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TECHNICAL REPORT

The Use of Standardized Scores in Officer Career Management and Selection

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Summary

The U.S. armed forces have long recognized the importance of selecting and promoting the most qualified individuals to serve as officers. Standardized test scores have helped military leaders assess, with a fair degree of reliability, the leadership potential and future performance of a large number of individuals at once. Currently, our research finds that the U.S. armed forces use a combination of 19 standardized tests for the purpose of selection into officer commissioning programs, for assignment to career fields, and for commissioning.[1] The tests generally fall into two broad categories: those that gauge level of knowledge or aptitude and those that gauge level of physical fitness. As for promotion, we do not find evidence indicating required use of standardized test scores.

This report provides an overview of how these tests are used as part of a broader selection system for each of the services at different points in an officer's career. The report also provides a discussion of key issues that should be considered when using standardized tests, including the relationship between a particular type of standardized test, aptitude tests, and racial/ethnic group differences, which could affect minority representation within the officer corps.

This study began with a review of the available literature on what and how standardized tests are used in the military, including peer-review published articles and reports on military testing and relevant literature in industrial and organizational psychology and educational testing. We also used Department of Defense and service policy documents, both online and printed, to identify standardized tests currently in use to select applicants for officer commissioning programs; branch, specialty, or job assignment; commissioning; and promotion. Finally, we obtained information and verified data through discussions with service representatives responsible for developing these tests or using them to inform selection decisions.

The Military Uses Standardized Testing as Part of Assessing the Whole Person at Various Points Along an Officer's Career Path

Overall, we found that standardized test scores are only one part of the military's holistic or "whole person" approach to assessing individuals for entrance into officer commissioning programs and key career fields. Interviews, performance evaluations, academic grade point average (GPA), and recommendations are also factored into final selections and appointments. The

[1] Note that, in this report, the terms *test*, *standardized test*, *measure*, and *assessment* are used interchangeably. Although they are separate tests, we count all standardized tests given in the Marine Corps's Basic School (TBS) as a single test in the number reported here.

types of standardized tests used also vary according to each decision point and by each service. Without data, we were unable to empirically examine the extent to which standardized tests affect selection decisions. However, according to the information available to us, standardized tests appear to play a large role in selection into officer commissioning programs and for selection into aviation careers in each of the services but not for other careers, commissioning, or promotion. What tests are utilized at different major selection points is reviewed in full in Chapter Three of the report. Appendix A provides a brief overview of each test and documents research examining the predictive validity and mean racial/ethnic group differences in scores for each of the tests we identified.

Although the RAND team was able to determine what standardized tests were called for by each service at each career decision point, due to our inability to fill some information gaps for some of the commissioning sources, some uncertainties remain as to how standardized test scores are used in various selection decisions and how they function as part of the larger selection system. In particular, we could not find direct answers to the following critical questions for certain selection processes:

- What other factors, in addition to standardized test scores, are considered as part of the selection decision for officer commissioning programs and branch, specialty, or job assignment?
- What weight do standardized test scores and other factors carry in the selection decision for officer commissioning programs and branch, specialty, or job assignment?
- How often are tests waived, for whom, and under what circumstances? Is there a replacement for these tests?

The difficulty in finding answers to these questions is likely due to a lack of publicly available information or published material on these selection processes and requirements. To help fill in these remaining information gaps for research and public information and to promote greater transparency regarding selection decisions, we suggest that the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) ask the services to provide detailed specifics on their selection systems. Toward that end, this report includes a list of questions for the services and officer commissioning sources (Appendix B).