

# ON SURFACE WARFARE



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Summary of 2022 Officer Surveys



# Commander's Foreword

We know our people are our greatest strength and the asymmetric advantage we bring to conflict. Dismantling the barriers that prevent their success and satisfaction is the surest way to build connectedness in our Force, while producing more positive recruiting and retention outcomes. Over the past year we surveyed all Surface Warfare Officers (SWOs), from ensign and captain, to identify key workplace satisfiers and dissatisfiers with the primary goal of finding the friction in our officers' lives that detract from their personal experience, fleet-wide connectedness, and overall warfighting readiness.

Results from these surveys varied by rank; many trends were consistent regardless of paygrade. SWOs of every rank take great pride in working with junior Sailors. Our wardroom enjoys positive peer relationships, broadly has a strong bond with their commanding officers and appreciates the level of responsibility in their work. We also learned that fewer than half of our junior officers desire command. Most officers believe we are not retaining top talent. There is much frustration about our administrative requirements and the number of unqualified junior officers on each ship. Though the survey did not observe broad differences across officers of different races, we did see differences between men and women. There are challenges unique to women who serve as SWOs.

Additionally, these surveys informed us that sitting Major Commanders are the most satisfied with being a SWO, while lieutenants junior grade are the least satisfied. With the insights these surveys provide, we are coupling efforts with Navy Personnel Command's SWO Directorate, PERS-41, in establishing initiatives and evolving policies. We have taken action. Over the course of the last year, we reduced the number of officers serving on afloat staffs in lieu of shore duty, enacted single longer tour options for division officers, added new options for early command, and increased flexibility in department head timing. It is our priority to recruit and retain talented officers to lead our combat forces. Talented leadership retains talented subordinates, and passion begets passion within our profession.

Reflect on these results, with bias towards, "What can I do to make our SWO culture better?" Talk it out with your shipmates on what we got right, and wrong. Your community is listening. We hear you. In the conclusion, we have laid the actions we have taken since we have received this feedback to elevate the Surface Warfare wardroom, and we need your help. Encourage one another and build each other up. This is our community.

**We own our culture!**

# Executive Summary

## Background

To explore factors contributing to both workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction, Commander, Naval Surface Forces (CNSF) surveyed all Surface Warfare Officers (SWOs) from the rank of ensign to captain, receiving 2,550 responses (33% response rate). The senior officer survey solicited feedback from commanders and captains with 855 responses (61% response rate).

## Insights

These surveys sought to establish reasons SWOs separate from the Navy, whether and why they desire command, and factors contributing most to workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The surveys provided insight regarding how SWOs view organizational improvement initiatives, support programs, and the SWO career path.



## SWO Top Three

### Positive Influencers

- Working with enlisted Sailors and subordinates
- Challenges/responsibility with job
- Relationships with peers

### Negative Influencers

- Navy and SWO administrative requirements
- Equitable workload distribution
- Working hours during shipyards/maintenance availabilities

# Introduction

The junior and senior officer surveys informed the SWO community about its members' perspective on serving. The vast majority of SWOs enjoy working with junior Sailors, their relationships with their peers, appreciate the amount of challenge in their work, and take pride in the amount of responsibility in their jobs. Conversely, both junior and senior officers are frustrated with the amount of friction caused by administrative tasks, believe work is not equitably distributed, and are displeased with the working hours during shipyard availabilities. Overall, SWOs are content with compensation, educational benefits, the retirement system, and healthcare. On the other hand, SWOs are less satisfied with promotion equity due to performance. Positively, junior officers believe that senior officers show respect toward Sailors with diverse backgrounds.

This report discusses results regarding desire for command and factors influencing junior and senior officer satisfaction. Largely, and logically, satisfaction with the Navy, desire to remain a SWO, and aspirations for command all increase with years of commissioned service. Officers are most satisfied serving as a SWO when serving in Major Command, and least satisfied as a lieutenant junior grade (LTJG). LTJGs are the most likely to desire to separate from the Navy, the least likely to desire command, and the most likely to report dissatisfaction with serving as a SWO.

Many Officers are likely making the decision to either stay in the Navy or remain a SWO as a LTJG. LTJGs are serving as either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> tour division officers on ships, and their satisfaction is most influenced by administrative burdens, equitable workload, and work performance recognition. Additionally, 71% of LTJGs stated that the possibility of serving on an afloat staff after their second division officer tours amplified their desire to leave the SWO community.

After serving as a first tour department head, satisfaction with serving as a SWO correlates positively with increases in years of service, higher rank, and selecting for career milestones.

# On Command

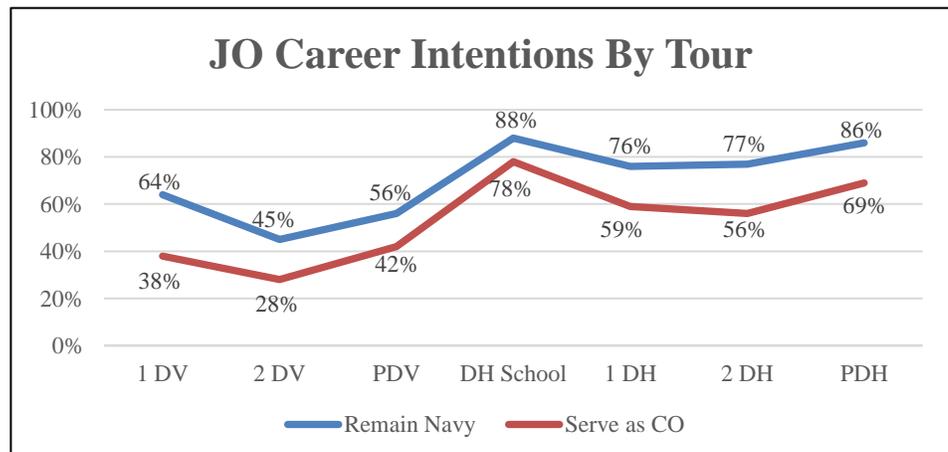
Both surveys sought to measure the desire officers have to serve as Commanding Officers. Overall, 44% of junior officers and 65% of senior officers are interested in serving as a Commanding Officer. The top factors detracting junior officers from pursuing command were too many requirements, lack of control, time away from home, high stress, and a toxic culture within the SWO community.



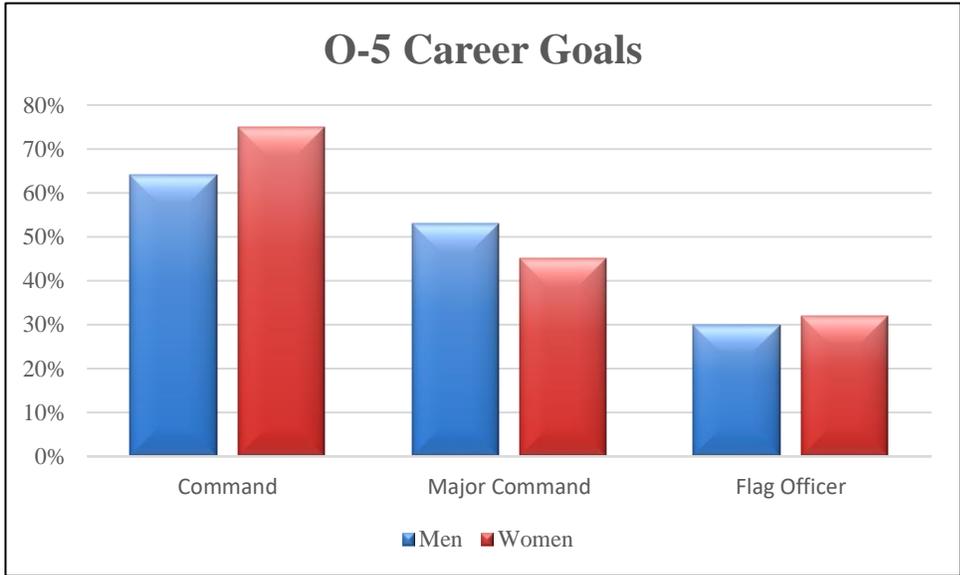
Desire for command is lowest for LTJGs, who generally have between two to four years of commissioned service. Additionally, desire to leave the Navy is highest among LTJGs. The desire for command then climbs, peaking for officers who are currently in department head school (78%) with approximately seven to eight

years of commissioned service. Desire for command is similar for both white and non-white officers (45% and 41%, respectively), but is markedly higher in men than women (47% and 34%, respectively).

The decision to leave the Navy is strongly correlated with the desire to pursue command. The junior officer survey suggests that JOs are making the decision to both leave the Navy and whether or not to pursue command during their second division officer tours. Interest in command and remaining in the Navy peaks on shore duty (both after division officer and department head tours).

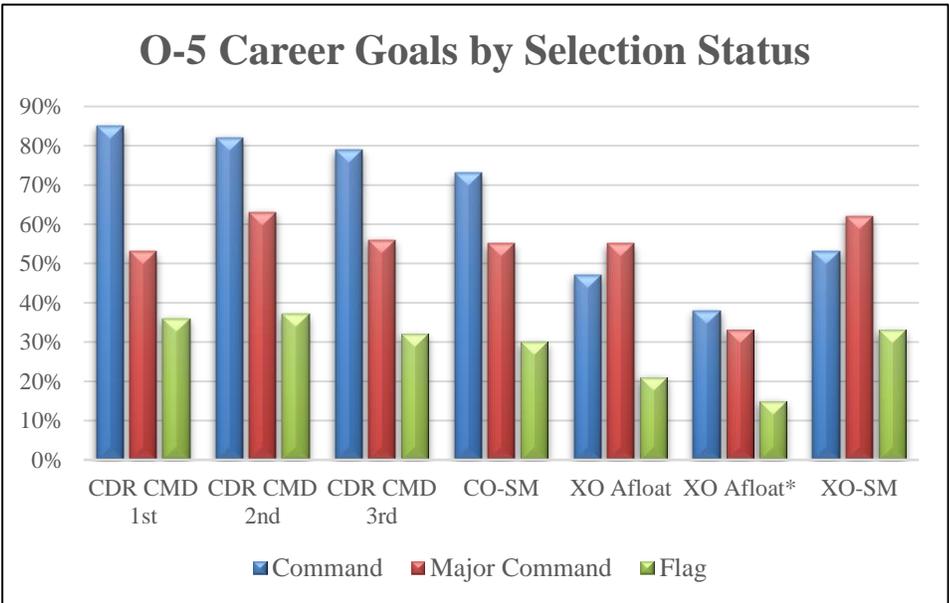


In the senior officer survey, respondents were more likely to desire command (overall, 65% of Commanders desire command). Unlike their junior officers counterparts, senior officer women were slightly more likely than men to desire command (75% compared to 65%, respectively) but less likely to desire major command (45% to 53%, respectively). White Officers and non-White Officers had the same desire for both command and major command, with non-White Officers hoping to attain flag rank at a



higher rate than White officers (46% versus 32%, respectively).

Career aspirations were also influenced by milestone selection. Respondents were asked which milestone they were selected for and when they were selected



(Commander Command, Command Special Mission, XO Afloat, XO Afloat\*, and XO Special Mission).

# Junior Officers

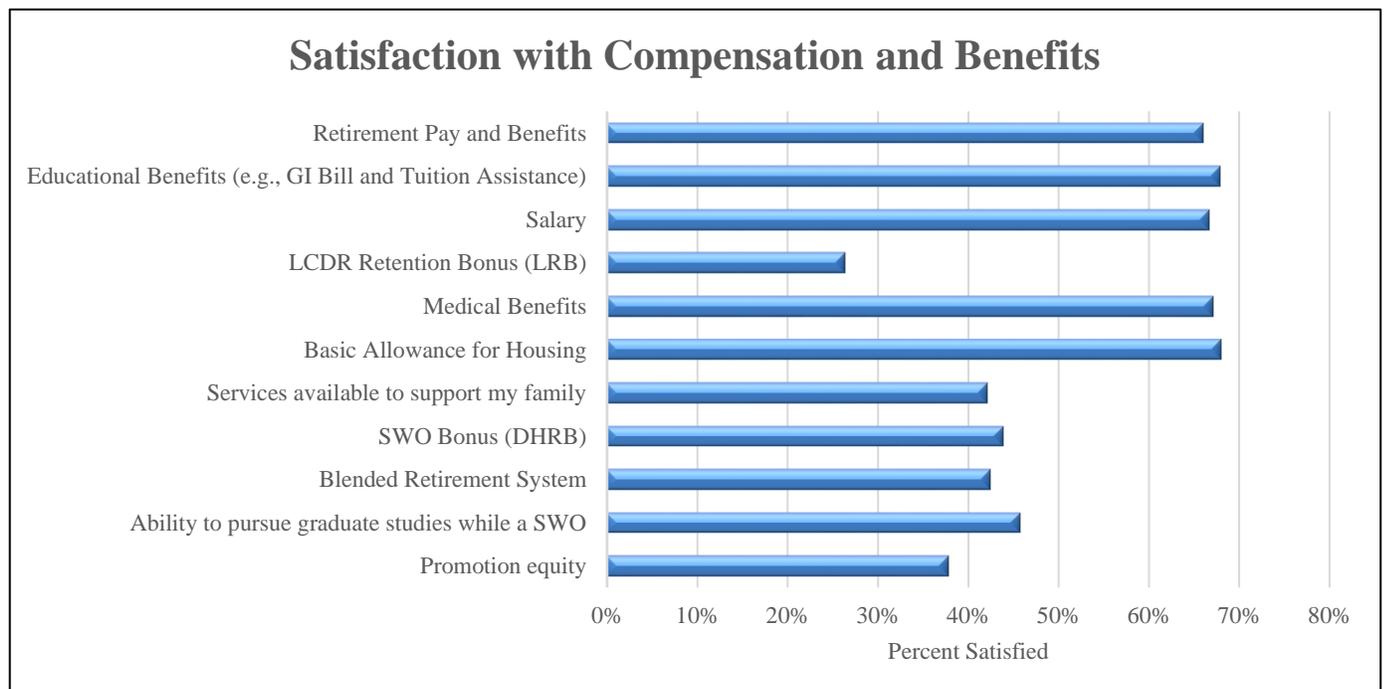
## Highlights

- *Accession Training is improving*
- *WTI would be more appealing with graduate school options*
- *Believe that SWO talent is leaving before Department Head Tours*
  - *Interested in Career Path Specialization*
  - *Too many non-qualified JOs on ships*

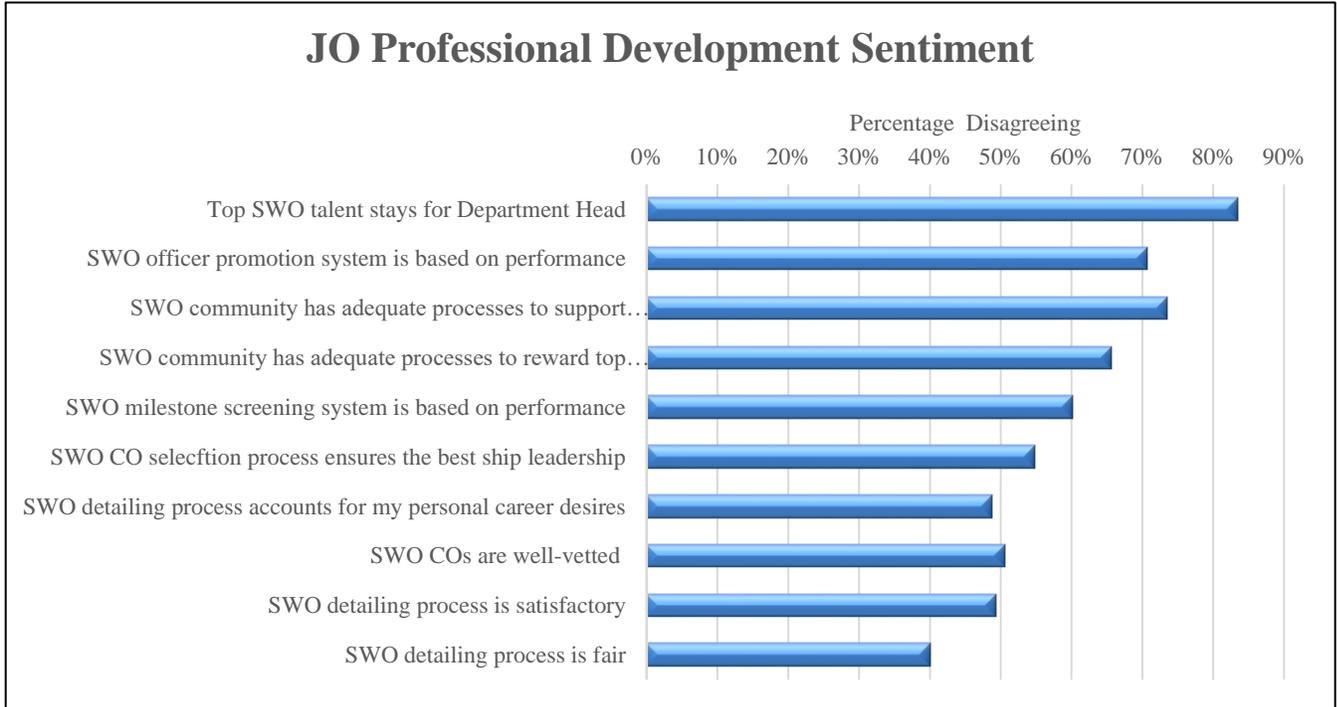
## *Professional Development Sentiment*

Both surveys asked questions using a Likert Scale (respondents read a statement and expressed how much they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement).

The majority of junior officers are satisfied with their retirement plan, salary, medical insurance, and housing allowance. JOs are less satisfied with bonuses, family support services, the blended retirement system, and graduate school options.

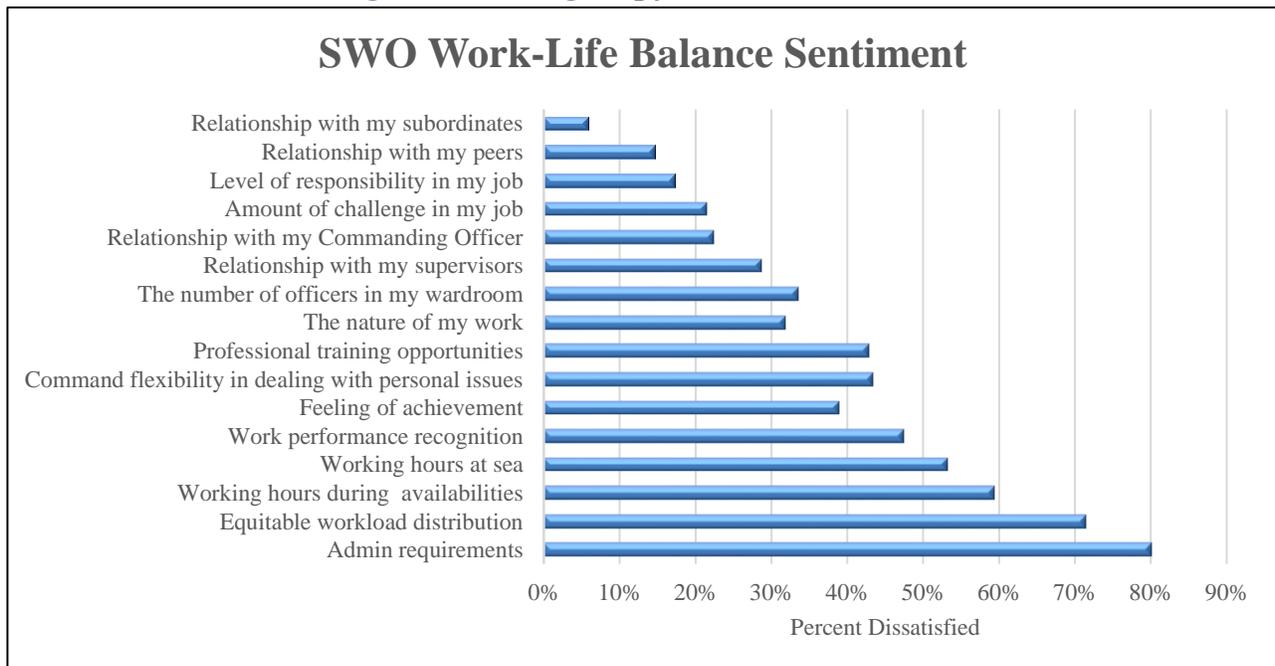


Most Junior Officers (83%) do not believe that top talent remains to serve as department heads or that the promotion system is based on actual performance (71%). These perspectives are most positive in ensigns and lieutenant commanders and most negative with lieutenant junior grades.

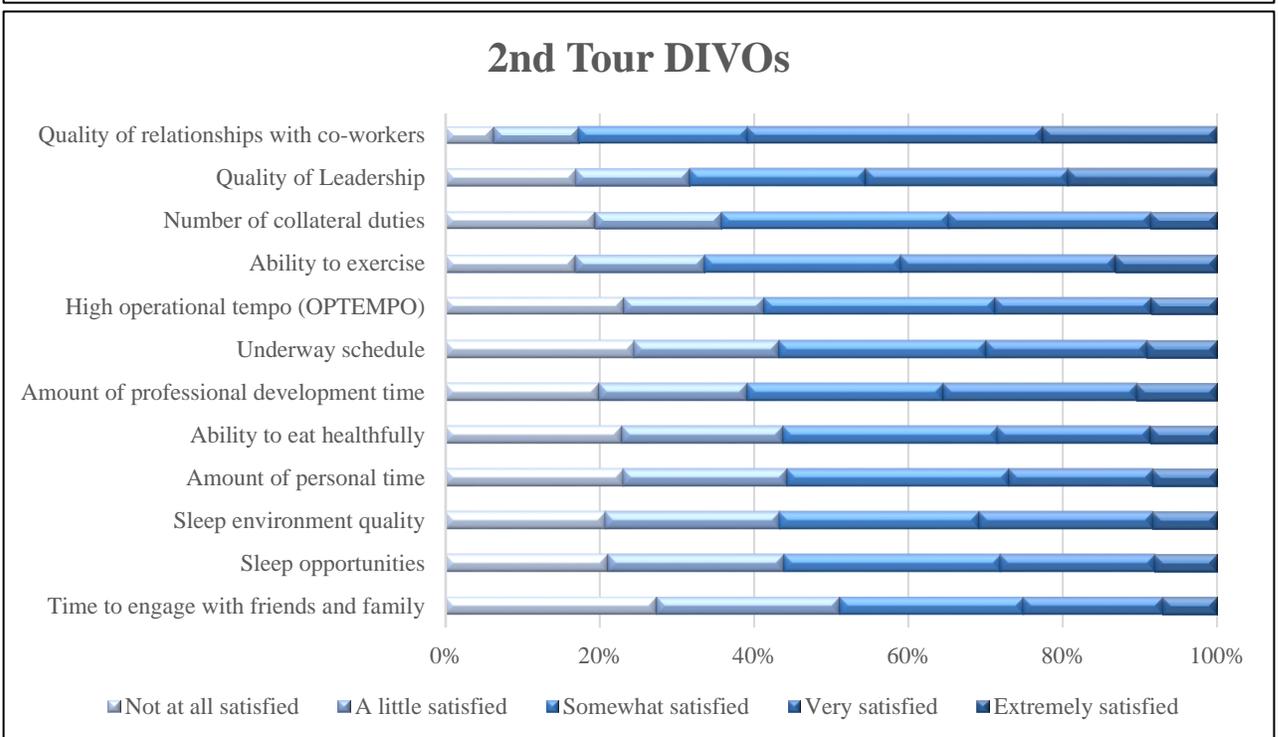
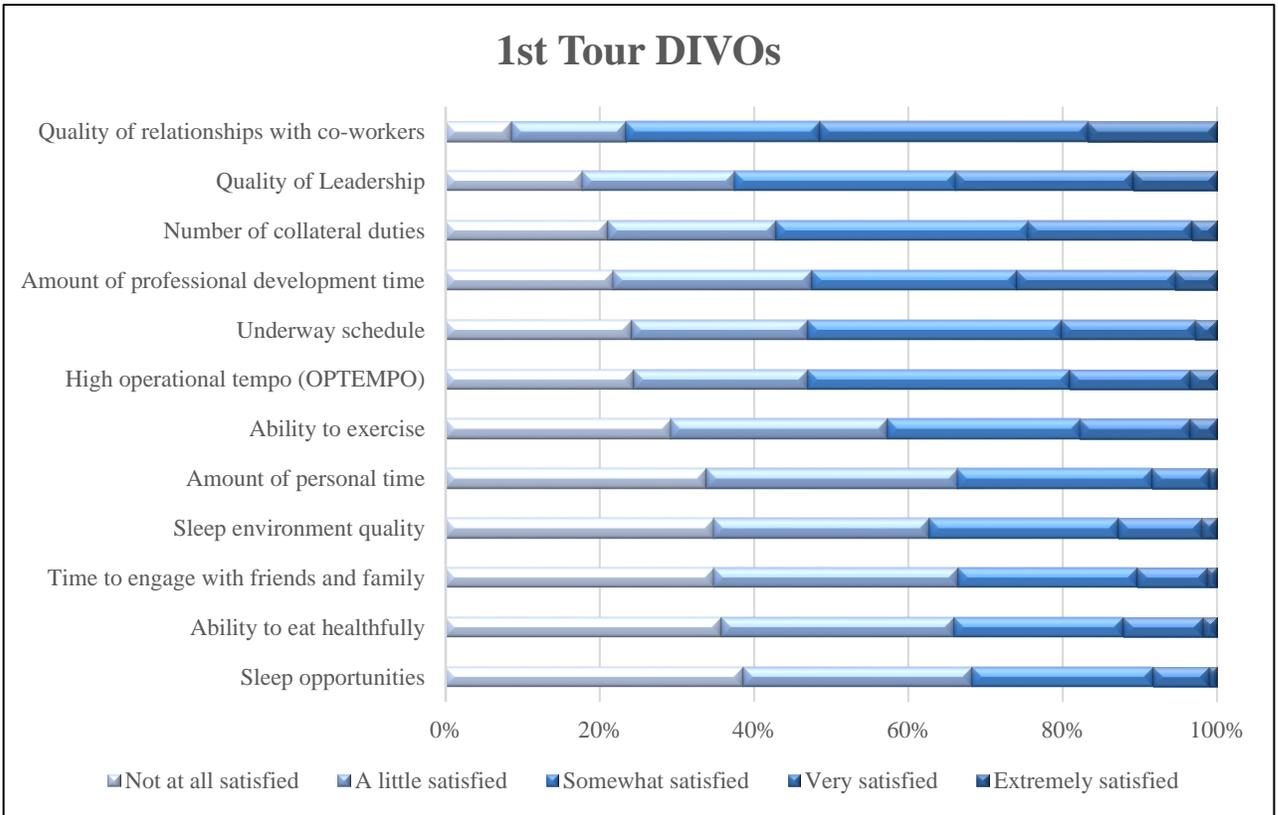


### *Quality of Life Satisfaction*

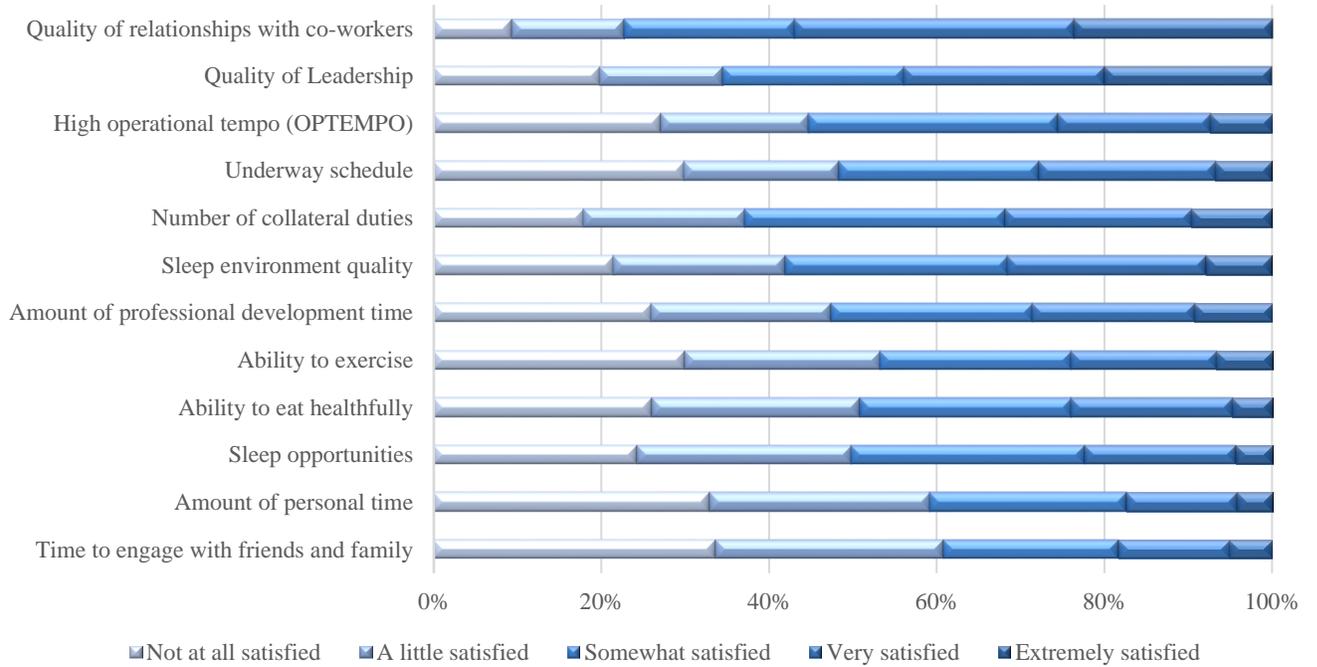
When asked about satisfaction with work-life balance, the majority of SWOs are satisfied with interpersonal relationships at work (subordinates, peers, Commanding Officer, and supervisors). Most JOs are dissatisfied with administrative requirements, workload distribution, and working hours during shipyard availabilities.



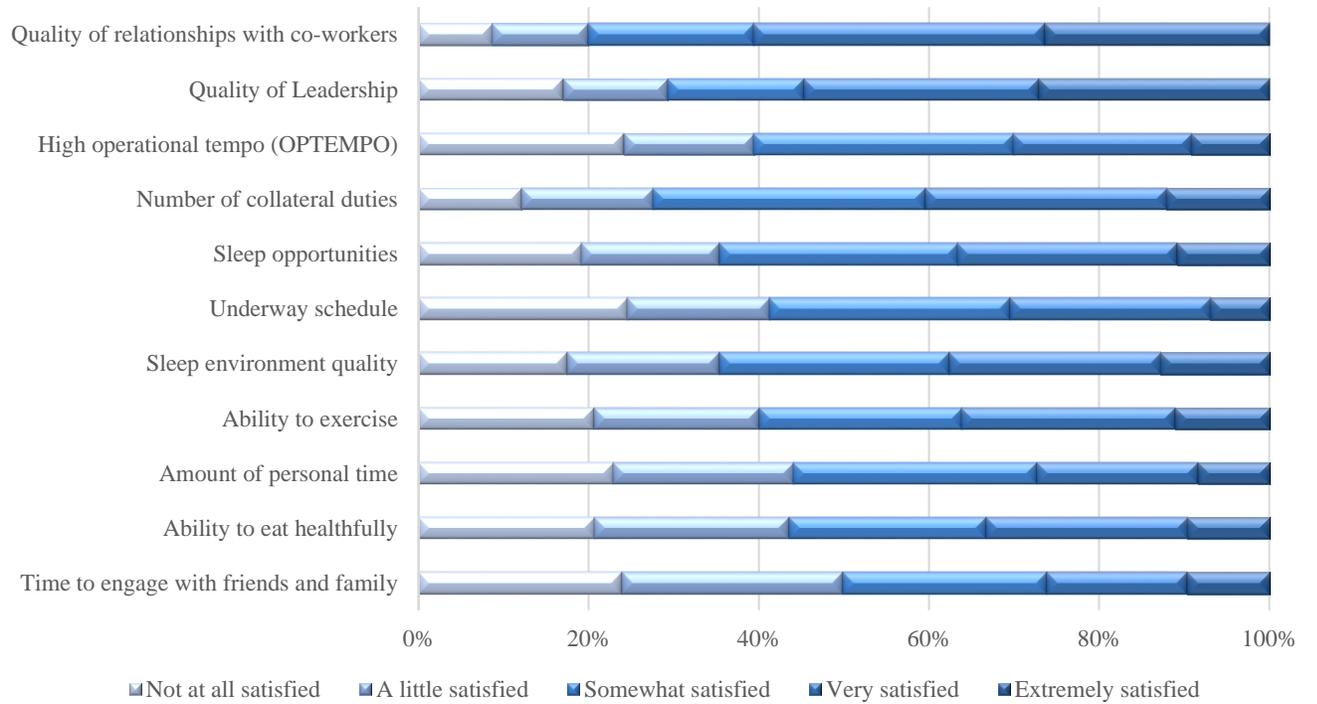
Exploring the elements affecting crew endurance, or burn out, relationships had the most positive effect on all junior officers. Opportunities for sleep, time to engage with friends and family, ability to exercise, and healthy eating options had the largest negative effect across all junior officers.



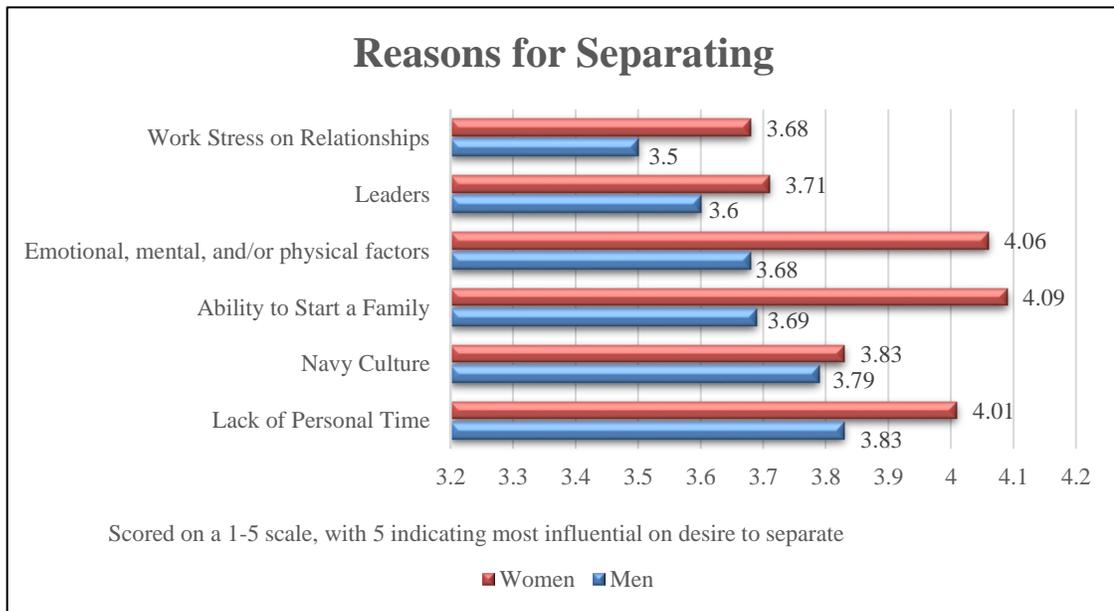
## 1st Tour Department Heads



## 2nd Tour Department Heads



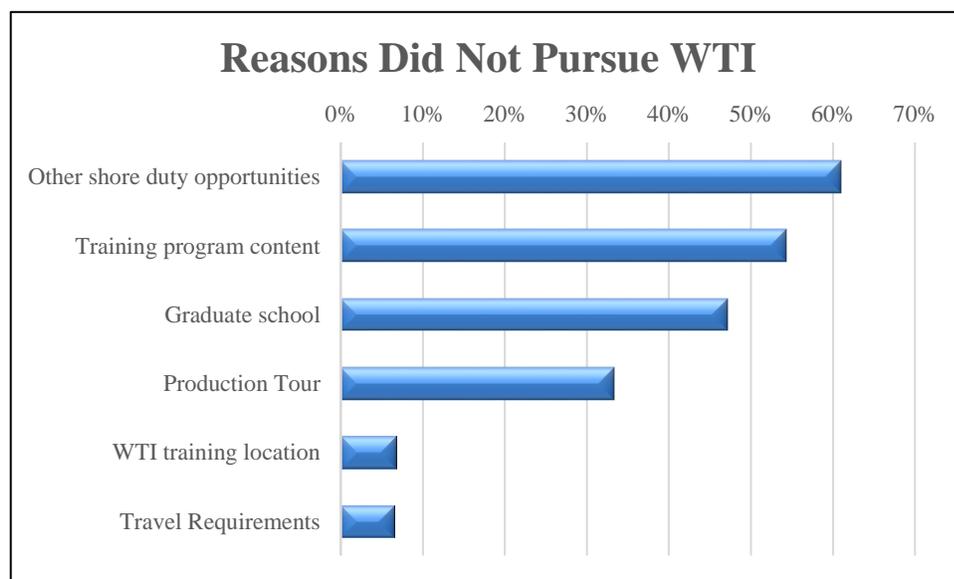
Junior officers were asked which reasons contribute the most to their desire to separate from the Navy. While men and women had similar trends, women expressed a stronger overall desire to separate from the service, with the ability to start a family as the leading reason why they plan to leave the Navy.



## Warfare Tactics Instructors

Junior Officers were asked about their perceptions of the Warfare Tactics Instructor (WTI) program. Of the 2,550 respondents, 270 applied for the WTI program, 94% were accepted, and 76% of those accepted planned to complete the WTI training and production tour.

Overall, the reasons officers either did not apply or did not complete the training was due to pursuing other shore duty options, a desire to attend graduate school, or lack of interest in the training curriculum.

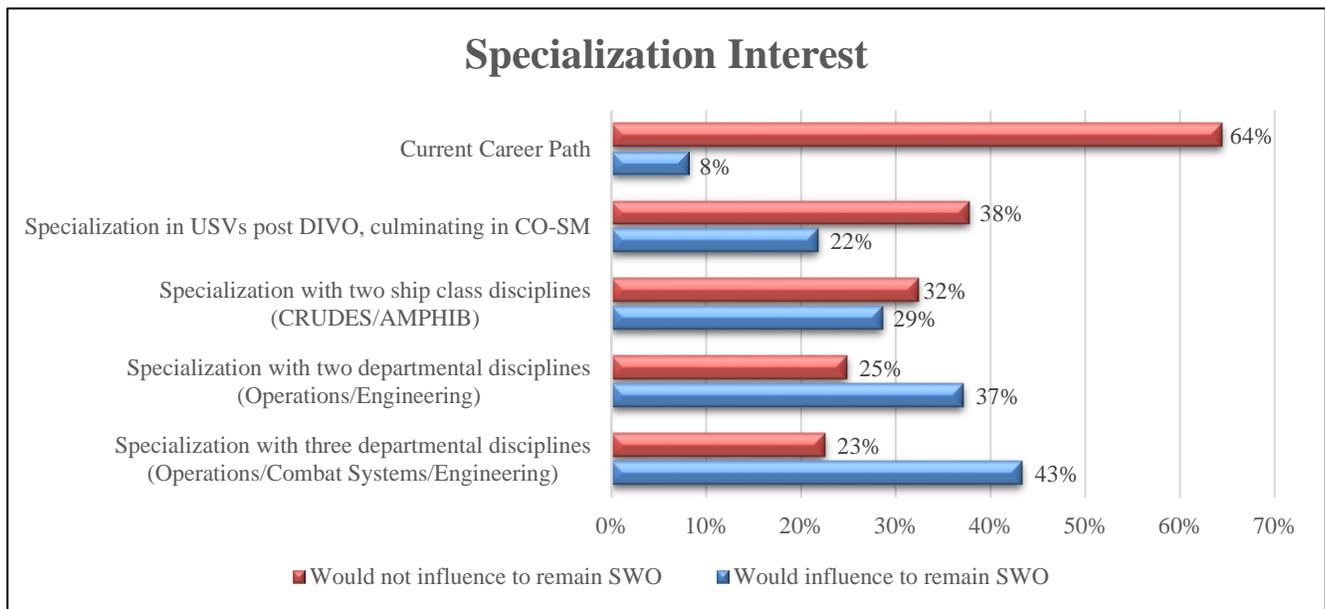


Historically, the WTI training pipeline made attending graduate school challenging for Junior Officers. To explore how much this barrier has influenced the number of applicants, respondents were asked whether or not the guarantee of graduate school after completing WTI training would positively influence their decision to become a WTI. 65% of junior officers stated that the opportunity to attend a graduate school of their choice would entice them to become WTIs, while 47% stated the opportunity to attend Naval Postgraduate School would drive them to become WTIs.

## Career Specialization

The survey asked Junior Officers about their interest regarding changes to the SWO career path. Specifically, the survey asked whether or not changes to the SWO career path (i.e. specialization) would influence their desire to continue serving as a SWO. Additionally, the question stated that specialization would not decrease sea time. Junior officers were provided five options:

- Current Career Path
- Specialization in USVs post DIVO, culminating in CO-SM
- Specialization with two ship class disciplines (CRUDES/AMPHIB)
- Specialization with two departmental disciplines (Operations/Engineering)
- Specialization with three departmental disciplines (Operations/Combat Systems/Engineering)



# Senior Officers

## Highlights

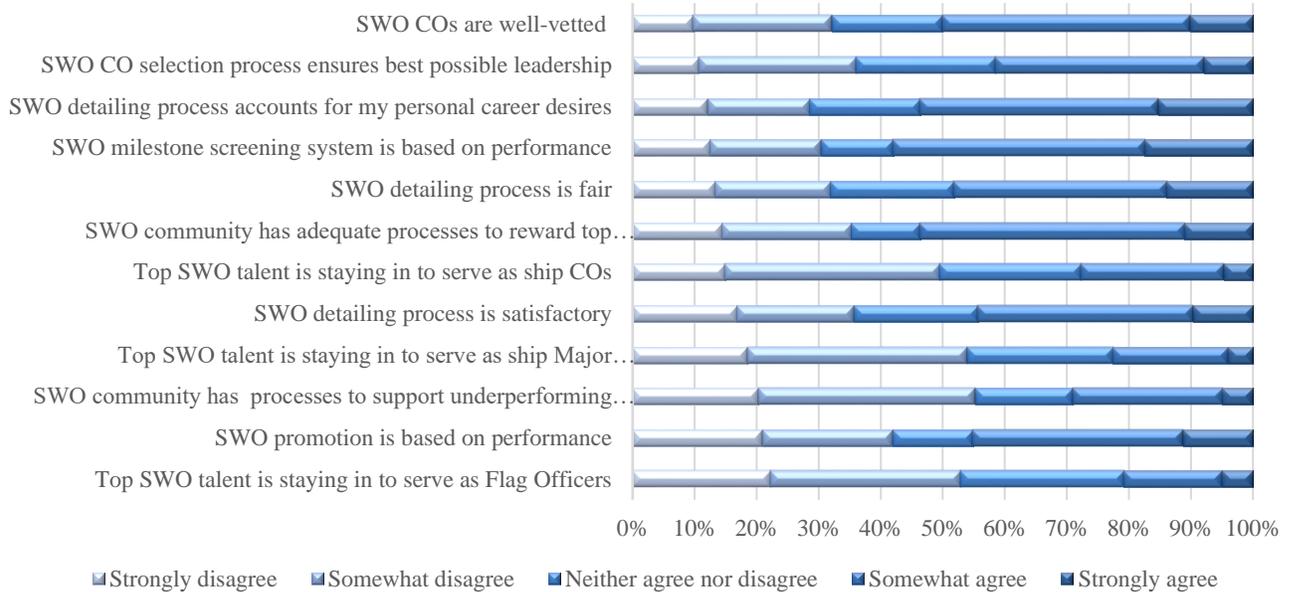
- *Most senior officers plan to serve beyond 20 years*
- *Most are interested in command and major command*
- *Senior Officers are dissatisfied with admin requirements*
- *Most feel prepared, with their career paths, to be XOs and COs*
- *Dissatisfied with Senior Officer Retention Bonus*

Senior officers, overall, are satisfied with SWO life. Similar to junior officers, senior officers enjoy their relationships with subordinates and peers, the amount of challenge in their jobs, and the nature of their work. Additionally, senior officers are overwhelmingly satisfied with educational benefits, the retirement system, salary, and medical insurance. Unlike junior officers, senior officers view promotion equity more positively. Of all senior officer respondents, 80% flected up to CO after their XO tours, 80% believe the SWO community is under-resourced, and the average time as XO was 16 months, as CO was 18 months, and as a Major Commander was nearly 19 months.

## *Professional Development Sentiment*

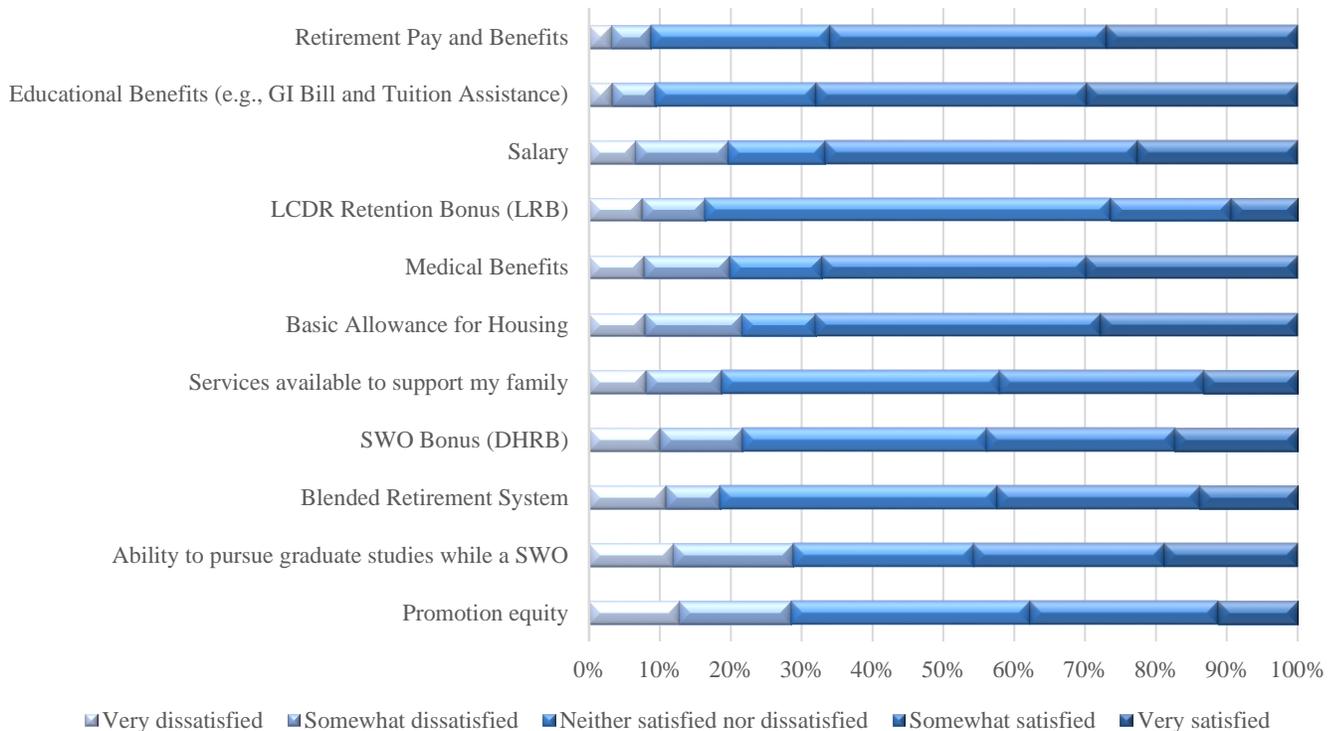
Like junior officers, senior officers are skeptical that the SWO community is retaining top talent for leadership positions (although more optimistic than JOs). Additionally, senior officers are more positive regarding CO selection, detailing, and milestone screening than Junior Officers.

## Senior Officer Professional Development Sentiment



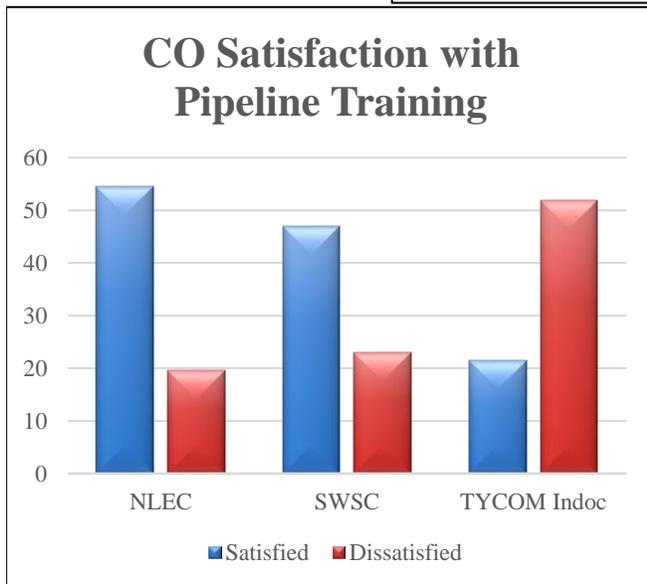
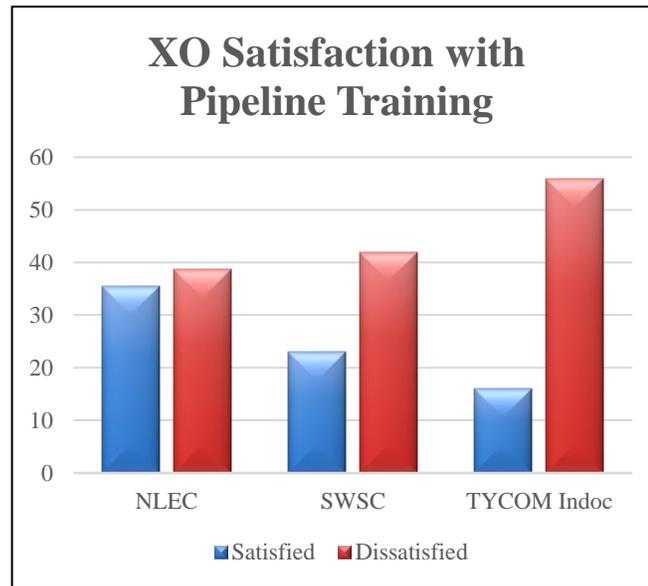
Senior officers are satisfied with total compensation and benefits, however, they are dissatisfied with the Senior Officer Retention Bonus (SORB). Only 27% of senior officers intend to take the SORB, 31% are satisfied with the SORB, and 79% would prefer a professional pay (i.e., “SWO pay”) that would increase based on years of service, instead of the current bonus structure.

## Compensation and Benefits Satisfaction



## Perspectives on Training

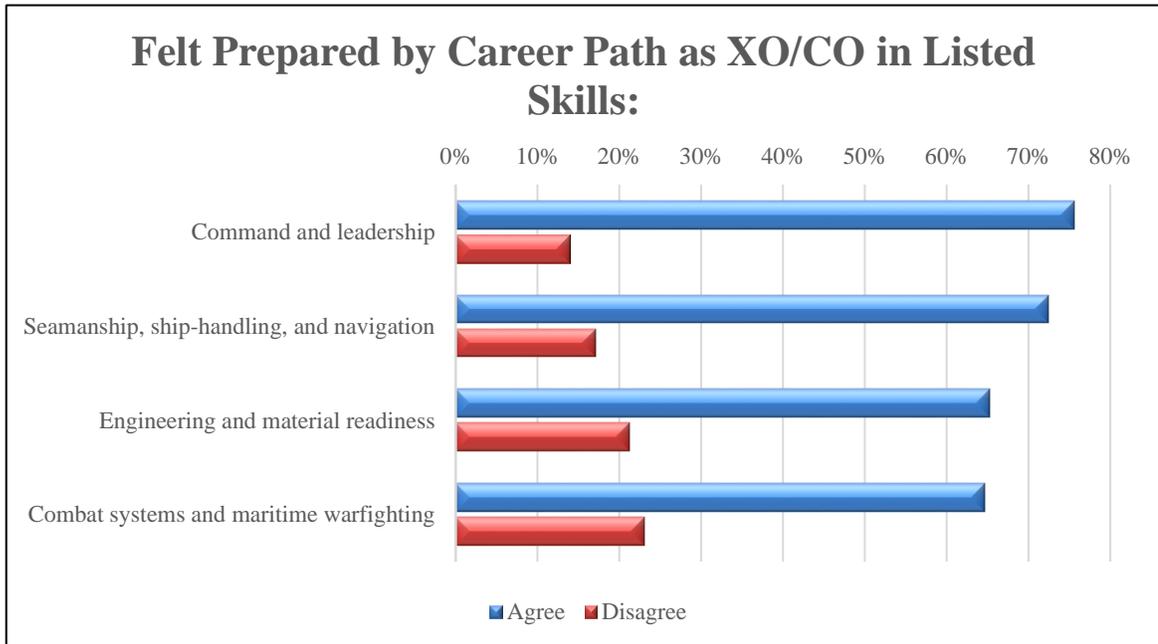
Senior officers were asked about the training they received prior to assuming duties as XO, CO, and as a Major Commander. Senior Officers believe that the current SWO career path arms XOs and COs with the necessary skills in leadership, seamanship, engineering, material readiness, combat systems, and tactics. COs felt most satisfied with their training before taking command, and XOs were the least satisfied.



Senior officers were asked how well the current SWO career path (two division officer and two department head tours) prepared them to perform the following tasks as XO and CO:

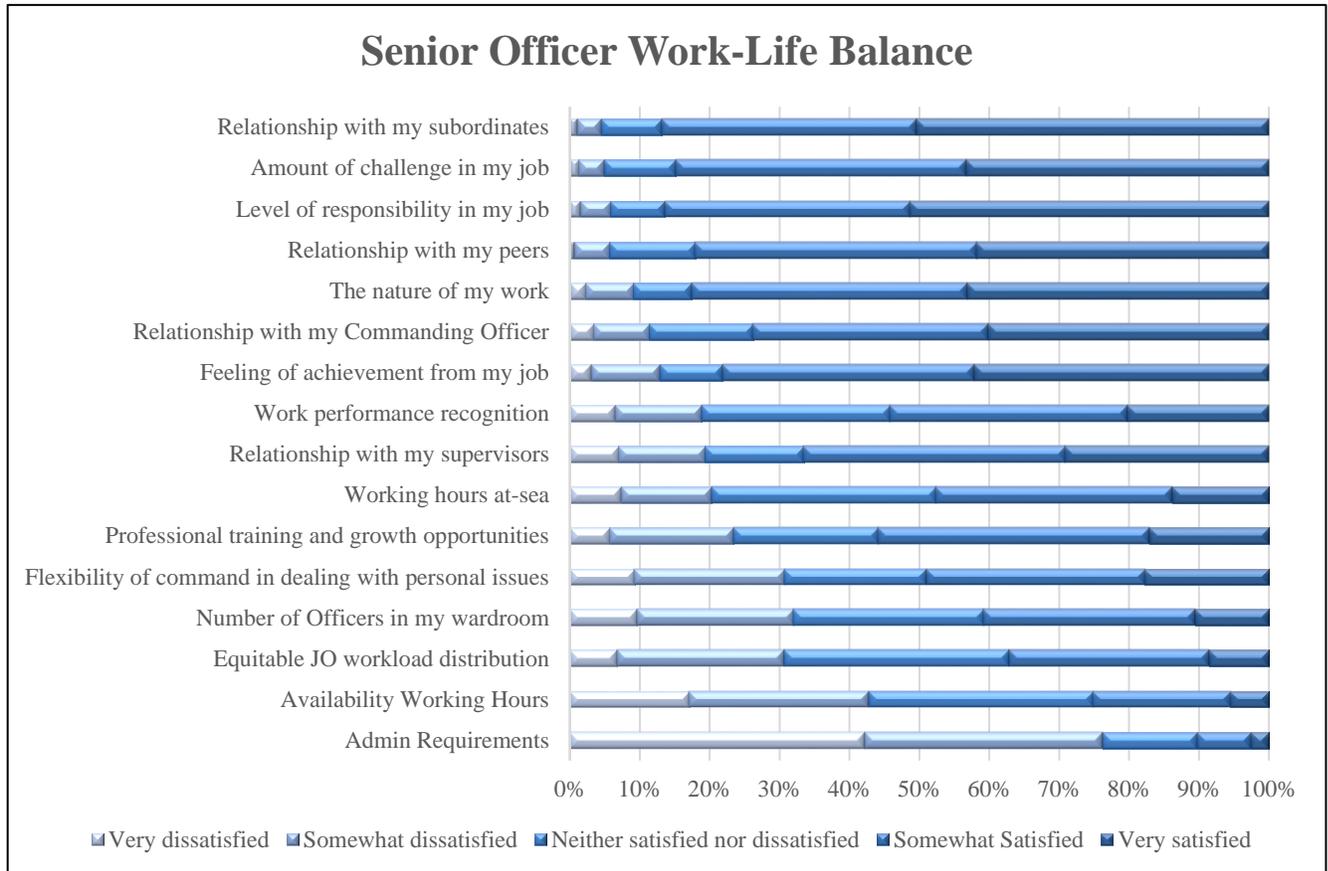
- Seamanship, ship-handling, and navigation
- Combat systems and maritime warfighting
- Engineering and material readiness
- Command and leadership

Senior officers felt most prepared in command in leadership, followed closely by seamanship, ship-handling, and navigation.



## Quality of Life Satisfaction

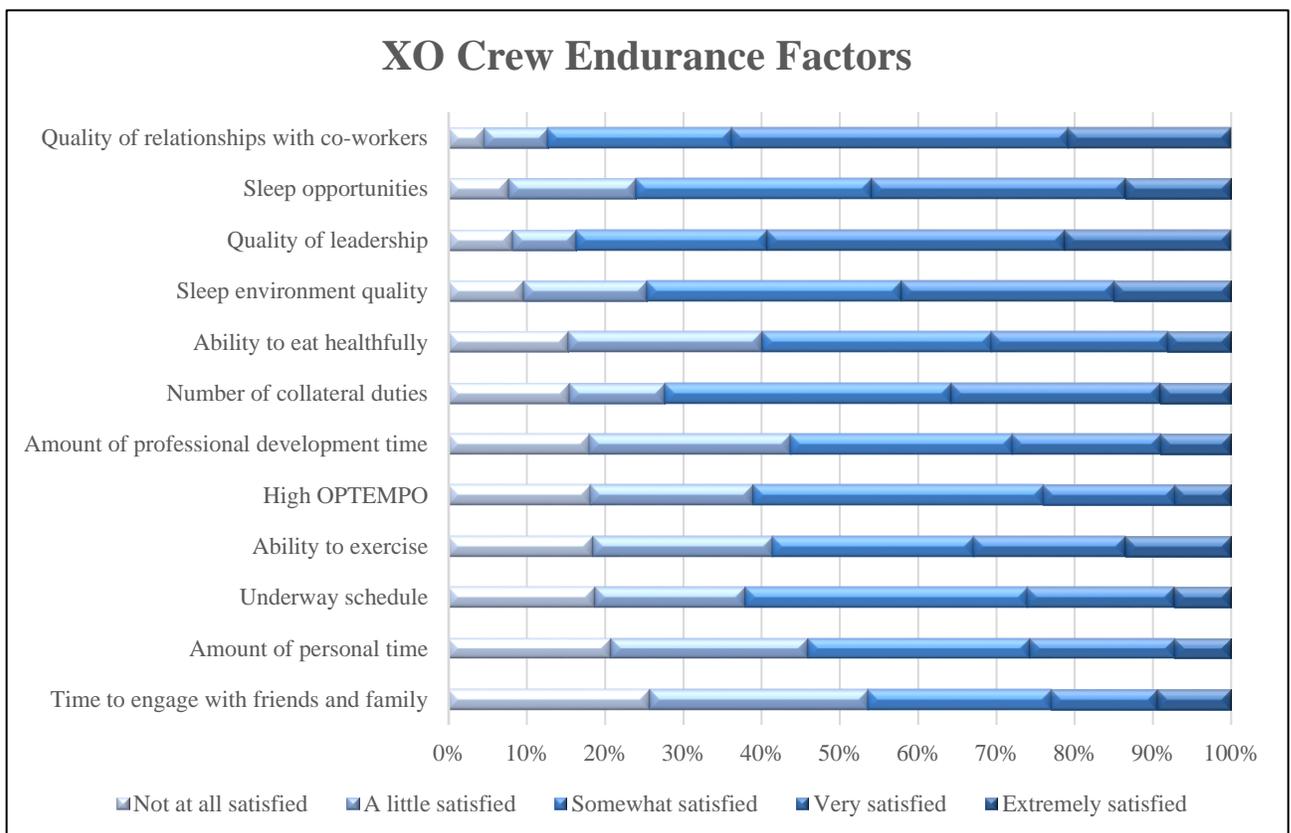
When asked about satisfaction with work-life balance, the majority of SWOs are satisfied with interpersonal relationships at work (subordinates, peers, Commanding Officer, and supervisors). Additionally, senior officers appreciate the level of responsibility in their jobs and the nature of their work. On the other hand, when asked a different way, senior officers again articulated frustration with admin requirements and working hours during maintenance availabilities.



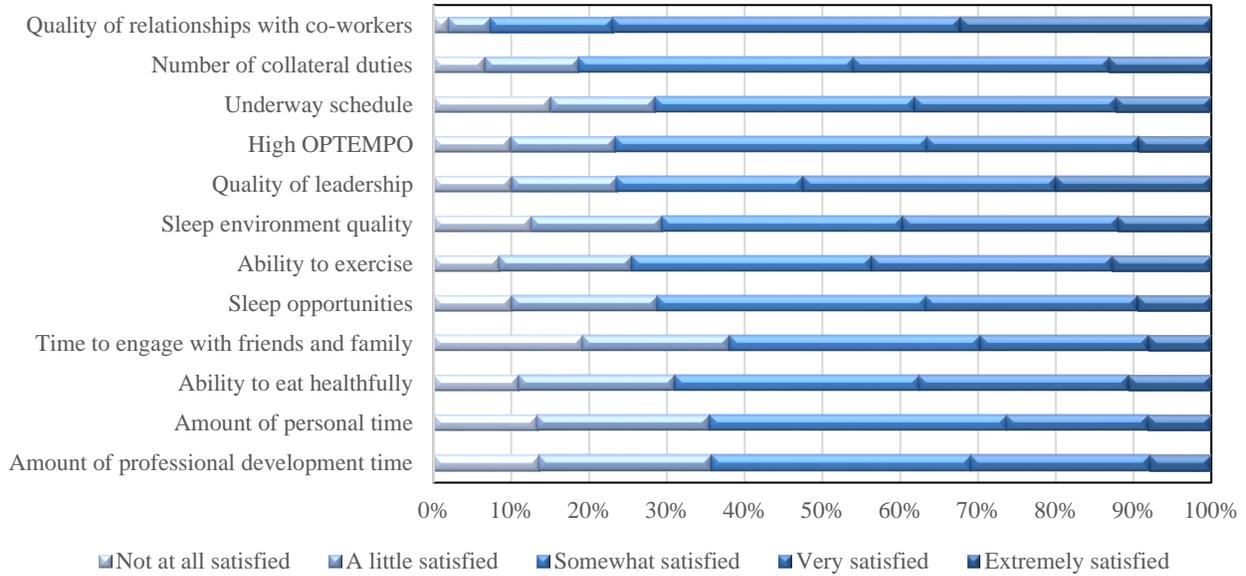
## Crew Endurance

Senior officers were asked to rate their satisfaction with different aspects of their jobs and how they influenced their overall ability to perform their duties, called crew endurance factors. These factors may either positively or negatively affect an individual's burn out.

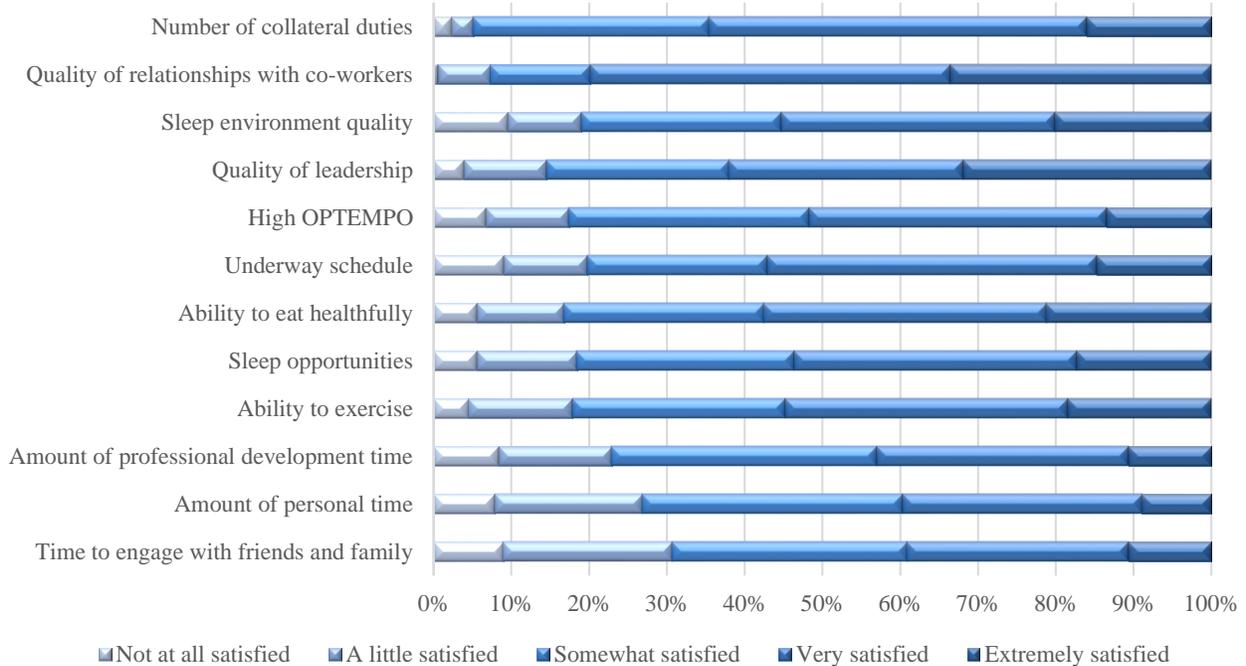
XOs, COs, and Major Commanders had similar views regarding factors influencing crew endurance. Relationships with coworkers was viewed very positively by all three cohorts. XOs and Major Commanders were more satisfied with sleep opportunities than COs. Across all three groups, time to engage with friends and family as well as personal time was viewed the most negatively.



## CO Crew Endurance Factors



## Major Commander Crew Endurance Factors



# Conclusion

This report integrated responses from two independent surveys of Surface Warfare Officers with the aim of better understanding the factors that influence their decisions to pursue leadership positions, remain in the Navy, and their overall satisfaction. By matching responses collected from the junior officer survey and the senior officer survey, a cross-sectional design allowed inferences to be made about the experience of officers throughout their careers. By examining rank as both a binary (i.e. junior officer vs senior officer) and continuous (i.e., O-1 through O-6), multiple analytical approaches provided insight into what aspects of their work most impacted their interest in staying on active-duty.

## *Interest in Serving as CO*

Among the officers who responded to the surveys, the average response to the primary outcome of leadership interest indicated that the majority of officers had “little interest” or were “unsure” if they were interested in serving as a CO. While this result can be interpreted as a negative reflection on the nature of the work completed by the SWO community, disentangling the effect of recent or temporary developments from the general nature of SWO leadership is challenging.

## *Demographics*

While demographic variables were not a primary focus of this report, differences in leadership interest were observed based on rank and gender, while none were observed based on race, ethnicity, having children, or having ended a significant relationship during an officer’s career. For rank, the result is unsurprising due to the fact that senior rank implies that that these officers are either temporally closer to serving as CO or have already served as a CO. As for gender, the finding that women are less interested in serving as CO aligns with previous research on the low prevalence of women in military leadership (Patten & Parker, 2011), which is a disparity that is often attributed to perceived gender roles in the military (e.g., Boyce & Herd, 2003). Additionally, the relative scarcity of women in military leadership roles may discourage junior women from pursuing leadership roles, which is a cognitive phenomenon in which minority groups avoid pursuits in which they are at risk of confirming a stereotype about their group (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

### *“Love of the Job” or Management of Job Demand-Resources*

Among the job-related questions that predicted interest in serving as CO, satisfaction with the “nature of my work,” “feeling of achievement,” and “working hours at-sea” contributed substantially. Based on the Job Demand-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), employees facing excessive job demands with limited resources must *strategically* resort to compensatory strategies (e.g., additional effort or energy) to avoid their overuse and the associated burnout that accompanies overuse (Hockey, 1997). Employees who can successfully manage and sustain their limited compensatory strategies during high-demand/low-resource exercises demonstrate increased motivation, engagement, growth, and learning (Demerouti, 2001), which would explain why officers who highly endorse satisfaction with “nature of my work” or “feelings of achievement” would also highly endorse an interest in serving as CO. Further exploring the strategies and experiences of individuals who rate these items highly may yield opportunities for additional training or intervention.

### *Family Support*

Unsurprisingly, items pertaining to family benefits and support contributed meaningfully to officers’ interest in serving as CO. Specifically, the ability to start or grow a family, family supportiveness, spouse preference for member’s job field, and Basic Allowance for Housing all provided unique additions to the model. These results align with previous research showing strong ties between the availability of family benefits and turnover intentions (Thompson and Prottas, 2005). This previous research also highlighted the importance of perceived control and flexibility in organizational family support programs, which further adds justification for additional resourcing of these initiatives.

### *Perceptions of SWO Life*

Two job-related items pertaining to SWO-specific processes were found to contribute meaningfully to leadership interest: agreement that top SWO talent is being retained and indicating that a low SWO bonus pay plays a small part in your retention decision. This result aligns with the research literature related to Organizational Support Theory, which posits that employees’ perceptions of organizational support (e.g., adequate bonuses) and their positive upward social comparisons (e.g., identification with talented officers who are promoted) lead to attitudes and behaviors that are beneficial to the organization (e.g., retention; Vardaman et al., 2016). Additional publication and transparency in promotion processes may, therefore, be ripe opportunities for Navy leaders to capitalize on this finding.

### *Limitations*

This study has many limitations that temper the impact of conclusions. Foremost among these limitations is the fact that all data collected were self-report, which can be negatively impacted by erroneous recollections or over-favorable self-evaluations. Second, the comparisons of ranks were cross-sectional, which can distort the conclusions about how officers' attitudes may change over their careers. Further, senior officers' proximity to serving as a CO or the fact that they have already served as CO makes the primary outcome (Interest in Serving as CO) have inherently different interpretation by the junior vs. senior officers. Finally, the use of the outcome of Interest in Serving as CO as a proxy for planned retention does not account for non-CO senior positions that some junior officers may be envisioning when they indicate that they are not interested in being CO (i.e., they plan to stay, but not be CO).

Additionally, this is the first survey of this depth we have ever conducted. Some of our findings (e.g. LTJG dissatisfaction) needs to be considered with contributing factors (COVID-19 pandemic challenges, changes to division officer sequencing) and future surveys will be compared to these findings.

# So What?

These surveys captured the sentiment of over 3,300 SWOs and we're using this feedback to galvanize our connectedness and retention efforts. Many, if not most, of our officers are making the decision to leave the Navy as LTJGs and we need these officers leading our ships. In the last year, we have rolled out various initiatives focusing on division officers. For example, at our first Junior Officer Training Symposium (JOTS), we decided to decrease the number of officers we are sending to afloat staffs after their second division officer tours. Below, we have captured the majority of our changes:

## **Division Officers:**

- Expanded Career Path Flexibility
  - o 1st Division Officer tour lengths based on SWO qualification and OOD hours
  - o Single Long Tour (SLT) option of 36 months
  - o Department Head School flexibility (between 5-9 YCS)
- Decreasing Afloat Post Division Officer Tour assignments
  - o 2nd tour Division Officers may serve on afloat staffs
- LT Early Command Opportunities
  - o TF59 and USDIV ONE Task Group COs

## **Department Heads:**

- Prospective Engineering Officer training offered to non-EOOW qualified Department Head students
- SLT Chief Engineers
- LCDR Early Opportunities
  - o Naval Connectors Element Command COs

## **Post Department Heads:**

- DESRON and PHIBRON N3 spot promoted to CDR, N4 is a recruited Chief Engineer from the squadron
- 100% fill for service War College Assignments (prioritizing graduate education)

## **Warfare Tactics Instructors (WTI) Graduate Education:**

- WTI Scholar: With increased career path flexibility, more opportunities are now available to complete graduate education, WTI training, and their associated production tour before Department Head school, leveraging relationships with NPS, USD, SDSU, and other institutions.
- Course consolidation: All WTI COIs will transition to be one location in San Diego to ensure content consistency across the courses and improve geographic stability.

All of our efforts to retain our best warfighters hinges on Sailors having positive relationships with their leadership. Every one of us, from the Type Commander to individual unit COs, must engage our wardrooms, forge connectedness, and create a culture that encourages esprit de corps. Your input is critical to our success! We will complete similar surveys every couple of years to see how we are trending and areas where we can improve. We need all of you, as valued members of our community, to continue providing us feedback about how we can create the very best Surface Warfare Officers in the history of our Navy. Thanks for all that you do, sail safe, and I'll see you on the waterfront.

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