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TECHNICAL
REPORT

The Air Force Officer Qualifying Test

Validity, Fairness, and Bias

Chaitra M. Hardison, Carra S. Sims, Eunice C. Wong

Prepared for the United States Air Force

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

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Summary

The Air Force has long recognized the importance of selecting the most qualified officers possible. In that spirit, the Air Force has relied on the AFOQT as one measure of those qualifications for more than 60 years.

Although the AFOQT has played a central role in the selection and placement of officers throughout the Air Force's history (see pp. 3–7), the test is not without criticism. A variety of concerns have been raised about the AFOQT, including whether the test is fair, whether the test is biased against minorities or women, whether the test is too expensive, and whether the test actually predicts anything important to the Air Force (see pp. 1–2).

To better understand these issues, AF/A1P asked RAND Project AIR FORCE to prepare a report that would review existing literature addressing common concerns about the AFOQT and would summarize the pros and cons for continuing to use the AFOQT as an Air Force officer selection tool. In doing so, we reviewed available scholarly work and relevant Air Force technical reports. Our literature search was designed to provide information addressing the following primary questions:

- What is the AFOQT?
- Is the AFOQT a valuable and useful test?
- Should the SAT replace the AFOQT?[1]
- Are there any other tests that could be used to select officers?

From that review, we conclude that the AFOQT is a good selection test. It predicts important Air Force outcomes (see pp. 14–21) and is not biased against minorities or women (see pp. 25–29). In addition, we discuss the pros and cons of replacing the AFOQT with a similar measure, such as the SAT, and conclude that the Air Force would not benefit by replacing the AFOQT with the SAT for three primary reasons. First, the Air Force cannot control the content of the SAT to ensure that the test will continue to address its selection needs. Second, certain AFOQT subtests measure specific aptitudes and knowledge needed for predicting pilot and combat systems officer success. These subtests are not covered on the SAT, and continuing to maintain them would likely negate any cost savings in switching to the SAT. Third, switching to the SAT will not help improve the racial and gender diversity of officers or pilots. Finally, we discuss the possibility of using other valid selection tools in addition to the AFOQT, such as interviews, biodata, and personality tests (see pp. 41–47).

[1] The SAT (formerly Scholastic Aptitude Test and Scholastic Assessment Test) is a standardized college entrance exam used in the United States.