The armed services prefer to recruit high quality youth because they perform better and have lower attrition rates. Yet competition for this group is increasing because of fundamental changes in the civilian opportunities that these youth face. One of the most dramatic of these changes is the enormous increase in the relative returns from attending college that have occurred over the last 20 years. This report summarizes the findings of the first year of a two-year project that seeks to provide input necessary for the development and expansion of programs intended to improve the services’ ability to compete against post-secondary institutions and subsequent civilian skilled employment. Specifically, the report examines trends in college attendance and the economic returns from attending college, describes the options that the military currently offers to combine service and college, and enumerates the types of issues that would need to be considered in developing and expanding recruiting programs that target college-bound youth. The report should be of interest to those concerned about military recruiting as well as to the larger defense manpower research community.

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