
DESCRIPTION OF AN OFFICER'S CAREER

COMMISSION SOURCES

Most officers receive their commission through one of three sources: the service academies, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs at public and private civilian institutions, or Officer Candidate or Training School¹ (OCS/OTS). All four services also have programs to allow promising young enlisted personnel to complete their college degree and earn a commission. The applicants, benefits, academic and military preparation, active-duty service obligation, and career-field opportunities differ for each of the three sources (academy, ROTC, and OCS/OTS). Most new officers are entering military service for the first time, but some have prior enlisted service.

Until recently, entering officers were given either a “regular” or “reserve” commission, depending on their commissioning source and undergraduate record.² In the Army, Navy, and Air Force, augmentation from a reserve to a regular commission is automatic at some point with the tender of a regular commission upon selection for promotion. However, when this research was conducted, the Marine Corps selected for augmentation in separate boards that op-

¹The Air Force program is called Officer Training School.

²An active-duty officer with a reserve commission is different from an officer in one of the reserve components. The 1992 National Defense Authorization Act mandated that *all* officers commissioned after September 1996 must enter active duty with a “reserve” commission and then pass through the augmentation process before receiving admission to the “regular” officer corps.

erated like promotion boards.³ The number of officers who may be augmented varies substantially from year to year and across career fields.

Service Academies

The three service academies⁴ provide officer candidates with a rigorous academic program and a complete immersion into military life. Admission to the academies is highly competitive, requiring very high academic, physical, and social accomplishment. Academy cadets receive free tuition, other expenses, and a stipend (\$600/month). In return, academy graduates generally incur a basic active-duty service obligation of five years.

Academy graduates begin their careers with a number of advantages. By the time that academy graduates begin their active duty, they are well steeped in the procedures and expectations of their service. They enter with a sizable cohort of peers with whom they have formed friendships and working relationships. They also receive regular commissions, and they are more likely to be placed in the occupation they prefer.

ROTC Programs

ROTC officer candidates pursue a bachelor's degree program at a civilian college or university while receiving credits toward their degree from a sequence of ROTC military education classes. There are a number of regular and scholarship ROTC arrangements. Regular candidates receive only a small stipend (\$150/month) during their junior and senior years and incur a correspondingly modest two- to three-year active-duty obligation. Select ROTC officer candidates receive scholarships that cover part or all of their tuition and other expenses and provide a \$1,500/year stipend. They must spend four years on active duty.

³More recently, the Marine Corps ended this practice and combined augmentation with promotion selection.

⁴The Naval Academy educates officer candidates for both the Navy and Marine Corps, which does not maintain its own academy.

More than 600 public and private universities and colleges have ROTC programs. The academic quality of these schools ranges from the most highly selective to relatively less selective. Officers we interviewed reported that the quality of military education also varies substantially between ROTC programs, although there was no consensus about which types of colleges were likely to have better programs. Thus, in contrast to academy graduates, the academic and military preparation of officers commissioned through ROTC programs is likely to vary more substantially.

OCS/OTS Programs

As in ROTC programs, OCS/OTS officer candidates receive their bachelor's degree from civilian institutions. However, most have no military education as college students. OCS/OTS officer candidates go through an intense 10- to 16-week program centered on basic military education, and they incur a four-year active-duty obligation. Depending on the requirements in different career fields at the time they are commissioned, officers with commissions through OCS/OTS often have a more limited choice of career field and initial duty assignment than do officers from other programs. Until recently, they also entered with a reserve commission—at the time, a disadvantage mostly in the Marine Corps.

In the Marine Corps, OCS is the final precommissioning activity for a unique program called the Platoon Leaders Course (PLC). PLC in some ways resembles ROTC because candidates sign up while they are students in a civilian college. However, they do not attend classes during the school year—only during a special summer program—and they do not oblige themselves to serve until they graduate. As we will show in Chapter Three, PLC is by far the largest commissioning source for Marine officers.

Enlisted Commissioning Programs

The services have a number of programs that provide young enlisted personnel with opportunities to receive an officer commission. These programs often cover the cost to complete a bachelor's degree, usually at a civilian institution but occasionally at a service academy.

Candidates who attend a civilian institution must also complete either a ROTC or an OCS/OTS program. Enlisted personnel apply to these programs and their applications are considered by formal selection boards.

Many of the officers we talked to said that individuals with prior enlisted service are generally quite successful as junior officers. These officers already have become acculturated to military life and acquired military skills, allowing them to focus their attention on learning the occupation they enter as an officer. However, these officers reach basic retirement eligibility (at 20 years of service) earlier than their peers due to their prior enlisted time. As a result, considerably fewer prior service officers remain in service beyond O-4 (see Chapter Three).

Accession of Minorities and Women

There are numerous reasons why a diverse officer corps is thought to be desirable. For example, equal opportunity to serve as an officer is integral to the military's overall commitment to equal opportunity. It is considered desirable to have officers who generally resemble the enlisted personnel they lead. In addition, officers are visible representatives of the American people when they are deployed overseas.

In a general way, all the services seek diversity, but there were few specific goals at the time of this study. Only the Marine Corps, which has by far the fewest women, had specific plans to increase the number of female officers. The objective was to move from less than 4 percent of all officers in 1995 to more than 7 percent by 2004–2010. Only the Navy and Marine Corps had explicit goals for the level of representation of minorities. In 1994, Secretary of the Navy Dalton established a plan for increasing minority accessions to 10–12 percent African American, 10–12 percent Hispanic, and 4–5 percent Asian-Pacific Islander by the year 2000. The 12-12-5 goals were derived from the representation of these minority groups in the U.S. population, rather than in the enlisted ranks or college-graduate population.

The services have a number of programs that target minority officer recruiting.⁵ The first of these focuses on ROTC units at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs account for a significant proportion of black officer accessions in all the services; in 1996, 43 percent of black accessions were from HBCUs. The Army has several programs that target HBCUs. The Quality Enrichment Program awards ROTC scholarships at HBCUs; because of this program, Moskos and Butler reported in 1996 that a black scholarship applicant is twice as likely to receive a scholarship as a white applicant is. Similarly, the most generous scholarships for enlisted personnel—which are for four years—are offered only at these schools. Since 1995, the Navy and Marine Corps' Immediate and Express Scholarship Decision Programs have awarded scholarships to well-qualified high school students; although not a targeted program, the awards have included high fractions of blacks and Hispanics (one-fifth) and women (one-third). All three services operate preparatory schools to help selected academy applicants qualify for admission. In recent years, the preparatory schools have provided 30 percent or more of the minority students at the academies. Finally, since minorities have a higher representation in the enlisted ranks than they do in the officer corps, the various enlisted commissioning programs described above are an important source of minority officers. To encourage participation in these programs, the services have assigned minority officers to targeted recruiting duty.

INITIAL OFFICER LISTING

In all services but the Air Force, the individual officers in a cohort are ordered in an “order of merit” list at or just after the time they enter active duty. The other services consider this initial listing in determining officers' career branches or fields, their initial assignments, and timing of subsequent promotion. An officer's placement on the list for his/her cohort is based on his or her date of commission. Officers commissioned on the same date are ordered according to their academic grades, military education grades, and performance during military field exercises; the specific weights given to each

⁵For more information on the Army's targeted accession programs and other programs aimed at minorities, see Moskos and Butler (1996). Information on these and other programs is also included in the DoD Pipeline Report.

component vary somewhat from service to service. Academy graduates are always the first to receive commissions in a particular entry cohort; thus, by definition, their initial listings are always higher than are those of regular ROTC officer candidates.⁶

In contrast to the other services, the Marine Corps does not determine its initial officer listing until the end of The (Officer) Basic School (TBS). As in the Army and Navy, the Marine Corps uses a composite score of academic grades, military education grades, and leadership evaluations based on field exercise performance. However, the grades are derived solely from performance and testing during TBS; academic or military education grades prior to TBS and one's source of commission do not directly affect a candidate's listing.

CAREER FIELD SELECTION AND DUTY ASSIGNMENT

A young officer's career potential is influenced by his or her career field and duty assignments. Ideally, the career field is a good match for the individual's abilities and preferences, allows the young officer to demonstrate performance in responsible positions, and has a relatively large number of senior positions. Similarly, an ambitious officer wants to be assigned to key positions within his or her career field. Good occupational and duty assignments are those that provide the opportunity for an officer to demonstrate the superior performance needed for promotion to senior ranks.

Career Field (Occupation) Assignment

The assignment of career field is handled slightly differently, depending on an officer's accession source and service. The most common procedure is for officer candidates to submit "dream sheets" listing several choices for career field placement. Marine Corps officers submit their dream sheets near the end of TBS. In all other services, officer candidates submit their dream sheets near the end of their respective accession program (academy, ROTC, or OCS/OTS).

⁶ROTC scholarship and distinguished military graduates from regular ROTC programs are often ranked with academy graduates in the Lineal List/Order of Merit List.

The services assign career fields based on their needs and the individuals' academic and physical qualifications and occupational preferences, giving priority to the former. Certain technical fields also require a special qualification test; otherwise, the assignment is made based on the general and specific skills of the officer. By law, women cannot serve in ground combat occupations or assignments; before 1993–94, women were excluded from other occupations and assignments that carried a risk of exposure to combat (Harrell and Miller, 1997). To ensure quality personnel in all career fields, the Marine Corps has instituted a rule of thirds: one-third of the placements in a career field must come from each of the top, middle, and bottom third of the Order of Merit ranking.

The selection of pilots in all services tends to be a notable exception to these general procedures. Marine Corps officer candidates who wish to serve as pilots usually prearrange this placement before entering TBS.⁷ Most Marine Corps pilots receive commissions through the Naval Academy or ROTC. In the Air Force, it used to be common for nearly all academy graduates to receive placements as pilot trainees, if they qualified physically. However, the force drawdown has cut the available pilot training seats in half and has caused an increasing proportion of Air Force Academy graduates to be placed in other career fields.

Similar to the selection of career field, initial base or ship assignment is determined by the needs of the service, the preferences of the officer, and the officer's initial ranking or performance in training. Within a career field, the first assignments differ primarily in their location. For example, the standard first assignment for infantry officers in the Army and Marine Corps is as a platoon leader. The processes by which subsequent assignments are determined vary quite a bit from service to service.

Duty Assignment

In the Army and the Marine Corps, officers work with their assignment officers to arrange their future assignments. Usually, each as-

⁷Each TBS company can designate a small number of qualified officers for aviation occupations.

assignment officer manages all officers of a given rank in a particular community or occupational specialty. The assignment officer is given the list of available positions and works with officers under his or her management to appropriately match individuals to positions.

An assignment officer's primary responsibility is to meet the needs of the service; the needs and preferences of the individual are of secondary importance. While it is generally in the interest of the service to ensure that all officers be given appropriate opportunities to develop their career, the short-term needs of the services may at times run counter to this. Thus, individuals must be proactive in managing their career after the first assignment. Individuals must sometimes be explicit in requesting career-enhancing assignments, as an assignment officer cannot always present individuals with the best opportunities. The services have developed career-information guides that describe key assignments and other requirements for promotion.

Army and Marine Corps officers can sometimes prearrange good assignments. An office with an open billet can request that the assignment officer fill the position with a particular officer. Depending on the office making the request and the career development of the officer of whom the request is made, the assignment officer may or may not choose to honor the request. Army and Marine Corps assignment officers reported that such requests are more common for high-visibility positions such as Pentagon or headquarters assignments.

The Navy assignment system is similar to the Army and Marine Corps system except that it involves both an assignment officer, called a detailer, and a placement officer. The detailer manages officer assignments and is responsible for balancing the officer's career needs with the needs of the Navy. The placement officer serves as a particular command's point of contact in the assignment process. Placement officers are responsible for balancing the needs of a command with the needs of the officers assigned to fill the billets.

Although the responsibility for career counseling in the Navy rests with the officer's commanding officer, detailers are expected to keep an eye on the career progress of officers assigned to them, and to help officers identify career-enhancing moves. The detailer also

must “sell” some officers on duty assignments that may be less career-enhancing. As with Army and Marine Corps assignment officers, Navy detailers are judged primarily by their ability to fill billets based on the needs of the Navy. As in the Army and Marine Corps, Navy personnel reported that officers can sometimes prearrange desirable assignments.

The Air Force's assignment system closely resembled that of the other services until 1991, when it was replaced by a voluntary assignment system supported by an electronic bulletin board listing job openings. The bulletin board lists all openings for line officers below O-6, except for some key positions—e.g., commanders (squadron and above) and generals' personal staffs. Officers are supposed to start reviewing the listings in their career field many months before their current assignment ends and apply for the positions they find most interesting. If they don't find a position by the time they must be reassigned, their assignment officer matches them to a job in the traditional manner.⁸ In our interviews and focus groups, Air Force officers consistently reported that few jobs advertised on the bulletin board were filled by an applicant from the bulletin board. However, the bulletin board does provide information about the kinds of jobs available, which can be useful in working with an assignment officer.

Occupation and Assignment for Minorities and Women

All career fields and assignments have been open to blacks and other minorities for many years. However, minority officers continue to be overrepresented in occupations such as supply and underrepresented in the tactical occupations. In the Navy, minority officers are overrepresented in the surface community and underrepresented in the submarine community (see Chapter Three).

Unlike male minorities, women are excluded from certain occupations and assignments. These restrictions, which have eased over

⁸When first implemented, officers could not be assigned to a job for which they did not volunteer. The voluntary system was recently modified to allow for nonvoluntary assignment of officers who don't have a voluntary assignment when they come up for mandatory reassignment. This change was made to allow the Air Force to fill important but undesirable positions.

time and have been reduced significantly since 1993, are described in some detail in Harrell and Miller (1997). Since a series of policy changes in 1993–94, women have been restricted from serving only in occupations or assignments that directly engage in ground combat. Harrell and Miller report that the percentage of all officer and enlisted positions closed to women decreased from 33 to 20 between 1993 and 1997. This figure is now lower than 1 percent in the Air Force, 9 percent in the Navy, and about 30 percent in the Army and Marine Corps. It is important to note that women may now perform many of the key jobs in the Air Force and Navy—including flying combat aircraft and serving on all but the smallest combat surface ships. The ground combat exclusion policy keeps women out of many combat jobs in the other two services. Despite the changes in opportunities for women, most remain in traditionally female occupations such as personnel and administration (see Chapter Three).

The Army and Marine Corps require new male officers to include at least one combat occupation in the choices they list on an occupational dream sheet. This requirement and the Marine Corps' rule of thirds, described above, help to limit the disproportionate assignment of any minority group to any occupation. The Army convenes a selection board to assign ROTC graduates to occupational branches; the usual equal opportunity goals, described below, apply to these boards as they do to all formal selection boards. During our interviews, we were told about less formal initiatives to encourage more blacks to enter combat career fields. For example, there are efforts to provide more information about the career fields to new officers and invite them to meet with minority role models from these occupations.

There are also some formal procedures for assuring fairness in duty assignments after the officer has been assigned to an occupation. The Navy now reviews all minority assignments with a goal of eliminating disparities in nonminority and minority assignments. Increasingly, all the services are using formal selection boards for key assignments, such as command assignments; as indicated above, these boards are guided by precepts that set fairness goals for minorities and women.

The services have, at times, consciously filled certain assignments in recruiting, ROTC instruction, and equal opportunity with women

and minorities. This has been done in the belief that the presence of women and minorities as visible role models in such positions enhances the accession and retention of other minority or female officers. Yet this practice can also lead some officers to consider such assignments as “minority” or “female” assignments, a perspective that can devalue strong performance in such assignments. It can also hinder the ability of minorities and women to develop valuable experience and competitive career records if it limits their time in critical jobs within their occupations. Finally, the practice potentially limits the number of minority and female officers available to serve as peers, mentors, and role models for other more junior officers in operational units, where peer support and mentoring may be most valuable.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

In all four services, an officer receives written performance evaluations. A description of the format used by each service may be found in Appendix A. These evaluations constitute the primary record of an officer's performance and are reviewed by selection boards (for augmentation, advanced education, promotion, and command) and those who make duty assignment selections. Generally, the evaluations are written by each officer's immediate supervisor and reviewed by a more senior rater. Although the specific format varies by service and has varied within the services over time, there are some common elements. The evaluation consists of brief written descriptions of the officer's job; his/her notable accomplishments during the period being evaluated (usually a year); his/her overall performance and potential; and recommendations for next career steps. In addition to the written comments, the officer's performance is rated on one or more scales.

As officers progress through the ranks, their evaluations are given more or less weight depending on the job in which the officer is being rated and the identity of the senior rater. The more challenging the job, the more weight the performance evaluation carries; the same may be true for performance evaluations written by high-ranking officers.

If an officer feels he or she has received an unfair or discriminatory performance evaluation, there is a formal appeals process. If the ap-

peal is successful, the evaluation form is removed from the officer's personnel record and a notice of the removal is included. Officers may write a letter to the promotion board that clarifies their record.

Inflation in Performance Evaluation

In a competitive environment, performance evaluations often become inflated. Inflation over time has long been universal across the services and common to performance evaluation systems in the private sector as well. With inflated grading, the language used to describe the officer and his/her performance takes on paramount importance; an example is the difference between an "excellent" officer (not quite up to snuff), an "outstanding" officer (a good officer), and the "best officer in his/her year group" (an outstanding officer).

According to the officer managers we interviewed, the competitive assignment and promotion system and the inflation in performance evaluations have led to a widespread perception that a "zero-defect" career is needed to be successful. Performance that is reported as being less than outstanding is seen to doom a career, even at lower ranks when officers are learning and might be expected to have room for performance improvement. Officers who make mistakes or run into serious problems may feel they have little opportunity to learn from their mistakes in such a system. Though detailers and selection board members are quite adept at interpreting the performance evaluation "code" in inflated evaluations, from time to time the services find it necessary to "reset the system" by introducing a new performance evaluation tool.⁹

We were also told that young officers often take some time to correctly interpret performance evaluations. An "excellent" officer who has received two or three Bs among the A grades may not realize that his or her performance is actually being rated below average. As officers gain more experience in reading and interpreting performance evaluations, it is not unusual for them to provide input to their performance evaluation. This input may range from a list of job accomplishments all the way to a complete draft of the performance evaluation.

⁹The Army phased in a new evaluation form in FY 1998.

PROMOTION

Officers advance by being promoted to a sequence of “pay grades.” The rank titles that are associated with each pay grade differ across the services (see Table 1), but the level of responsibility and authority accompanying each grade is roughly standard. The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA) standardized much of the management of officer careers across the four services.¹⁰ In particular, DOPMA set common targets for grade-to-grade promotion rates. The “up or out” system requires most officers to separate from active duty if they fail to make promotion to the next grade within a fixed period of time.

If the officer completes training, promotion from O-1 to O-2 is essentially automatic, and voluntary separations are not likely as most service obligations last four years or longer. Over the past 15 years, the services have lost on average only about 5 percent of a commission cohort before the members reached O-2. “Wash-outs” from basic military or occupational training are the major source of separations during the first couple of years. The physical and intellectual standards a young officer must meet differ somewhat according to occupational field; for example, combat arms specialists must meet especially challenging leadership and physical standards, while nuclear specialists must pass a series of difficult academic tests.

Table 1
Officer Pay Grades and Associated Rank Titles

Grade	Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps	Navy
O-1	Second Lieutenant	Ensign
O-2	First Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade
O-3	Captain	Lieutenant
O-4	Major	Lieutenant Commander
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander
O-6	Colonel	Captain
O-7 to O-10	General officers	Flag officers

¹⁰See Rostker et al., 1993.

Survival to O-4 is determined primarily by two factors: an individual's choice to continue his or her military service and demonstration of the level of performance needed for promotion to the first "field grade" of O-4. Somewhat more officers leave voluntarily than fail to receive the O-3 or O-4 promotion (see Chapter Three). Officers generally complete their initial service obligation while at the O-3 level, and about one-third choose to end their service at that time.

In contrast to the O-2 promotion, the O-3 and O-4 promotions are considered "competitive" in that candidates undergo a competitive board review process. However, since DOPMA sets the O-3 promotion rate goal at 95 percent (Table 2), the O-3 promotion at about four years is also virtually automatic. The O-4 promotion, occurring around ten years, is the first truly competitive promotion. About one-fifth of the officers reviewed by the O-4 promotion board will not be selected and will subsequently be required to separate from the services. Although some of these nonselected officers may be allowed to continue in service for a while, they will generally not be able to reach retirement unless they have prior enlisted service.

Attaining senior ranks requires the demonstration of a sustained manner of excellence in performance. To be competitive for promotion to O-5 and above, officers must begin building the necessary credentials early in their career. The promotion board members we interviewed said that "slow starts" must be over before an officer attains O-3. Further, officers must ensure that they demonstrate performance in difficult or key assignments in their career field. Selection for and good performance in the most challenging and

Table 2
DOPMA Model of Officer Careers

Grade	Promotion Opportunity (% promoted)	Promotion Timing (YOS)	Cumulative Probability to Grade from Original Cohort (includes expected attrition)
O-2	100% if fully qualified	2.0	96%
O-3	95%	3.5/4	82%
O-4	80%	10±1	66%
O-5	70%	16±1	41%
O-6	50%	22±1	18%

SOURCE: Rostker et al. (1993), p. 14.

NOTE: YOS = Years of service.

prestigious assignments are marks of success. Opportunities in non-combat-related career fields often peak in the later career stage as the relative number of general officer positions in these fields is rather limited. Senior billets are particularly limited for officers in the administrative and personnel career fields.

In addition to demonstrating sustained excellence in performance, officers must acquire certain credentials to be considered competitive for promotion to senior ranks. One important credential is the completion of required professional military educational (PME) courses or other expected civilian advanced degree programs. Officers can complete PME courses either by correspondence or in residence. Since selection to attend the more advanced PME courses in residence is competitive, this is often a signal of prior high performance. In order to be competitive for promotion to senior ranks in the Air Force, officers also are expected to complete a postgraduate civilian program. Completion of the expected educational programs is not always a technical requirement for promotion but is generally seen as a “de facto” standard.

The Promotion Selection Process

Generally, all officers in a cohort are considered for each new promotion at the same time; the legislated schedule was shown earlier in Table 2, but the actual promotions to grades O-4 and beyond have tended to occur about two years later. The exceptions are officers who earlier in their careers were selected for an early or late promotion; they then join the cohort one or more years ahead or behind. When evaluated, officers may be below the “zone” (the primary year of eligibility for the promotion), in the zone, and above the zone. The fractions selected from below the zone and above the zone vary across services and cohorts, but typically about 90 percent are chosen when first eligible in the zone.

The substance of the deliberation is essentially the same in all services, although the process by which promotion selection boards deliberate differs. Promotion board deliberations are based on the contents of the candidate's file, which includes a cover sheet that details the officer's assignment history, military and civilian educational certifications, distinctions and honors, performance evaluations, and any reports of judicial punishments or admonishments.

Navy, Army, and Marine Corps files also include photographs, which are used to evaluate military bearing (e.g., posture, grooming, and fitness).

Basic credentials for promotion include: completion of appropriate military education courses and/or relevant civilian postgraduate degrees, qualification in their military occupations, a record of performance and good conduct, and (in the Marine Corps at this time) augmentation to a regular commission.¹¹

Beyond these basic credentials, candidates must demonstrate to board members a sustained level of performance and a potential for future leadership. Board members assess these qualities primarily through a review of the candidate's assignment history and performance evaluations. The performance threshold increases as the promotions become more competitive.

Board members look for a sequence of assignments appropriate for the career field and particularly difficult, critical, or high-profile assignments. These include the assignments listed in the career guides we alluded to earlier. Individuals with atypical assignment histories can have difficulty demonstrating career-field credibility. Atypical histories develop for a variety of reasons—for example, switching career fields several years into one's career, accepting an otherwise atypical position in order to co-locate with a spouse, or failing to get important assignments due to past poor performance.¹² Board members are instructed to leave room in their evaluations for "slow starts" and "nontraditional" career paths. However, in choosing among officers who are borderline, board members often must consider all career irregularities, even those that occurred early in a career. A single negative evaluation can be overcome, but only if it is followed by a higher manner of performance.

¹¹Before augmentation was tied to promotion selection, Marine officers could apply for augmentation any time after their second year and after receiving at least one fitness report in an operational assignment. Given the year-to-year variation in available regular commission slots, it was important that an officer apply early and often for augmentation, but not all officers did so.

¹²Important assignments typically include responsible positions on the command staff for a high-level unit (e.g., battalion), as a department head on a Navy ship, or as a unit commander.

Good performance is indicated by being ranked high in a group of peers or receiving the highest absolute scores. The wording of reviews by senior raters is particularly important, especially if the wording demonstrates a familiarity with and sincerity in the review of a candidate. Officers demonstrate potential for leadership through strong performance in command positions and through the explicit enthusiastic recommendations by senior raters for future command assignments or for selection for in-residence professional military education.

Boards follow a formal process to ensure fairness. Prior to deliberating, boards are provided precepts, signed by the service Secretary. The precepts specify the number of officers who can be promoted and set goals for officers in certain career fields and with joint duty assignments. The precepts also set equal opportunity goals, which are further described below.¹³ These are goals, not quotas.

All services have instituted procedures that can inform a board president throughout the proceeding on how well its results compare with the goals. Usually, the use of these procedures is at the discretion of the board president. The Army and the Air Force also track the voting patterns of individual board members to ensure that their voting shows no anomalous patterns, such as preferences for officers in a particular occupation, from any racial/ethnic group, or with any other characteristics not appropriately considered for promotion. Inappropriate use of the scoring scales are also identified (e.g., too many top scores).

Guidelines for Minorities and Women

The portions of the instructions to promotion boards (and other selection boards) that concern minorities and women, as they appeared at the time of our research, are reproduced in Appendix B. The Secretary of each service prepares these instructions in accordance with DoD Directive 1320.12, which requires that they include “guidelines to ensure the board considers all eligible officers without prejudice or partiality.” The common Navy and Marine Corps in-

¹³Chapters Four and Five summarize what we learned about the implementation of these goals in our interviews and focus groups.

struction cited unspecified studies in urging board members not to overlook those minority officers (especially African Americans) who are “late bloomers” because of their past inexperience with a majority environment. All the instructions included two generally worded provisions: (1) Board members should be sensitive to the possibility of past discrimination and the reality of atypical assignment patterns; and (2) The board should review its selection rates for minorities and women and compare them with the selection rates for all officers. All the services except for the Air Force set a clear goal of equal selection rates. Finally, candidate files in all four services explicitly indicated an officer’s race and gender.