

5. The Role of Education in the Military Promotion Process

From the preceding sections, it is evident that military officers and enlisted servicemembers have many opportunities for pursuing and financing their post-secondary education. From the services' perspectives, the DoD has many reasons for being willing to finance formal education for servicemembers. The military might gain at least three types of utility from educating its forces: (1) increased productivity, (2) longer retention, and (3) increased morale. Admittedly, such gains can be fairly intangible and are difficult to measure, as evidenced by the limited research published on the subject.

However, one proxy for assessing how the services value education is examining their promotion systems to determine whether a premium is awarded to educational progression. For example, if the military valued education, it would tend to promote those people who had earned college degrees or had taken college courses at higher rates than it would those who had not pursued further education, holding all else constant (experience, military training, performance). This is not to imply that education is more important than other factors are in the promotion process, but, rather, that it is one of many.

In this section, I present education-weighting information from published materials on promotion standards and methodology to suggest possible indicators of a tangible value the services place on education.¹

Enlisted Promotions

Promotion of enlisted personnel across all of the services is based on a three-tiered system.² The first tier of promotions (E-1 through E-3/E-4) tends to be noncompetitive and based on time-in-grade (TIG) and time-in-service (TIS) criteria. The middle tier, which includes junior NCO ranks, such as E-3/E-4 to

¹See Albert A. Robbert et al., *Differentiation in Military Human Resource Management*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-838-OSD, 1997, for an analysis of how military servicemembers perceive various performance indicators (such as formal education) in determining compensation. It is obvious that an econometric approach to determining the effect of education on promotion would be key to the valuing process.

²For greater detail and a more comprehensive review of the subject, refer to work-in-progress by RAND colleague Stephanie Williamson on enlisted-promotion systems.

E-6/E-7, involves more-centralized, competitive selection boards. These boards promote individuals on the basis of a composite score of various factors, including education, professional training, and performance reviews. In third-tier promotions, senior enlisted servicemembers, E-5/E-7 through E-9, are selected for promotion by competitive boards that focus mainly on recommendations from senior raters. At the senior NCO level, formal academic education³ is considered by promotion boards as supplemental information; it is not assessed quantitatively as it is for middle-tier promotions.

Although all of the services' promotion systems are similar in their reliance on the three-tiered concept and such criteria as TIS, TIG, appraisals, and military education, there is lesser agreement with respect to (1) the role of civilian education in the promotion process and (2) the weighting of the various criteria. In fact, in reviewing the Air Force promotion system, I could not find any reference to a quantification of civilian education within its weighted scoring system.⁴ Rather, the Air Force promotion system considered the material to be "supplemental information" for consideration by promotion boards.⁵

In the remainder of this subsection, I examine the Army, Marine Corps, and Navy promotion systems, their scoring criteria, and the weight of education relative to other factors.

Army Enlisted Promotion System

Within the Army enlisted-promotion system, civilian education is considered at both the middle and upper promotion tiers. The middle tier of enlisted ranks includes E-5 through E-6.⁶ Although field commanders have a hand in the promotion process by assessing their personnel, a host of other criteria are also considered. Table 5.1 shows the criteria and the maximum number of points associated with each criterion for promotion consideration to E-5 and E-6. *Duty performance* refers to the assessment provided by the servicemember's commander. The *Awards and decorations* category includes military medals and ribbons. *Military education* includes PME; *Military training* refers to specialized,

³However, professional military education (PME) is important.

⁴The Air Force uses the following criteria in its weighted airman promotion system (WAPS) for the ranks of E-5 through E-7 (maximum number of points in parentheses)—specialty knowledge test (100), promotion fitness examination (100), performance reports (135), decorations (25), TIG (60), TIS (40)—for a total of 460 points. The E-8 through E-9 WAPS has similar breakouts, but does not include civilian education either.

⁵U.S. Air Force, *Promotion Fitness Examination*, Washington, D.C.: Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) 36-2241, Volume 1, July 1995, Table 5.3.

⁶<http://www.perscom.army.mil/select/jrensys.htm>, December 15, 1997.

Table 5.1
Promotion Points for Army E-5 and E-6

Item	E-5/E-6 Maximum Number of Points	Percentage of Maximum Total Points
Duty performance	200	25.00
Awards and decorations	50	6.25
Military education	150	18.75
Civilian education	100	12.50
Military training	100	12.50
Total board points	200	25.00
Total	800	100.00

job-related classes that the military offers. *Total board points* are the number of points scored by the promotion board. The *Civilian education* component of the overall promotion point score can count for a maximum of 100 points within the entire 800-point composite score.

Within the *Civilian education* category, Army enlisted servicemembers can earn education points in the following ways: completing high school or a GED; taking college courses; completing a college degree; and passing DANTES' sponsored exams, such as the College Level Entrance Program (CLEP), or correspondence schools. The following summarizes the maximum number of points an individual can receive for various educational achievements:⁷

- One point for each semester-hour of business, trade school, or college completed.
- Ten points (maximum) for *education improvement*, defined as the following: completing a high school degree, GED, or post-secondary program while on active duty.
- 30 points (maximum) for successfully passing all portions of the CLEP (passing any single section of the five-part exam earns six points).
- Promotion points for military or civilian training or experience when certified by ACE.
- Points for accredited correspondence courses.

⁷U.S. Army, *Enlisted Promotions and Reductions*, Washington D.C.: Army Regulation 600-8-19, November 1991, p. 36.

Navy Enlisted Promotion System

Similar to the Army's promotion system, the Navy's system also has a quantitative scoring methodology for middle-tier promotions (E-4 through E-7).⁸ Whereas the Army has a separate category for civilian education, the Navy uses a section called *Awards*, which is a conglomerate score of medals, overseas exercises, and education.

Table 5.2 summarizes the overall promotion methodology for the Navy. For promotion to ranks E-4, E-5, and E-6, the *Awards* category counts for approximately 4.5 percent of the entire promotion score. By the time an individual is promoted to E-7, the only two categories that count are standard score and a performance factor; the *Awards* category, which includes educational achievement, is eliminated from the promotion weighted score.

Although the *Awards* category counts for 4.5 percent of the overall promotion score for advancement to ranks E-4 through E-6, the relative point importance of civilian education is further diminished when education in this category is considered in relation to other achievements. Table 5.3 lists a sample of possible achievements, decorations, activities, and educational levels that are counted under the *Awards* category of Table 5.2.

Table 5.2
Navy Promotion Points for E-4 Through E-7^a

Factor	E-4/E-5	E-6	E-7
	Maximum Points (percentage of total)	Maximum Points (percentage of total)	Maximum Points (percentage of total)
Standard score ^b	80 (35%)	80 (30%)	80 (60%)
Performance factor	70 (30%)	92 (35%)	52 (40%)
Length of service	30 (13%)	34 (13%)	
Service in paygrade	30 (13%)	34 (13%)	
Awards	10 (4.5%)	12 (4.5%)	
PNA exam points ^c	10 (4.5%)	12 (4.5%)	
Total	230 (100%)	264 (100%)	132 (100%)

^aAdapted from U.S. Navy, *Advancement Manual*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Personnel Instruction (BUPERSINST) 1430.16D, July 10, 1991, p. A-3-1.

^bStandard score refers to the score from a professional competency exam.

^cPNA exam points are additional points a servicemember receives for exemplary performance on written exams and performance.

⁸<http://www.ncts.navy.mil/homepages/bupers/selectbd/compute.html>, December 1, 1997.

Table 5.3
Examples of Awards and Promotion Points for
Navy E-4 Through E-6

Award	Point Value
Medal of Honor	10
Navy Cross	5
Distinguished Service Medal	4
Silver Star Medal	4
Legion of Merit	4
Distinguished Flying Cross	4
Navy and Marine Corps Medal	3
Soldier's Medal	3
Bronze Star Medal	3
Purple Heart	3
Commendation Medal	3
Letter of Commendation from President	2
Achievement Medal	2
Combat Action Ribbon	2
Navy Good Conduct Medal	2
Aviation Insignia	2
Bachelor's degree (or above)	2
Associate's degree	1

SOURCE: Data adapted from U.S. Navy, *Advancement Manual*,
Washington, D.C.: BUPERSINST 1430.16D, July 10, 1991, pp. 4-9, 4-10.

From the table, we can see that education in the Navy enlisted promotion process is not weighted as highly as it is in the Army methodology of weighted scores. For example, a Navy E-4 who achieves a bachelor's degree would be awarded two points of a maximum of ten points under the *Awards* category in Table 5.2. This would account for approximately 2/230, or less than 1 percent of the entire promotion score. Needless to say, civilian education is not weighted as much as are other criteria in the promotion of Navy servicemembers to the E-4 through E-6 ranks.

Marine Corps Enlisted Promotion System

The Marine Corps middle-tier enlisted-promotion system (E-4 and E-5) is based on a quantitative methodology that is similar to the other services' and includes several factors: TIG, TIS, performance reviews, and a *Self-education* category. The composite scoring methodology for promotion to E-4 and E-5 is listed in Table 5.4. In calculating the various maximum possible scores for categories, I made several assumptions. For example, the TIG and TIS scores were based on an E-3 who had 8 months' TIG and 9 months' TIS—the minimum requirements for promotion to E-4. It is likely that these numbers would actually be larger for a

Table 5.4
Marine Corps Promotion Points for E-4 and E-5

Factor	Methodology	Maximum Possible Score	Factor As a Percentage of Total
Rifle Marksmanship Score	Shooting Score	—	
Physical Fitness Score	Fitness Score	—	
General Marine Performance (GMP) Score	$((\text{Rifle} + \text{Physical Fitness}) / 2) \times 100$	500	27.2
Average Duty Proficiency	Duty Score \times 100	500	27.2
Average Conduct	Conduct Score \times 100	500	27.2
Time-in-Grade	Months \times 5	40	2.2
Time-in -Service	Months \times 2	24	1.3
Drill Instructor Bonus	100×1	100	5.4
Self-Education Bonus	Course points \times 10 (see Table 5.5)	75	4.1
Command Recruiting Bonus	$20 \times$ number of individuals recruited	100	5.4
Composite Score		1,839	100.0

NOTE: Methodology adapted from U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Promotion Manual, Volume 2, Enlisted Promotions*, Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Order (MCO) P1400.32A, March 4, 1992, pp. 2-16a-2-22a.

realistic scenario. The *Self-Education Bonus* category is based on points awarded for taking correspondence, vocational, and college courses. Table 5.5 summarizes the type of course and points awarded for its completion.

As with the Navy, it does not appear from these calculations that civilian education makes up a large percentage of an individual's total score. However, the relative importance of scores changes as different point values for other

Table 5.5
Courses and Promotion Points

Course	Points
Any certified DoD correspondence course	1.5
Extension school subcourse	1.5
CLEP Test (each portion)	1.0
College course (semester or quarter)	1.0
Vocational school course (semester)	1.0

NOTE: The maximum number of self-education points that can be earned is 7.5. No points are awarded for high school-related courses or courses taken prior to current grade status. More-detailed information can be found in U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P1400.32A, Chapter 1, March 1992, p. 2-20.

categories are considered as well. The numbers presented here are for an individual who maximizes each category. As the number of points per category decreases relative to maximizing the education category, education will become relatively more important within the overall score.

Comparison of Enlisted Promotion Processes

It is clear from this description of the enlisted-promotion point systems that formal, civilian education does not play a significant role in determining the promotion points of enlisted personnel. This is an observation and is intended neither as a value judgment on the current process nor as a recommendation that the military value education more or less than it currently does.

Other observations recorded in this section include that (1) education is not considered in the noncompetitive junior enlisted promotions; (2) the middle tier of enlisted ranks receives some (limited) points for job performance, TIG, TIS, and professional military education; and (3) the most-senior tier of NCOs receives a majority of its promotion points from management and leadership experience.

Likewise, across the services, the role of educational achievement in determining points appears to vary significantly. In the Air Force, civilian education is not explicitly figured into the overall performance score. This is not to imply that promotion boards may not be influenced by an individual's personnel file, which lists his or her education, but, rather, that no criteria have been stated for quantitatively valuing the worth of college experience. In the Navy and the Marine Corps, the weight of education relative to total promotion scores is less than 10 percent. The Army has the highest relative score within the promotion framework: A servicemember can earn as much as 12 percent of maximum points by having significant civilian educational experience. Similarly, the importance of civilian education relative to other criteria tends to decrease as a servicemember is promoted through the ranks. All three of the services that have an educational component to their promotion methodology weight experience more heavily than they do civilian education. Note that, while education does not contribute a large percentage of total promotion points in any of the services, in a competitive environment even a couple of extra points could mean the difference between being promoted or not.

Officer Promotions

Unlike enlisted promotions, which tend to be based on quantitative scores within a structured framework, the officer-promotion process is less transparent.

Officer promotions are not based on *published* point values as enlisted promotions are. No scoring criteria have been published to provide a quantification and relative ranking of individual variables. For example, in the Army enlisted-promotion system, civilian education is given a weight of up to 100 out of a possible 800-point overall score. The more education achieved, the more points are received and the more likely a person is to be promoted. Although the services do not publish quantitative criteria for scoring officer records or attributes, it is well known within the promotion process that those who are promoted tend to have achieved solid records of performance, obtained the right jobs, and taken required professional military education courses.

Less uniform across the services is the understanding of the role formal civilian education plays in the promotion process. The remainder of this subsection focuses on how the Air Force values the formal education of its officers. To consider a more robust analysis of the subject, it is necessary to consider how the other services perceive this issue; however, it was not possible to find published, contemporary information related to this subject within the Army, the Navy, or the Marine Corps. Note that Hosek et al. report that it appears that most officers progressing beyond O-3 now have master's degrees.⁹

During 1997, the Air Force tried to demystify the promotion process by openly discussing those attributes of officers that appear to be important or, at the very least, common across those who were selected for promotion.¹⁰ An Air Force Military Personnel Center (AFMPC) study of promotion-board results from the last four major boards and the last three lieutenant colonel and colonel boards was prompted by two perceptions within the officer force: (1) that a captain must have an advanced degree in order to be promoted to major and (2) that a captain without an advanced degree will not be selected even if he or she receives a promote recommendation on the Promotion Recommendation Form (PRF), from his or her senior rater. The 1996–1997 study revealed the following trends:¹¹

⁹S. D. Hosek et al., "Race and Gender Differences in Officer Career Progression," Santa Monica, Calif.: unpublished RAND research.

¹⁰Information is taken from the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) homepage, Randolph AFB, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/publicaf/demystif/demyst.htm>, October 10, 1997.

¹¹The results listed here are taken directly from AFPC's analysis of the results. The purpose of this subsection is not to critique its methods of analysis but, rather, to present how it marketed the results to the USAF officer population.

- A majority of the officers meeting the major's board over the past four years had an advanced (graduate or professional) degree.
- Officers with an advanced degree were selected at a higher rate than officers without an advanced degree.
- As an officer progresses up the grade ladder, the percentage of eligibles with an advanced degree increases significantly, but the promotion opportunity decreases for both those with and those without an advanced degree.

Overall results for officers competing for promotion to the grades of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel were as follows:

For promotion to major:

- 68 percent of the officers meeting the promotion board in the primary zone (IPZ) had an advanced degree.
- 40 percent of the pilots had an advanced degree; the pilot promotion rate was 81 percent.
- 64 percent of the navigators had an advanced degree; the navigator selection rate¹² was 77 percent.
- 79 percent of the nonrated¹³ officers meeting the boards had completed their advanced degrees; the nonrated selection rate was 71 percent.

For promotion to lieutenant colonel:

- 87 percent of the IPZ officers meeting the boards had an advanced degree; the overall IPZ select rate was 63 percent.
- 79 percent of the pilots had an advanced degree; the pilot promotion rate was 74 percent.
- 84 percent of the navigators had an advanced degree; the navigator selection rate was 59 percent.
- 90 percent of the nonrated officers meeting the boards had completed their advanced degrees; the nonrated selection rate was 61 percent.

¹²*Selection rate* is used synonymously with *promotion rate* in this subsection.

¹³The term *nonrated* refers to USAF officers who do not have an aeronautical rating (pilot or navigator).

For promotion to colonel:

- 94 percent of the IPZ officers had an advanced degree; the overall IPZ selection rate was 42 percent.
- 92 percent of the pilots had an advanced degree; the pilot promotion rate was 45 percent.
- 95 percent of the navigators had an advanced degree; the navigator selection rate was 29 percent.
- 96 percent of the nonrated officers meeting the boards had completed their advanced degrees; the nonrated selection rate was 46 percent.

According to the Air Force, and similarly to the other services' officer-promotion systems, having an advanced degree is just one factor considered in the promotion process. Promotion boards evaluate records using a "whole-person" concept, which includes such factors as job performance, leadership, professional competence, breadth and depth of experience, job responsibility, academic and professional military education, and specific achievements. From this list of criteria, promotion-board members from the past three boards held at AFMPC indicated that job performance was considered to be the most important factor in promotion success. They rated advanced education as the least important of the eight factors. However, they also indicated that an advanced degree could be a tiebreaker between two otherwise equal records.¹⁴

¹⁴Information is taken from the Air Force Material Personnel Center (AFMPC) homepage, Randolph AFB, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/publicaf/demystif/demyst.htm>, October 10, 1997.