <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/FactSheets/Display/tabid/224/Article/104479/officer-training-school.aspx> (accessed 4 October 2013).

⁶ Military Advantage, “Air Force OTS,” <http://www.forums.military.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/1721928695/m/2210079182001> (accessed 11 December 2013).

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