
Military Leadership Diversity Commission

Decision Paper #4: Promotion



February 2011

MLDC decision papers present the Commission-approved, subcommittee-specific recommendations. These recommendations are the product not only of the logic and evidence presented in the decision papers but also the values and judgments of the Commissioners. Legally imposed time constraints naturally limited the Commission's ability to undertake extensive research. Thus, the decision papers present the evidence that was available and that could be collected during the discovery phase of the Commission. The decision papers were reviewed by subject-matter experts external to the Commission.

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INTRODUCTION

In the military's closed personnel system, the demographic diversity of leadership depends on the demographic diversity of accessions and on the relative career progression rates of members of each demographic group. For a given level of demographic diversity of accessions, if women and racial or ethnic minorities progress at lower rates than white men, they will be under-represented in the top ranks. Furthermore, career progression in the military has two components: rates of retention to each promotion window and rates of promotion to each pay grade. To explore the role that promotion rates play in determining the demographic profiles of senior leadership, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) created a subcommittee tasked with examining the fairness of promotion opportunities for members of all demographic groups. The goal of this decision paper is to provide an overview of the subcommittee's findings and to show how they support the Commission's final recommendations for ensuring that all race, ethnicity, and gender groups have fair opportunities to be competitive for promotion.

Charter Tasks

The Promotion Subcommittee was assigned and addressed two charter tasks:

- Evaluate the establishment and maintenance of fair promotion and command opportunities and their effect by race, ethnicity, and gender for officers at grade O-5 and above.
- Evaluate the existence and maintenance of fair promotion, assignment, and command opportunities for racial, ethnic, and gender-specific members of the Armed Forces at the levels of warrant officer, chief warrant officer, company and junior grade, field and midgrade, and general and flag officer.

In acknowledgment of the importance of senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) among military leadership, the Commission also addressed these issues for the enlisted corps when appropriate.

Unfairness in the promotion system can arise from both institutional and individual bias, and it can affect both the actual selection process and each candidate's preparation for that process.

Institutional bias exists in the military if Department of Defense (DoD) or Service policies intentionally or inadvertently lead to different promotion outcomes for members of different demographic groups. A specific type of institutional bias is structural barriers to advancement, which are defined as "prerequisites or requirements that exclude minorities [and women] to a relatively greater extent than non-Hispanic whites [and men]" and are "inherent in the policies and procedures of the institution" (Kirby et al., 2000, p. 525). An example of a structural barrier is the DoD policy that restricts women from serving in certain career fields or assignments that involve direct ground combat (Harrell & Miller, 1997). Although this policy is not intended to inhibit the advancement of women, it likely does so in practice because the combat-related career fields and assignments from which women are barred are considered to be career-enhancing. The decision paper for the Branching and Assignments Subcommittee addresses this and other structural barriers in detail (Decision Paper #2). Since it is generally illegal to consider race, ethnicity, or gender in promotion selection decisions, institutional bias is now more likely to affect how members become competitive for promotion than the promotion selection process itself.

In contrast, individual bias can surface anywhere in the process because it comes from members of the institution and is not codified in policy. Individual bias is manifested in individual practices and decisions, which range from unconscious behaviors to outright discrimination. Such bias can affect promotion outcomes if it affects who gets the best assignments, how servicemembers are evaluated in performing their assignments, and/or who is ultimately selected for promotion. Promotion outcomes can also be indirectly affected by bias if servicemembers who experience such bias are more likely to leave than those who do not (e.g., they leave before they can even be considered for promotion). Although fundamentally different, these two types of bias are related: Individual bias can keep women and minorities from advancing only if institutional policies and cultures do not serve to minimize biased individual practices.

Strategy to Address the Charter Tasks

The subcommittee's first step in addressing the assigned charter tasks was to determine whether promotion outcomes vary by race, ethnicity, and gender. The subcommittee's primary finding was that across Services, over time, and roughly controlling for military occupation, minority officers have been promoted at lower rates than white officers. There is also evidence that, in some Services, for some pay grades, and during some periods, female officers have had lower promotion rates than male officers. Also, minority enlisted members have lower promotion rates than other enlisted members.

These results do not, however, necessarily mean that the military personnel system does not provide fair promotion opportunities for all its members. Therefore, the next step was to look more closely at the promotion system to understand whether and how it may have contributed to creating the observed promotion gaps. Specifically, the Promotion Subcommittee examined three aspects of the promotion system, looking especially for sources of bias, either individual or institutional:

- the officer promotion board process—the laws, policies, and practices related to board composition, precept language, and the review and evaluation of candidates' records
- inputs to the promotion board—the assignment histories and performance evaluations that make up candidates' records¹
- the Services' efforts to educate their members about the promotion process and promotion opportunities—the extent to which such efforts are, or are perceived to be, equally effective for members of all demographic groups.

The subcommittee evaluated each of these areas by reviewing relevant laws, policies, and practices as described and provided by Service representatives and/or available in the public domain. In addition, the subcommittee supplemented the Services' information by reviewing the results of surveys that asked servicemembers themselves whether they think the promotion processes and the promotion opportunities provided by their Services are fair.

¹ Note that the Promotion Subcommittee evaluated the contribution of assignment histories on a surface level. For a more in-depth discussion, refer to Decision Paper #2.

Commission-Approved Recommendations Related to Promotion²

Based on the results of the Promotion Subcommittee's examination of actual promotion outcomes and its evaluation of the Services' promotion systems, the Commission makes the following promotion-related recommendations:

Recommendation 1—

The Services should report enlisted and officer promotion rates based on a common definition of demographic groups, a common methodology, and a common reporting structure to the Secretary of Defense. Specific deviations for demographic groups and career fields should be investigated for underlying causes, and corrective actions should be taken as appropriate.

- ***a. Each Service shall make the promotion and/or selection rate of underrepresented groups a key metric of the Services' success in creating an inclusive environment.***

Recommendation 2—

DoD should continue to require that its Services use a common survey instrument to monitor and periodically report on servicemembers' perceptions about promotion opportunities. The Coast Guard should participate in this effort. DoD and the Services should take corrective actions whenever negative perceptions emerge or persist.

Recommendation 3—

The Services shall ensure that promotion board precepts provide guidance regarding Service-directed special assignments outside of normal career paths and/or fields. As appropriate, senior raters' evaluations should acknowledge when a servicemember has deviated from the due-course path at the specific request of his/her leadership.

Recommendation 4—

DoD and the Services must ensure that there is transparency throughout the entire promotion system so that servicemembers may better understand performance expectations and promotion criteria and processes.

- ***a. The Services shall educate and counsel all servicemembers on the importance of, and their responsibility for, a complete promotion board packet.***

² The recommendations discussed in this decision paper are the Commission-approved, topic-specific recommendations that resulted from the Commission's understanding and interpretation of the findings from this subcommittee. Following the approval of all of the subcommittee-specific recommendations, the Commission developed its final recommendations by combining recommendations across subcommittees to reduce overlap and repetition. Therefore, the recommendations presented in this paper do not map directly to the recommendations presented in the Commission's forthcoming final report.

Organization of This Paper

This decision paper is structured around the strategy for addressing the charter tasks. It begins by showing promotion rates by race, ethnicity, and gender for each Service and for both officers and enlisted personnel. Following from the result that promotion rates are, in fact, lower for minority and, in some cases, female officers, the next section presents the subcommittee's evaluation of different aspects of the officer promotion system. The third section reviews the Services' efforts to educate their members about promotion processes and opportunities. The decision paper concludes with a discussion of the recommendations and how they emerged from the subcommittee's investigation.

PROMOTION OUTCOMES BY RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER

During the December 2009 meeting, the Services briefed the Commission on officer and enlisted promotion rates for men and women and members of different race and ethnicity groups. This section of the decision paper summarizes these rates and presents the key findings from these briefings.

It is important to acknowledge what the data presented here do and do not indicate about racial, ethnic, and gender differences in promotion outcomes and the overall fairness of the promotion system. Demographic differences in promotion outcomes do not, on their own, indicate that there is bias in the promotion process. Instead, they simply show whether there are average, aggregate differences in promotion outcomes between men and women and between minorities and whites. They also show whether such differences are large enough to merit additional attention to identify their underlying causes.³

Data Sources, Data Limitations, and Definitions

Data Sources

Except where otherwise noted, the data for this section come from the Service briefings presented at the December 2009 MLDC meeting and span, at most, the four fiscal years (FYs) from FY 2007 to FY 2010.

For officers, all five Services presented line officer promotion rates for FY 2008 and FY 2009, but the Marine Corps did not present rates for FY 2007, and the Army and the Air Force did not present rates for FY 2010. The Navy and the Coast Guard presented promotion rates from FY 2007 to FY 2010.⁴ The Commission requested data for line officers for two reasons. First, the majority of military officers, and especially senior officers,⁵ are line officers—commanders of warships, ground combat units, combat aviation units, and combat support units. Officers who are not line officers are those whose primary duties are in noncombat specialties, including chaplains, lawyers, supply officers, and medical officers. Second, looking only at promotion rates for line officers controls for some occupation-specific factors that may affect the promotion of females and racial or ethnic minorities; combining line and non-line officers could mask or exaggerate differences in male/female or white/minority promotion rates.

For enlisted personnel, the four DoD Services presented promotion rates for senior NCOs from all military specialties. The promotion rates for the Air Force, the Army, and the Marine Corps⁶ span three fiscal years (FY 2007 through FY 2009), and the Navy data span four (FY 2007 through FY 2010). The Coast Guard did not present data on enlisted promotion because of data limitations and because its senior enlisted personnel do not promote via a board process.⁷

³ The main findings related to this question can also be found in Issue Paper #45 and Issue Paper #47.

⁴ All Coast Guard and Marine Corps officers are considered line officers.

⁵ See Decision Paper #2 and Issue Paper #23.

⁶ The Marine Corps did not provide enlisted promotion rates for FY 2007–FY 2010 at the December 2009 briefings. Instead, data for FY 1999, FY 2004, and FY 2007 were provided. Major Ryan W. Reilly provided enlisted promotion data from the Marine Corps to the Center for Naval Analysis on February 18, 2010.

⁷ Advancement rates for the enlisted Coast Guard are unavailable because the number of enlisted members of the Coast Guard who are eligible to advance is not recorded.

For both officers and enlisted personnel, the data tables present average promotion rates (calculated from all the data provided, not just the common years) rather than trends over time.

Data Limitations

The enlisted promotion rates provided by the Services and presented here are “raw” rates in that they do not control for factors other than race, ethnicity, and gender that have been shown to affect enlisted promotion outcomes (e.g., occupation, education level, and entrance exam score). The officer promotion rates are for line officers only, so they include a rough occupation control but no other controls that have been shown to matter (e.g., accession source, college grades, and marital status) (Hosek et al., 2001). This means that the raw rates may be picking up the effects of underlying differences in characteristics other than race, ethnicity, or gender. Thus, rather than providing the basis for strong policy recommendations, these comparisons of raw rates highlight areas for further investigation.

Additionally, all recent (FY 2007–2010) officer promotion rates reported, except for the Army, are for those promoted in the zone. Promotion zones, as defined by U.S. Code, Title 10, are eligibility categories for the consideration of officers by a mandatory promotion board. The most junior officer in the zone defines the lower bound and the most senior in the zone defines the upper bound for a particular competitive category. Above-the-zone (AZ) officers are officers that are senior to the most senior officer in the zone for that competitive category and are still eligible for promotion to the next grade. Below-the-zone (BZ) officers are those who are junior to the most junior officer in the zone for that competitive category and are eligible to be considered for promotion to the next grade. The majority of officers are promoted in-zone, and, thus, the promotion rates that we calculated (except for the Army) are for officers who are in-zone.⁸

Race and Ethnicity Categories

The race and ethnicity categories used in the Services’ presentations differed from those used in other decision papers and those defined in Issue Paper #1. The most substantive difference is that race and ethnicity are defined separately, such that the racial and ethnic groups are not mutually exclusive. Thus, the race and ethnicity categories are as follows:

- black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic
- Hispanic, all races
- “other,” Hispanic and non-Hispanic (this includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska natives, and individuals reporting more than one race).⁹

For readability, we refer to Hispanic and non-Hispanic blacks as “blacks” and members of the Hispanic and non-Hispanic “other” group as “others.”

⁸ The Services did not consistently report promotion rates for AZ and BZ, and the time constraints of the MLDC did not allow for investigation into and resulting discussion of promotion rates for demographic groups within these two other zones.

⁹ The Services are not consistent in defining race and ethnicity groups beyond white, black, and Hispanic. The Navy allows respondents to pick Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American (A/PI/NA), the Air Force and the Marine Corps refer to a fourth group as “other” (which therefore includes A/PI/NA), the Coast Guard has two additional groups (A/PI/NA and “other”), and the Army has three additional groups (A/PI, NA, and “other”). Where rates are available for multiple groups, we present a rate that has been averaged across groups.

Promotion Outcomes for Officers

Recent Outcomes for Officers

For context, Table 1 shows overall average promotion rates for all five Services. The data show that, over each Service's data period, the likelihood of advancement varied by Service. In particular, officers in the Army were promoted at the highest rates. With the exception of the Army at pay grades O-4 and O-5, the rates in Table 1 are comparable to the desired active-duty promotion rates given by U.S. Department of Defense (2009)—80, 70, and 50 percent for promotion to O-4, O-5, and O-6, respectively, with a 10-percentage point variance around each of these percentages.

Table 1. Recent Line Officer Promotion Rates

Pay Grade	Average Promotion Rate (%)				
	Navy	Air Force	Army	Marine Corps	Coast Guard
O-4	84	90	94	87	82
O-5	79	76	90	69	73
O-6	55	45	57	52	58

NOTES: Navy and Coast Guard averages are based on data from FY 2007 to FY 2010, Army and Air Force averages are based on data from FY 2007 to FY 2009, and Marine Corps averages are based on data from FY 2008 to FY 2010.

Table 2 compares promotion rates for officers in each minority demographic group and in each Service with each Service- and pay grade-specific average.¹⁰ Black officers in all five Services had below-average promotion rates to O-4 and O-5. The gaps were largest in the Navy and smallest in the Army. Except in the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard, black officers' promotion rates to O-6 were within a few percentage points of the overall Service-specific rate. The promotion rates of black officers in the Coast Guard are difficult to interpret because there were few black officers in the Coast Guard. On average, in each of the four years for which data were provided, there were 21, seven, and one black officers eligible for promotion to O-4, O-5, and O-6, respectively, in the Coast Guard.

For Hispanic officers, the Coast Guard had the greatest difference compared with the overall promotion rate to O-4. For the other Services, Hispanic officer promotion rates to O-4 were slightly below average. Except in the Army, Hispanics were also promoted to O-5 at below-average rates. The largest gap at the O-5 level was in the Marine Corps. In the Navy, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps, Hispanics were also behind in rates of promotion to O-6. Although promotion rates were generally below average for Hispanic officers, Hispanic promotion rates were typically not as low as black promotion rates.

¹⁰ Any differences that are noted here and for subsequent promotion rates are not based on statistical tests for significance, unless otherwise stated.

Table 2. Recent Average Line Officer Promotion Rates to O-4, O-5, and O-6, by Service, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Pay Grade	Average Line Officer Promotion Rate (%)									
	Navy		Air Force		Army		Marine Corps		Coast Guard	
	Black	Overall	Black	Overall	Black	Overall	Black	Overall	Black	Overall
O-4	68	84	86	90	90	94	79	87	64	82
O-5	51	79	66	76	83	90	51	69	54	73
O-6	53	55	42	45	54	57	44	52	17	58
	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall
O-4	83	84	88	90	93	94	84	87	75	82
O-5	71	79	70	76	90	90	57	69	70	73
O-6	48	55	34	45	58	57	45	52	71	58
	Other	Overall	Other	Overall	Other	Overall	Other	Overall	Other	Overall
O-4	87	84	83	90	93	94	90	87	69	82
O-5	71	79	68	76	83	90	54	69	43	73
O-6	57	55	40	45	53	57	67	52	19	58
	Female	Overall	Female	Overall	Female	Overall	Female	Overall	Female	Overall
O-4	74	84	90	90	93	94	86	87	69	78
O-5	75	79	75	76	86	90	71	69	43	64
O-6	64	55	47	45	46	57	68	52	19	54

NOTES: Promotion rates do not distinguish between male and female officers. They also do not distinguish between Hispanic and non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics of different races, or between Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, etc.

Only in the Air Force and the Coast Guard did “other” officers have promotion rates to O-4 that were substantially below the overall Service-specific promotion rate to that grade. Other officers in each Service had below-average promotion rates to O-5. Most noticeably, “other” officers had very low promotion rates in the Coast Guard. The O-6 promotion rates of “other” officers also lagged behind the overall rates in the Air Force, the Army, and the Coast Guard. The promotion rates of “other” officers in the Coast Guard are difficult to interpret because there were few of these officers in the Coast Guard. On average, there were 15, eight, and four of these officers eligible for promotion to O-4, O-5, and O-6, respectively, in the Coast Guard in each of the four years.

Finally, female officers in the Navy and the Coast Guard had below-average promotion rates to O-4 and O-5. In the Army, female officers also had below-average promotion rates to O-5. Although female officers had below-average promotion rates to O-6 in the Army and the Coast Guard, female officers’ O-6 promotion rates were well above average in the Navy and the Marine Corps. The promotion rates of female officers in the Coast Guard are difficult to interpret because there were few female officers in the Coast Guard. On average, there were 50, 21, and eight female officers at the O-4, O-5, and O-6 levels, respectively, in the Coast Guard in each of the four years.

Promotion Rates to O-7 and to O-8

The consideration of flag officer promotion rates requires an important caveat. The minority representation in the eligible populations for promotion to O-7 and O-8 can be very small. In those circumstances, a single promotion can cause a minority promotion rate to change substantially. We discuss flag officer promotion rates only for descriptive reference and not to recommend changes to promotion policies.

When females have been promoted to O-7 and O-8, their promotion rates have roughly equaled the Service averages. This is also true of Asians/Pacific Islanders, except for promotions to O-8 in the Coast Guard. Although Hispanics have had well-above-average promotion rates to O-7 in the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard, the promotion rates of blacks to this pay grade have been below average for these Services. Blacks and Hispanics have experienced very low promotion rates to O-8 in the Army and the Marine Corps. Table 3 displays these results for promotions to O-7; Table 4 displays these results for promotions to O-8.

Table 3. Recent Average Line Officer Promotion Rates to Flag/General Officer Rank, O-7

Race/Ethnicity/Gender	Average Promotion Rate to O-7 (%)				
	Air Force	Army	Coast Guard	Marine Corps	Navy
Overall	3	2	3	7	2
Black	2	2	0	0	5
Hispanic	1	1	15	16	2
Asian/PI	4	2	0	0	5
Female	3	1	1	0	4

NOTE: The Coast Guard did not distinguish among O-7, O-8, and O-9 in the promotion of flag officers.

Table 4. Recent Average Line Officer Promotion Rates to Flag/General Officer Rank, O-8

Race/Ethnicity/Gender	Average Promotion Rate to O-8 (%)		
	Air Force	Army	Marine Corps
Overall	38	41	88
Black	45	31	33
Hispanic	25	0	0
Asian/PI	50	50	33
Female	39	37	0

NOTES: The Coast Guard did not distinguish among O-7, O-8, and O-9 in the promotion of flag officers. The Navy did not present promotion rates to O-8 at the meeting in December 2009.

Promotion rates to O-7 were very low because, according to Title 10, the number of O-7s should be about 3–4 percent of the number of O-6s for each force (Powers, 2010). Title 10 allows for a ratio of O-8s to O-7s—between two-fifths and two-thirds for each force—that is relatively high compared with the ratio of O-7s to O-6s.¹¹

¹¹ The allowed ratios of O-9s to O-8s are also roughly bounded between two-fifths and two-thirds.

Summary of Recent Officer Promotion Outcomes

In several cases, the data show that promotion rates from O-4 to O-6 for several minority groups were lower than the average. In particular,

- In all Services, black officers' promotion rates were substantially lower than the pay grade-specific average promotion rates for their respective Services.
- Except in the Army, Hispanic officers' promotion rates were below the Service- and pay grade-specific averages. Across the Services, Hispanic officers tended to have higher promotion rates than black officers.
- Officers from other race and ethnicity groups in each Service had substantially lower-than-average promotion rates to O-5. In the Air Force and Coast Guard, their promotion rates to O-4 were also below average.
- Female officers in the Navy and the Coast Guard had substantially lower-than-average promotion rates to O-4 and O-5.

Historical Promotion Outcomes for Officers

To investigate a little more fully the robustness of the findings presented in the previous section, the Promotion Subcommittee compared the recent results provided by the Services with results from a 2001 study by Hosek et al. that covered a much longer time frame and controlled for other personal characteristics beyond race, ethnicity, and gender. (Time and resource constraints did not allow for the subcommittee to do this type of analysis itself.) Specifically, for officers who were commissioned between 1967 and 1991, Hosek et al. (2001) used regression analysis to separate the effects of race and gender on promotion outcomes from the effects of other factors, including prior enlisted service, accession source, academy, Reserve Officers' Training Corps [ROTC] scholarship, ROTC regular, Officer Candidates School/ Officer Training School, direct appointment), a more detailed occupation breakout (executive, intelligence, engineering and maintenance, administration, supply/procurement), and accession cohort. These controls allow for stronger conclusions than can be drawn from the analysis of raw promotion rates.

Table 5 summarizes the results of Hosek et al.'s analysis of promotion outcomes for different minority groups compared with white males. For example, the "−4" in the top left cell indicates that black male officers were 4 percentage points less likely to be promoted from O-3 to O-4 than comparable white male officers competing in the same promotion window. From this data, we can see that, during the relevant years, black males were less likely than white males to be promoted to O-4 and O-5. Similarly, other minority males were less likely than white males to be promoted to O-4.

For minorities, the recent promotion rates presented in Table 2 are similar to the past rates computed by Hosek et al. (2001). Specifically, black officers continued to have below-average promotion rates to O-4 and O-5. Similarly, Hispanics (i.e., other minorities) had Service-specific promotion rates to O-4 that were lower than the overall average promotion rates to that pay grade. This gives credence to the idea that these racial or ethnic differences in recent rates still hold even after controlling for other factors, and it indicates that some of these historical promotion disparities have persisted.

Table 5. Regression-Adjusted Promotion Outcomes for Officers Commissioned Between 1967 and 1991

Race, Gender	Differences in Promotion Rates for Row Group vs. White Male Officers		
	O-3 to O-4	O-4 to O-5	O-5 to O-6
Black, male	-4*	-6*	+5
Other minority, male	-8*		
White, female	+5*	0	+3
Black, female	-4	-6	
Other minority, female	-6	-3	

SOURCE: Hosek et al., 2001.

NOTES: As the authors report, these values are rounded to the nearest integer. An asterisk (*) indicates that an estimate is statistically significant. An empty cell indicates an instance for which the sample size was too small to estimate a promotion rate differential. The promotions to O-4, O-5, and O-6 took place in 1967, 1970, 1977, and 1980.

Promotion Outcomes for Enlisted Personnel

Following the same structure as the discussion of officer promotion outcomes, the presentation of enlisted outcomes begins with overall average rates for each Service that provided data, then proceeds to the discussion of how minority and female rates vary from the Service- and pay grade-specific averages.

The data in Table 6 show that, for FY 2007–FY 2009/FY 2010, the likelihood of advancement varied by Service. Marine Corps NCOs were more likely to advance than NCOs in the other Services. Advancement also varied by pay grade. In the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army, enlisted servicemembers were more likely to be promoted to E-7 than to either E-8 or E-9.¹²

Table 6. Average Promotion Rates to E-7, E-8, and E-9, by Service

Pay Grade	Average Promotion Rate (%)			
	Air Force	Army	Marine Corps	Navy
E-7	23	28	35	21
E-8	9	14	48	11
E-9	19	22	43	11

NOTES: Navy and Coast Guard averages are based on data from FY 2007 to FY 2010, Army and Air Force averages are based on data from FY 2007 to FY 2009, and Marine Corps averages are based on data from FY 2008 to FY 2010.

Table 7 shows that, in the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy, the promotion rates of black NCOs were equal to or within a couple of percentage points of the average rates for E-7 through E-9. In the Marine Corps, however, the promotion rates of black NCOs were substantially below average for all three pay grades.

In all the Services, Hispanics’ promotion rates to E-7 through E-9 were generally equal to or within a couple of percentage points of the overall Service average. There were exceptions: In the

¹² Similar to limits set with officers, Title 10 sets the authorized daily average number of enlisted members on active duty (other than for training) in an armed force in pay grades E-8 and E-9 in a fiscal year to not be more than 2.5 percent and 1.25 percent, respectively.

Army, Hispanic NCOs had higher-than-average promotion rates to E-7; in the Marine Corps, they had lower-than-average promotion rates to E-8. The promotion rates in Table 4 show that Hispanic NCOs had higher promotion rates than black NCOs in the Marine Corps and, to some extent, the Army.

Only in the Marine Corps were “other” NCOs’ promotion rates to E-7 more than 2 percentage points below the overall promotion rate to E-7 between FY 2007 and FY 2010. Only in the Navy was the “other” NCOs’ promotion rate to E-8 more than a couple of percentage points below the overall average. “Other” NCOs in all four Services had below-average promotion rates to E-9; the difference was only greater than a few percentage points in the Air Force.

In the Navy and the Air Force, women’s promotion rates were equal to or greater than the average rates for all three pay grades. In the Army and the Marine Corps, female NCOs promoted to E-7 at higher-than-average rates, but they promoted to E-8 and E-9 at lower-than-average rates. In the Marine Corps, the differences between the female and average rates were substantial: The female promotion rate to E-7 was 6 percentage points greater than the average, and the female promotion rate to E-9 was 12 percentage points below the average.

Table 7. Average Promotion Rates to E-7, E-8, and E-9, by Service, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Pay Grade	Average Promotion Rate (%)							
	Air Force		Army		Marine Corps		Navy	
	Black	Overall	Black	Overall	Black	Overall	Black	Overall
E-7	23	23	26	28	26	35	21	21
E-8	10	9	18	14	42	48	10	11
E-9	17	19	19	22	38	43	11	11
	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall	Hispanic	Overall
E-7	22	23	32	28	33	35	21	21
E-8	11	9	16	14	44	48	12	11
E-9	17	19	21	22	45	43	13	11
	Other	Overall	Other	Overall	Other	Overall	Other	Overall
E-7	24	23	31	28	31	35	21	21
E-8	8	9	17	14	49	48	8	11
E-9	11	19	21	22	40	43	10	11
	Female	Overall	Female	Overall	Female	Overall	Female	Overall
E-7	22	23	30	28	41	35	20	21
E-8	11	9	11	14	45	48	11	11
E-9	19	19	18	22	31	43	11	11

NOTES: Promotion rates do not distinguish between male and female officers (unless stated). For blacks, they do not distinguish between Hispanic and non-Hispanic blacks. For Hispanics, they do not distinguish between white and non-white Hispanics, and for Asian/Pacific Islander, do not distinguish between Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. Female rates do not make any distinction between different races or ethnicities.

Summary of Recent Enlisted Promotion Outcomes

The raw promotion rates presented by the Services and summarized here indicate that there were a few cases, especially in the Marine Corps, in which advancement differed by race, ethnicity, and gender, but that below-average rates for minority NCOs are not the widespread phenomenon they are for officers. Here are the key findings:

- Black marines had substantially lower-than-average promotion rates to E-7, E-8, and E-9.
- Hispanic marines had promotion rates to E-7 and E-8 that were somewhat lower than average.
- “Other” airmen had a substantially lower-than-average promotion rate to E-9. “Other” marines had a promotion rate to E-7 that was somewhat below average.
- Female marines had a substantially lower-than-average promotion rate to E-9 but a higher-than-average promotion rate to E-7. Female soldiers had a slightly below-average promotion rate to E-8 and E-9.

Summary

The most important takeaway from the analysis of promotion outcomes is that minority officers have lower promotion rates than white officers for pay grades O-4 to O-6. With only a few exceptions—for example, Hispanic Army officers—this pattern appears to hold for all Services and minority groups, and it appears to have persisted over time and to hold up even when controlling for military occupation.¹³ Thus, this result is sufficiently robust to warrant additional investigation.

The gender differences for officers and the racial, ethnic, and gender differences for enlisted personnel are more varied across both Services and pay grades and thus do not signal the same widespread, persistent majority-minority gap. For female officers, recent promotion rates signal promotion rate gaps for a few of the Services. The differences in the historical promotion rates for female officers from the Hosek et al. (2001) paper and recent promotion rates for this group indicate that differences in promotion rates can change over time.¹⁴ Past promotion rates cannot always predict future promotion rates, and rates should be continuously monitored.

¹³ To reiterate, the occupation controls for the recent promotion rate are rough, accounting only for the distinction between line officers and other officers. Hosek et al.’s 2001 study of past promotion rates included more-comprehensive controls.

¹⁴ Hosek et al.’s (2001) analyses do not distinguish between Service and also do not distinguish between all race and ethnicity groups within the female category. For this reason, it is not clear how recent promotion rate gaps directly map to historical promotion rate gaps, but the noted difference between the two does remind the reader that current rates may not predict future rates.

FAIRNESS IN THE OFFICER PROMOTION PROCESS

To directly address issues of fairness in the military promotion system, the Promotion Subcommittee examined two main aspects of the officer promotion process. First, the subcommittee reviewed the laws, policies, and practices related to the promotion board process itself, defined chronologically as the time between the convening of a promotion board and its selection of officers for promotion. Second, the subcommittee looked at inputs to the board process, defined as the events that take place before a board is convened. In both investigations, the subcommittee looked for potential sources of individual and institutional bias.

The subcommittee focused on the officer promotion process because the charter tasks explicitly directed the Commission to investigate promotion fairness for the officer corps and because the below-average promotion rates for minority officers indicate that there could indeed be unfairness in that system.

The Officer Promotion System Defined by U.S. Code, Title 10

Officer promotion is competitive beyond O-3, and the process is largely defined by various provisions of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, combined with DoD Directives and other guidance. Here, the Promotion Subcommittee calls out four features of the system and their implications for its examination of fairness in the promotion process.

First, Title 10 stipulates that officers must be grouped into functionally related career fields. These groupings are known as competitive categories because officers in each grouping compete only among themselves for promotion. Although Title 10 requires the Services to have competitive categories, it allows each Service to define its own categories within DoD guidelines.

Second, the law requires each Service secretary to determine the maximum number of officers that each promotion board may recommend for promotion. According to the law, this number should be based on the number of positions needed to achieve the mission in each grade in each competitive category, as well as the number of officers needed to fill vacancies in the relevant time period.

The competitive aspect of the system emerges because there are typically more officers eligible for promotion than can be selected. Thus, the third important feature of the system is the selection criteria defined in Title 10. According to the law, candidates must be selected based on the “best and fully qualified” standard.¹⁵

Finally, eligibility for promotion is defined by both Title 10 and DoD guidelines in terms of time in Service and time in grade, which function as proxies for experience. Within this construct, each competitive category has a well-established sequence (or set of sequences) of tours or assignments that each officer should have within the prescribed time frame. These sequences are known as due-course career paths. Key credentials and milestones include professional military education (PME) and/or the acquisition of civilian advanced degrees, selection for a command position,¹⁶ and outstanding performance in key assignments (as evidenced by evaluations), such as joint assignments.

¹⁵ Even when the number of promotions allowed is the same as the number of eligible officers, the best-and-fully-qualified standard must be met.

¹⁶ The process of selecting officers for command is similar to that used for making promotions. To achieve the highest possible level of performance, the Services must select the best fully qualified officers eligible for command.

The first two features of the system mean that the promotion selection process can create demographic differences in advancement rates only within, not across, competitive categories. Demographic differences in promotion rates that arise because of demographic differences in branching or occupational assignments are the result of how the Services apportion promotion opportunities across competitive categories. The Promotion Subcommittee addressed the former and the Branching and Assignments Subcommittee addressed the latter. The third and fourth features of the system mean that becoming best and fully qualified is about getting the right experience in the allotted time and being evaluated highly.

The Promotion Board Process

Promotion boards are statutory selection boards because many of the rules governing them are found in Title 10.¹⁷ The subcommittee assessed the extent to which the rules governing four aspects of the promotion board process were likely to introduce or minimize institutional and individual bias. This subsection describes these four aspects of the promotion board process and the efforts undertaken to remain fair and objective within each one.¹⁸

Board Composition

The basic composition of promotion boards is defined in Title 10, Section 612. All promotion boards must consist of five or more officers on the active-duty list who must be serving in a grade higher than the grade of the officers under consideration. Each board member must be serving in grade O-4 or higher, and each board must include at least one officer from the competitive category of officers to be considered for promotion. There are also provisions for reserve and joint representation. Officers may not sit on consecutive boards.

In addition, most Services maintain that the racial, ethnic, and gender mix of the promotion board members should be a consideration. The Service briefings presented at the fall 2009 meetings do not explicitly say why this is a consideration, but there may be an underlying assumption that a demographically diverse board is more likely to evaluate a demographically diverse candidate pool fairly than is a homogeneous board (Roth et al., 2003).

Constructing a demographically representative promotion board can be a challenge, particularly for the smaller Services. Several issue papers show that the officer corps is majority white and male and that the senior officer corps is proportionally more white and male than the junior officer corps (Issue Paper #19). Nevertheless, policy set forth by the Secretary of the Air Force holds that the board composition should be similar to the racial, ethnic, and gender mix of the pool of eligible officers, and Army and Marine Corps guidance calls for ethnic and gender representation on boards to the extent that the officer population allows. The Coast Guard and Navy briefings to the Commission did not indicate that the racial, ethnic, and gender mix of their statutory boards was

For officers, selection for command is a key career milestone that is critical for advancement to the highest ranks. The integrity of the selection processes for both promotion and command must be maintained by selecting the best fully qualified officers by evaluating training, experience, and performance and not such criteria as race, ethnicity, or gender.

¹⁷ See Title 10, Sections 611–618. The Coast Guard follows similar law in Title 14, so where Title 10 is cited for the military Services, it is implied that related sections of Title 14 or other similar law apply to the Coast Guard. More generally, Title 10 forces similar timing of promotions to the various pay grades and establishes similar up-or-out career progression rules across the military Services.

¹⁸ This information is also presented in Issue Paper #34.

specifically considered, although other Navy sources suggest that the racial, ethnic, and gender mix of the board is a concern (Navy Personnel Command, Bureau of Naval Personnel, n.d.).

Precept Language

Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1320.14 grants authority to the Secretaries of the military departments to issue written instructions to selection boards and gives guidance on what those written instructions may include. In particular, Services may include “guidelines to ensure the consideration of all eligible officers without prejudice or partiality” (U.S. Department of Defense, 1996, p. 6).

The military Services’ current practices regarding providing equal opportunity instructions to promotion boards vary slightly, although all adhere to DoDI 1320.14. Some of the Services expand on the DoD guidelines. For example, Department of the Navy guidance allows Navy and Marine Corps promotion board precepts to include the following language: “[T]o determine those officers who are best and fully qualified, you must ensure that officers are not disadvantaged because of their race, religious preference, ethnicity, gender, or national origin” (U.S. Department of the Navy, 1996). The Army instructs its boards that they may take into consideration the fact that there has been past institutional discrimination but that they may not consider or grant any preferences based on past discrimination. The Air Force brief indicated that the Air Force does not expand on DoDI 1320.14 in instructing its boards on equal opportunity matters. DoDI 1320.14 does not cover the Coast Guard, but the Coast Guard briefing and documents subsequently sent to the Commission concerning promotion board precepts suggest that the Coast Guard follows the spirit of DoDI 1320.14. Thus, the precepts include specific language that instructs and reminds board members that promotion decisions are not to be based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

Content of Eligible Officer Records

General Information

All the Services said that the review and evaluation of eligible officer records—the information supplied to the board for each eligible officer—was central to identifying officers for promotion. Common features of eligible officer records include the list of all of the positions that officers have held, the results of evaluations by commanding officers, training and education milestones, and information about other qualifications and subspecialty achievements. Finally, all the Services allow eligible officers to write a letter to the board highlighting particular achievements.

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender-Specific Information

Knowledge of eligible officers’ race, ethnicity, or gender could affect how candidates are evaluated by the board. In some situations, such knowledge could lead to a fairer evaluation of the officer. For example, knowing that an officer is a woman may explain why she has not held certain positions, particularly in combat; it could justify what might otherwise be considered an inferior record. However, there is also concern that, if boards know the race, ethnicity, and gender of eligible officers, the promotion process may be less fair. For example, there is some experimental research that shows that private-sector job candidates with black-sounding names are less likely to be granted interviews than are candidates with white-sounding names, even if the résumés submitted are identical (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Similarly, Goldin and Rouse (2000) found that “blind” auditions for orchestra positions, in which a screen hides the identity of the person auditioning, “fostered

impartiality in hiring and increased the proportion of women in symphony orchestras” compared with auditions in which the person auditioning was seen by evaluators.

Information on the race, ethnicity, and gender of officers could be revealed in several ways: Race, ethnicity, and gender could be reported directly to the board as part of the official personnel record; the Services may require officers to include a photograph in their records, which could reveal race, ethnicity, or gender; and the gender (and, possibly, the race or ethnicity) of eligible officers may be revealed by including the full names of the eligible officers or in the use of pronouns or other descriptive language in evaluations by commanding officers.

Drawing from the Services’ briefings and other information provided by the Services, Table 8 summarizes what type of information about the race, ethnicity, and gender of eligible officers is made available to promotion boards and the reasons for providing the information. The Marine Corps reports the race, ethnicity, and gender of eligible officers to the board. In addition, it requires each eligible officer to submit a photograph so that board members can review the candidate’s physical bearing and see whether the uniform is being worn properly.¹⁹ The Army has essentially the same reporting and requirements as the Marine Corps and applies them for the same reasons. The Navy does not report the race, ethnicity, and gender of candidates to its boards, but it does require that photographs be submitted as part of the eligible officer package. The Navy dropped the photograph requirement in 2006, but it was reinstated by the Chief of Naval Personnel only a year later because he felt that the board should consider military bearing.²⁰ The Air Force eliminated the use of photographs in the promotion process in 1995 and has not reported the race, ethnicity, or gender of the eligible officers to selection boards since 2002. In addition, it has discouraged the use of gender-specific pronouns in officer evaluations. The Coast Guard does not allow race, ethnicity, or gender to be indicated in eligible officer records, does not use photographs at promotion boards, and, in officer evaluations, does not allow gender-specific pronouns and other descriptive language (including names) that indicates the officer’s race, ethnicity, or gender. The information in Table 8 suggests that the Coast Guard promotion boards receive the least amount of information on the race, ethnicity, and gender of eligible officers.

The Promotion Subcommittee is not aware of any research that examines whether the evidence from the civilian sector on how knowledge of race, ethnicity, and gender biases the evaluation of current and potential employees extends to military promotion boards. More research is required to test this hypothesis, and the variation across the Services in terms of the amount of knowledge that the boards have may provide an opportunity for doing so.

¹⁹ For example, the photograph allows the board to compare the officers’ list of medals and awards reported in their personnel record with the uniform worn in the photograph.

²⁰ At the December 2009 MLDC meeting, the Navy representative also said that there was concern about officers appearing to be physically fit, even though the results of physical fitness reports are available in eligible officer records.

Table 8. Information About Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Provided to Officer Promotion Boards

Service	Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Stated in Packages?	Photographs Included in the Process?	Reason for the Inclusion of Photographs	Evaluations Include Gender Pronouns
Air Force	No	No	N/A	Discouraged
Army	Yes	Yes	Review of military bearing, medals	Yes
Coast Guard	No	No	N/A	No
Marine Corps	Yes	Yes	Review of military bearing, medals	Yes
Navy	No	Yes, except from 2005 through early 2007	Review of military bearing	Yes

NOTES: N/A means that the information is not applicable. The Coast Guard was the only Service that indicated in its briefing presentation that the names of the eligible officers were not included in the information made available to boards.

Review and Evaluation of Eligible Officer Records

The main work of the promotion board is to rank the eligible officers for selection to promote. Title 10, Section 613, requires each board member to swear that “he will perform his duties as a member of the board without prejudice or partiality and having in view both the special fitness of officers and the efficiency of his armed force.” The Air Force briefing summarized the key criteria considered in evaluating applicants, criteria that are similar across the Services and, more importantly, on the surface, are race-, ethnicity-, and gender-neutral:

- performance
- professional qualities
- leadership
- job responsibility
- achievements (qualifications and awards)
- career development education and training
- academic education.

As noted, the Services attempt to create board membership that mirrors the demographic mix of the eligible officer pool, with the goal of making the evaluation process as fair as possible. Nevertheless, individual board members may have conscious or unconscious biases against officers of a particular race, ethnicity, or gender, and this bias may affect the fairness of their evaluations of officers’ records. Unfortunately, these biases may be subtle, and there may be little that the Services can do about them. Thus, the relevant concern is whether the features of the review and evaluation process accentuate or diminish these potential underlying biases.

A key feature common to all of the Service board evaluation processes is that every eligible record is considered by every board member. In one approach, every board member reviews and scores each record; some Services have board members review and score records simultaneously, while other Services allow board members to review and score records individually, at their own pace.²¹ In another approach, each eligible officer record is randomly assigned to and reviewed by one board member; that board member is responsible for summarizing the salient features of the record, scoring

²¹ The Army uses the latter method.

the record (in some cases), and then briefing the record to the rest of the board.²² The record is available to the rest of the board during the briefing. After the briefing, the board members score the record.²³ Regardless of the approach used, Title 10, which forbids board members from introducing negative information that is not in the official records, further ensures that the process is objective.

Some concern has been expressed that the second approach described above—the “single-briefer” approach—could make it more likely that individual bias will be introduced into the evaluation process. To the subcommittee’s knowledge, there is no research on this topic, but conceptually, it is not clear how such bias would be introduced. Even if a single briefer has particular biases, the random assignment of records to each briefer makes it unlikely that an entire group of eligible officers who share the same race, ethnicity, or gender would be affected. The other safeguards already mentioned—board membership that is demographically representative of the candidate pool, changes in board membership over time, and full board input on the final decision—also decrease the likelihood that the single-briefer approach is more likely to introduce systemic or persistent bias. It must be acknowledged, however, that because of the large numbers of records to review, boards typically have only a few minutes to evaluate each eligible officer. This limits the amount of discussion of each record and may give extra weight to the single briefer’s evaluation.²⁴

Once the records have been scored, the Services must still decide which officers will be selected to promote. In general, the highest-scoring records in the specialties most in demand by the Service will be ranked highest for selection to promote. However, each Service may differ in precisely how individual board member scores are tallied and used to make selection decisions. For example, the Services may define and incorporate outlier scores differently.

Fairness of the Board Process—Summary

Overall, the promotion board process appears to be designed to be institutionally fair and to mitigate the impact of potential bias on the part of any individual board member: Selections are made not by a single individual but by multimember boards that are, to the extent possible, demographically representative of the pool of candidates. The fact that the entire board membership changes from one board to the next further decreases the likelihood that individual bias can cause systemic or persistent demographic differences in promotion outcomes. Furthermore, the guidance to these boards—which can be in the form of precepts, instructions, or actual laws—requires that selections be made based on the needs of the Services and the best-and-fully-qualified criterion, without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender.

²² The Navy and the Marine Corps use this approach.

²³ We describe the process for evaluating eligible officers who are in-the-zone (IZ) for promotion because in-zone officers make up the majority of promotions. The promotion boards are responsible for BZ and AZ promotions as well, and each Service employs a slightly different method for selecting officers for promotion from these zones. However, all BZ and AZ records are considered by every board member, just as the IZ records are. In addition, the Services are required to adhere to the “best and fully qualified” standard as well as to the guidance in the board precept to make BZ and AZ selections.

²⁴ As noted previously, the Army does not use the single briefer approach; in addition, it does not allow discussion of the eligible officer records by board members. Board members may discuss an officer record only if the record is recommended to show cause (e.g., if the officer has been shown to display substandard performance, misconduct, actions inconsistent with national security, or moral/professional dereliction).

Inputs to the Promotion Board

No matter how carefully it is designed, the promotion board process cannot address the impact of unfairness that occurs before a board is convened. Specifically, the competitiveness of an officer's record depends both on his or her assignment history and on supervisors' assessments of his or her performance in each position. To continue its investigation of unfairness in the promotion system, the Promotion Subcommittee assessed potential for bias in these two inputs to the promotion boards, because bias here may affect a candidate's ability to promote. We evaluate bias in several ways. We assess whether the institutional policies and practices themselves relating to assignment histories and evaluations are biased toward a specific race, ethnicity, or gender group. We also assess individual bias, or unfairness on the part of the members of the institution. Within the Services, these members would include supervisors who evaluate servicemembers on their performance and those who assign servicemembers to positions. We could directly evaluate policies and practices, but, to address the presence of individual bias, we relied on survey results of how fair servicemembers felt their evaluations and opportunities to receive career-enhancing assignments were.

Assignment Histories

Assignments can affect an officer's career progression in two ways. First, both opportunities to serve in specific assignments and actual promotion opportunities vary by competitive category and by occupations within a competitive category. This aspect of assignments is covered by the Branching and Assignments Subcommittee (see Decision Paper #2 and Issue Paper #23). Second, the due-course career paths for each officer community identify key assignments within occupations and competitive categories. This aspect of assignments is addressed by the Promotion Subcommittee and is the focus of this subsection. The subcommittee started its assessment of assignment opportunities by analyzing results of surveys that assessed servicemembers' perceptions of their own promotion opportunities. However, servicemembers' perceptions (e.g., thinking they are receiving adequate opportunities for advancement) and actual outcomes (e.g., actually getting assignments needed to be competitive for promotions) may not be aligned. Therefore, the subcommittee also investigated the extent to which female and minority officers may disproportionately receive assignments that take them off the due-course path, thus rendering them less competitive for promotion than their majority counterparts.

Servicemembers' Perceptions of Assignment Opportunities

The subcommittee analyzed responses to selected questions from three different surveys and found ambiguous results. The first two surveys are large-scale surveys administered regularly by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC): the 2009 Workplace and Equal Opportunity Survey of Active-Duty Members (WEOA) and the Status of Forces Survey (SOFS) of Active Duty Members administered in late 2008. Then, to supplement the information from these surveys, the subcommittee added its own questions to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS). Note that, despite this section's focus on the officer promotion system, all of the survey results reported below are based on samples that included both officers and enlisted personnel—the WEOA and SOFS results were not given to the subcommittee in a format that allowed separate analysis for officers, and the sample from the DEOCS supplement was too small to allow separate analysis for officers.

WEOA Results. The WEOA is conducted by DMDC as part of a quadrennial cycle of human relations surveys mandated by law. Specifically, Title 10, Section 481, requires the Secretary of

Defense to conduct cross-Service surveys to identify and assess racial, ethnic, and gender issues and discrimination among members of the Armed Forces. The survey targets active-duty members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard who had at least six months of service at the time the survey was first fielded and were below flag rank. For the 2009 WEOA, data were collected predominantly via the web in February, March, and April 2009, and completed surveys (defined as those with at least half the survey questions answered) were received from 26,167 eligible respondents. The resulting sample of respondents was 72 percent enlisted and 28 percent officers, and 84 percent DoD and 16 percent Coast Guard.²⁵

As part of this survey, respondents were asked the following:

- During the past 12 months, did any of the following happen to you? If it did, do you believe your race/ethnicity was a factor?
 - 1. Your current assignment has not made use of your job skills?
 - 2. Your current assignment is not good for your career if you continue in the military?
 - 3. You did not receive day-to-day short-term tasks that would help you prepare for advancement?
 - 4. You did not have a professional relationship with someone who advised (mentored) you on career development or advancement?
 - 5. You did not learn until it was too late of opportunities that would help your career?
 - 6. You were unable to get straight answers about your promotion possibilities?
 - 7. You were excluded by your peers from social activities?

These seven survey items capture servicemembers' perceptions about whether an aspect of their current military assignment or career progression was hampered by their race or ethnicity. Thus, any answer in the affirmative to one of these seven questions indicated that the servicemember experienced assignment/career discrimination due to his or her race or ethnicity, and thus the answer to the main question would be, yes, a servicemember experienced career/assignment discrimination due to his or her race or ethnicity. The survey results showed that blacks, Hispanics, and Asians were significantly more likely than whites to indicate experiencing assignment/career discrimination (6, 5, and 2 percent responded "yes," respectively).

SOFS Results. The SOFS of Active Duty Members is administered to DoD servicemembers three times a year; the Coast Guard does not participate in the SOFS.²⁶ As with the WEOA, the target population is active-duty members who had completed at least six months of service and were below flag rank six months prior to data collection. Members of the National Guard and Reserve in active-duty programs were not eligible. The SOFS data used here were collected via the web between November 5 and December 19, 2008. A total of 10,435 eligible members returned usable surveys, again defined as those with at least half the questions answered. The final sample included 3,474 officers (33 percent), 6,303 enlisted members (61 percent), and 658 warrant officers (6 percent).

As part of this survey, servicemembers were asked the following:

²⁵ See Defense Manpower Data Center, 2010a, for more information about the data collection and sampling methods, as well the final sample.

²⁶ The SOFS is also administered to reserve members (twice a year) and DoD civilian employees (once a year). Spouses of active-duty and reserve members are also a part of the Human Relations Survey Program. See Klerman, 2009, for more information on the SOFS.

- How much do you agree with the following statements about your military career and Service (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)?
 - 1. I will get the assignments I need to be competitive for promotions.

Analysis of responses to this question yielded no statistically significant difference in the percentage of “agree” (i.e., a response of “4” or “5”) responses between non-Hispanic whites (49 percent) and minorities (52 percent). In contrast, the percentage of disagree (i.e., responding with “1” or “2”) responses for this statement was significantly higher for non-Hispanic whites (22 percent) than for minorities (18 percent). Women were less likely than men to agree—45 percent vs. 51 percent, respectively—but there were no gender differences in “disagree” responses.

DEOCS Supplement Results. To collect information more specifically tailored to the Commission’s investigations, DEOMI allowed several MLDC subcommittees to add questions to its DEOCS. The Promotion Subcommittee added several sets of questions to learn about servicemembers’ perceptions of various aspects of the promotion system, and its questions were fielded during March 2010. During this time period, a total of 2,196 servicemembers completed the survey, with 2,004 of these providing usable information.²⁷ Relevant shares of the final sample were: 87 percent enlisted personnel, 12 percent officers, and 1 percent warrant officers; 60 percent were white non-Hispanic.²⁸ It is important to note that the DEOCS sample is much smaller than the WEOA and SOFS samples, and it was collected without using any particular sampling methodology. Therefore, it is less likely to be representative of the population of servicemembers as a whole.

One set of survey items focused on perceptions about opportunities for advancement. Specifically, using a 5-point scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree), respondents were asked to indicate agreement with the following statements:

1. I can expect to get the assignments needed to be competitive for promotion.
2. To date, I am satisfied with the pace of my promotions.
3. I am satisfied with my chances for future advancement.

²⁷ To be counted as part of the sample, each respondent must have provided ethnicity information and must not have displayed systematic response bias (e.g., put the same response for all questions). From the original 2,196 people who completed the survey, 108 were removed for having random response patterns, and 84 were removed for not providing race or ethnicity information. This resulted in the final sample of 2,004 servicemembers, with 79.4 percent from the Active Component.

²⁸ A total of 2,196 servicemembers completed the survey, with 2,004 of the servicemembers providing usable information. The gender breakdown of the final sample of 2,004 participants was 85 percent male and 15 percent female. The racial/ethnic breakdown was as follows:

- 60 percent white non-Hispanic
- 13 percent black non-Hispanic
- 15 percent Hispanic
- 4 percent Asian non-Hispanic
- 7 percent other non-Hispanic (American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or multiple races).

Each Service was represented in the survey sample, with 5 percent (110 respondents) from the Air Force, 38 percent (765 respondents) from the Army, 6 percent (121 respondents) from the Coast Guard, 17 percent (334 respondents) from the Marine Corps, and 33 percent (664 respondents) from the Navy. In terms of corps, 87 percent of participants were enlisted, 12 percent were regular officers, and 1 percent were warrant officers.

4. I believe I have received adequate training to be competitive for promotions.
5. I believe I have received the necessary assignments to be competitive for promotions.
6. Completing all necessary professional development courses enhanced my chance of being promoted.

Responses were averaged across the items to create a single representative score.²⁹ The overall average score across items and respondents was 3.69 ($SD = 0.95$),³⁰ indicating only somewhat-positive perceptions of opportunities for advancement. There was one statistically significant difference across demographic groups: Women were less satisfied than men with their promotion opportunities (3.58 and 3.71, respectively). However, the size of the difference is very small, meaning that the difference cannot be interpreted as having practical significance.³¹

Deviations from the Due-Course Career Path

As described in the overview of the officer promotion system, each functional community within each Service has a defined due-course career path describing the successive milestones that members need to achieve to be competitive for promotion to each rank. Because of the strict timing requirements of the military promotion system, deviations from the due-course path can negatively affect an officer's competitiveness in the selection process.

Hosek et al. (2001), who found that minority officers had lower career progression rates than white officers during the 1970s and 1980s, concluded that black officers were more likely to be given assignments that took them off the due-course path. According to Hosek et al. (2001),

Black officers' ability to develop competitive career records may also be aggravated by policies that the services have developed to increase the number of minority recruits. In discussions with officer managers and midcareer officers, we were told that the services place minority officers disproportionately in certain positions: recruiting and ROTC assignments, where they have high visibility to potential minority recruits, and the Equal Opportunity (EO) Office. Unfortunately, many officers regard these assignments as less desirable than assignments in their career field. These assignments take officers out of their particular occupational fields for a period of time, potentially weakening their ability to demonstrate "occupational credibility" in their career profile. Thus, while these policies may increase the services' ability to recruit and retain minorities, they may simultaneously damage the long-term competitiveness of black officers for promotion. This is despite the fact that all services explicitly instruct promotion board members that atypical assignment patterns among minorities and women may be due to the services' assignment policies, rather than a reflection of the caliber of the officer.

²⁹ To support averaging these items into a single unified scale, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis and examined the extent to which the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability or internal consistency. We found that it did ($\alpha = 0.86$).

³⁰ *SD* stands for *standard deviation*, which is a statistic used to describe the variation around the mean in a sample of data. The larger the standard deviation, the more "spread out" the scores in the sample from the mean.

³¹ These results are also summarized in Issue Paper #43.

The Promotion Subcommittee recognizes that this conclusion is both dated—based on interviews that occurred in the mid-1990s—and unconfirmed by systematic analysis of officer assignment patterns across Services.³² Several factors, however, led the subcommittee to highlight this result as part of its investigation. First, it is consistent with the subcommittee members' more recent experience in their Services: They raised the issue before the results of Hosek et al. (2001) were made known to them. Second, in interviews with the Branching and Assignments Subcommittee, only Marine Corps representatives identified recruiting assignments as career-enhancing.³³ Third, although the study by Hosek et al. (2001) and an OSD report based on the study's early findings (Gilroy et al., 1999) recommended that DoD do further research to determine whether black officers' promotion rates were indeed hampered by recruiting- and EO-related deviations from the due course, the Promotion Subcommittee was unable to find any indication that this recommendation was ever implemented.

Performance Evaluations

The second input to the promotion board investigated by the Promotion Subcommittee was candidates' performance evaluations. Specifically, the subcommittee considered whether bias in the evaluations of officers' performance can explain the observed minority-majority gap in promotion rates. As with its assessment of assignment histories, the subcommittee considered both recent survey results regarding servicemembers' perceptions about whether they had been evaluated fairly and findings from past research.

Past Research

Starting with the latter, the subcommittee again drew on research by Hosek et al. (2001), who found qualitative evidence that the subjectivity of performance evaluations opens the door for bias. According to Hosek et al. (2001), the black officers they interviewed "expected that the measured career progress of blacks would be weaker than the progress of their white peers" because "[w]hite officers expect black officers to have weaker skills and abilities; to overcome this expectation, the 'performance bar' gets increased for black officers." Since these conclusions were purely impressionistic, Hosek et al. (2001) considered other evidence. Specifically, they cite a Navy study (Mehay, 1995) that found that adding controls for ratings on performance evaluations to statistical models of promotion outcomes rendered the racial difference in promotion rates statistically insignificant. Mehay (1995) further suggests that performance evaluations were lower for minorities due to lack of obtaining certain qualifications, which is likely tied to previous ship assignments, but it was unclear what drove these inadequate ship assignments.

³² With regard to analytical confirmation of the qualitative results, Hosek et al. (2001) note the following:

[A] recent GAO [Government Accountability Office] study (1995) of a limited number of high-profile, career-enhancing jobs in the Army, Navy, and Air Force found no significant difference in the relative chances of receiving such assignments between white and black officers. It should be noted that the GAO study did not examine the relative chances of assignment to positions thought to be career damaging. However, the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis has reported that black officers are twice as likely as white officers to be serving in a recruiting assignment, although black officers appear no more likely to be serving in ROTC commands.

³³ See Decision Paper #2.

Turning to more recent perceptions of objectivity of performance evaluations, the subcommittee analyzed results from the same three surveys it used to analyze perceptions about assignments—the 2009 WEOA, the 2008 SOFS, and the MLDC supplement to the DEOCS.

WEOA Results. From the WEOA, the subcommittee analyzed responses to the following question:

- During the past 12 months, did any of the following happen to you? If it did, do you believe your race/ethnicity was a factor?
 - 1. You were rated lower than you deserved on your last evaluation?
 - 2. Your last evaluation contained unjustified negative comments?
 - 3. You were held to a higher performance standard than others in your job?
 - 4. You did not get an award or decoration given to others in similar circumstances?

These four survey items were used to assess servicemembers' belief that their race or ethnicity was a factor in others' judgment about their military performance (e.g., evaluations or awards). Thus, if a servicemember answered "yes" to any of the four questions, they held a belief that their race or ethnicity was a factor in others' judgment about their military performance. The results from this question indicated that blacks, Hispanics, and Asians were significantly more likely than whites to indicate experiencing discrimination regarding their evaluations (6, 6, 6, and 2 percent who responded "yes," respectively).

SOFS Results. The relevant question from the SOFS was as follows:

- How much do you agree with the following statements about your military career and Service (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)?
 - 1. My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance.

Analysis of these responses showed no significant differences by race or ethnicity (non-Hispanic white vs. total minority) or gender.

DEOCS Supplement Results. The subcommittee added the following set of evaluation-related questions to the DEOCS: Using a 5-point scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree), respondents were asked to indicate agreement with the following statements:

- 1. My performance evaluation is a fair reflection of my performance.
- 2. On my last performance evaluation, I was rated lower than I deserved.

As in the previous section, we averaged responses across the two items to create a single representative score for perceptions of the fairness of performance evaluations; because the second question was negatively worded, its scores were reversed so that higher scores reflect more-positive perceptions of one's performance evaluations.³⁴ The overall average score across items and respondents was 3.58 ($SD = 1.07$), indicating only somewhat-positive perceptions of the fairness of

³⁴ To support averaging these items into a single unified scale, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis, which is a statistical procedure designed to examine the extent to which the items are measuring a single theme. We also examined the extent to which the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability or internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.57$). This alpha level appears to be low, but, because alpha levels increase with the number of items in a scale, this alpha level can be considered acceptable because there were only two items in the scale (i.e., the minimum for a scale).

one's performance evaluations. There were no statistically significant differences based on race, ethnicity, or gender.³⁵

Promotion Board Inputs—Summary

The subcommittee's review of survey results regarding servicemembers' perceptions about the fairness of both assignment opportunities and performance evaluations generated ambiguous results. According to the 2009 WEOA, minority servicemembers were more likely than whites to believe that race or ethnicity was a factor in both their assignments and their performance evaluations. In contrast, both the SOFS and the MLDC supplement to the DEOCS indicated that white and minority servicemembers had similar perceptions about the fairness of these two "inputs." These two surveys did, however, find significant differences by gender: According to responses on both the SOFS and the DEOCS, women were less likely than men to agree that they received the assignments they needed to be competitive for promotion. Despite this ambiguity, the Commission recommends continued monitoring of servicemembers' perceptions about these issues, especially using validated survey instruments and rigorous sampling methodologies.

In addition, the subcommittee found some evidence that minority officers, especially black officers, may be more likely than white officers to be asked by their Services to serve in assignments that take them off their communities' due-course paths. The Commission believes that this issue bears further investigation.

³⁵ These results are also summarized in Issue Paper #43.

THE SERVICES' EFFORTS TO EDUCATE MEMBERS ABOUT THE PROMOTION PROCESS

The Promotion Subcommittee's last area of investigation was how well the Services minimize institutional or individual bias with respect to educating both officers and enlisted personnel about their respective promotion systems. According to their briefings to the Commission, the Services use a variety of methods, both formal and informal, to educate servicemembers about the promotion systems. Many of the Services rely on mentors, career counselors, or affinity groups to teach junior members how the systems work. The Services also direct members to search for information on their personnel management websites. For example, the Air Force maintains information about promotion on the Air Force Personnel Center website. This web-based information can include videos about promotion, PowerPoint slides on force development, and information on previous promotion board members and board results. These informal methods are just that—informal—and do not involve any systematic implementation or tracking.

The Services also use more-formal educational methods. Many of the Services conduct “road shows” or “spread-the-word” trips in which a small set of trainers (e.g., Coast Guard Career Management Branch staff officers) travel to installations to present information on promotion and career development. For example, the Army sends a group of officers from its Human Resources Command to visit officers in the Intermediate Level Education program at Fort Leavenworth. Some Services also assign dedicated career counselors (e.g., Air Force career assistance advisors) to different locations throughout the force. Finally, some Services also reported that they imbed information about promotion into educational courses (e.g., the Air Force's squadron commander's courses).

More detailed information on the Services' mentoring programs and the career-development resources they provide is found in Issue Paper #33 and Issue Paper #38. Combined, these issue papers show that the Services are making extensive efforts to assist their members in career development, including teaching them about the promotion process. There is, however, very little information about the overall effectiveness of these efforts—either overall or for members of different demographic groups; the Services do not appear to evaluate the effectiveness of their educational efforts.³⁶ In particular, it is not clear how the effectiveness of more-informal methods may differ across race, ethnicity, and gender groups. Again, in the absence of direct evidence of individual bias, the subcommittee used survey data regarding servicemembers' perceptions on how informed they feel they are about the promotion process.

Survey Results

To investigate how well the Services' attempts to inform servicemembers about the promotion process are working, the subcommittee once again turned to the DEOCS, adding another set of questions to the survey while it was being fielded in March 2010. Specifically, the subcommittee added a set of questions designed to address whether servicemembers believe that they understand the promotion system in their Services and for their corps. Using the same 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree), respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements:

³⁶ If such information exists, it did not accompany the information describing the programs.

- 1. I know how my Service’s promotion system works.
- 2. I am provided with adequate information about how the promotion process works.
- 3. I know what I need to do to get promoted in my field.

Because the subcommittee was interested in examining overall knowledge about the promotion system, researchers averaged responses across the items to create a single representative score.³⁷ Using a composite score affords a more reliable assessment of a group’s opinion by minimizing the influence of any wording bias that may be contained in a single item (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The overall average score across items and respondents was 4.13 ($SD = 0.95$), indicating that, on average, servicemembers more than “moderately agree” with statements that indicate that they have enough knowledge of the promotion system. Table 9 shows average ratings for each scale and individual item, broken out by race, ethnicity, and gender.³⁸ Importantly, there were no statistically significant differences between minorities and whites or between men and women.

Table 9. Average Level of Knowledge About the Promotion System, by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

	Average Rating Across All Items	Survey Item		
		1	2	3
Gender				
Overall average ($N = 2,004$)	4.16	4.17	4.09	4.22
Female ($N = 294$)	4.12	4.11	4.04	4.24
Male ($N = 1,710$)	4.17	4.18	4.11	4.22
Race or Ethnicity				
Overall average ($N = 2,004$)	4.16	4.17	4.09	4.22
White non-Hispanic ($N = 1,208$)	4.18	4.19	4.12	4.23
Black non-Hispanic ($N = 269$)	4.09	4.08	4.03	4.16
Hispanic ($N = 307$)	4.16	4.17	4.05	4.26
Asian non-Hispanic ($N = 75$)	4.24	4.24	4.12	4.37
Other non-Hispanic ($N = 145$)	4.08	4.08	4.06	4.10

NOTES: Survey Item 1 = I know how my Service’s promotion system works. Survey Item 2 = I am provided with adequate information about how the promotion process works. Survey Item 3 = I know what I need to do to get promoted in my field. Response scale: 1 = totally disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = moderately agree, 5 = totally agree. N = group sample size.

Similarly, the survey results reported in relation to career-development resources³⁹ demonstrated that there were no demographic differences in servicemembers’ satisfaction with the career-development resources they received.

³⁷ To support averaging these items into a single unified scale, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (a statistical procedure designed to assess the extent to which the items are measuring a single theme). We also examined the extent to which the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability or internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.86$).

³⁸ To save space, survey results by corps (i.e., enlisted, warrant officer, and commissioned officer) and branch of Service are not provided here. Interested readers can read survey results broken out by corps and branch of Service in the appendix of Issue Paper #43.

³⁹ See Issue Paper #38.

Although servicemembers generally reported that they know how their promotion system works, qualitative data from the informational meetings suggest that this reported knowledge may not be accurate. That is, many of the participants in the informational meetings stated that they know how the promotion system works but, when asked to explain the promotion system, had some difficulty doing so. Furthermore, participants in the informational meetings stated that they did not start to learn about the promotion system until they were eligible to go before a promotion board. In addition, only a few of these participants stated that they had received any formal education on the promotion system, and several said that they had received information about the system from a superior only once or twice in their entire careers. Although the informational meeting data are based on a small set of responses (mainly from NCOs and officers), the results suggest that self-assessed confidence in knowledge about the promotion system may not translate into a full understanding of the promotion system: Perceptions of knowledge and actual knowledge of the promotion system may not be the same, and people may not be aware of how little they know about the promotion process until it is too late. Also, it could be the case that promotion education is not effective for anyone, but the majority group is able to learn about promotion from other resources (e.g., mentoring), whereas the minority group is not able to use other resources. For this reason, effectiveness of promotion education should be independently verified to assess whether it is actually working in general and whether it is reaching all demographic groups uniformly.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The Commission's promotion-related recommendations reflect not only the specific findings from the investigation described in the body of this decision paper but also some lessons learned during the investigative process. In light of initial findings that a gap existed between promotion rates for minority and white officers, the subcommittee searched for possible institutional and individual biases that might be related to the gap by examining the promotion selection process, the inputs to the promotion board, and any efforts to educate servicemembers about the promotion process. Thus, the overall goal of the recommendations is to drive the Services to actions that will help explain and, ultimately, address unfairness in the system as revealed by such gaps. The Commission also recognizes, however, that other gaps could emerge over time. Thus, the recommendations are also intended to ensure that the Services are vigilant about monitoring promotion outcomes for all groups, among both officers and enlisted personnel.

Recommendation 1—

The Services should report enlisted and officer promotion rates based on a common definition of demographic groups, a common methodology, and a common reporting structure to the Secretary of Defense. Specific deviations for demographic groups and career fields should be investigated for underlying causes, and corrective actions should be taken as appropriate.

The Promotion Subcommittee reported recent promotion rates by race, ethnicity, and gender as provided by the Services. Although the Service representatives were gracious in their provision of information and time to the Commission, the Commission nevertheless identifies incomplete recordkeeping and reporting as an impediment to ensuring fair promotion opportunities for members of all demographic groups across all Services. Without complete and consistent records, the Services cannot accurately track and identify persistent or emerging demographic differences in promotion outcomes.

Two primary data shortcomings affected the subcommittee's ability to carry out its investigation. First, the data provided were not consistent across Services, thus impeding the subcommittee's ability to formulate DoD-wide assessments of promotion patterns. For example, although all the Services were given the same data request, each provided data for a different time period. More importantly, the Services do not use the same race and ethnicity categories, despite the fact that there is clear guidance from the Office of Management and Budget regarding how data by race and ethnicity should be reported by federal agencies.⁴⁰ Second, except for rough occupation controls for officers, the promotion rates provided by the Services were "raw" rates that did not control for the impact of factors other than race, ethnicity, and gender. To understand what is driving demographic differences in promotion rates and draw policy-relevant conclusions, it is important to isolate the effects of demographics from other factors. Furthermore, to do this across Services requires using a common methodology to the extent that Service characteristics allow.

⁴⁰ See Issue Paper #1.

Thus, in making this recommendation, the Commission recognizes that the Services already collect and report enlisted and officer promotion rates, but seeks to emphasize the importance of: (1) keeping records that are complete and consistent across all Services, (2) reporting outcomes regularly and in a common format, and (3) ensuring that factors other than race, ethnicity, and gender are controlled for when calculating promotion rates. In addition, the Commission urges that the Services not only continue to report on promotion rates for both officers and enlisted personnel, but take action when promotion rates for one group are persistently different from those of another.

Recommendation 1a—

Each Service shall make the promotion and/or selection rate of underrepresented groups a key metric of the Services' success in creating an inclusive environment.

This recommendation follows from the Commission's understanding of the Services' and DoD's diversity management goals. Specifically, diversity management policies are intended to both increase representation of women and minorities in the Services and increase readiness and capability. Increasingly, creating an inclusive environment is seen as a way to achieve both objectives and is considered an essential value for a diverse workforce. According to Lim et al. (2008), inclusion "implies preserving identity and maintaining individual differences." It promotes rather than mutes individual differences and, if managed effectively, can allow an organization to benefit from well-crafted diversity policies and practices.⁴¹

Achieving similar promotion rates across demographic groups is an indirect, but bottom-line, indicator that diversity management policies are promoting an inclusive environment. And part of promoting an inclusive environment is to ensure that both institutional as well as individual bias is minimized. As the Chief of Naval Operations stated at the June 2010 meeting of the MLDC, "I can look at some of our demographics today in the leadership of the Navy, and see where the initiatives of the 80's have now come to fruition" (Roughead, 2010). It is very important to note, however, that using promotion rates as the sole metric of inclusion is not advised. Lim et al. (2008) cite R. Roosevelt Thomas as stating just that: "[E]ven the most diversity-friendly organizations have plateaued in their efforts to manage diversity, having achieved the 'numbers' but not maintaining them or not moving beyond demographic diversity in a meaningful way." In other words, achieving the "numbers" implies that representation may have been achieved, but it says nothing about increasing readiness and capability (or productivity in the civilian sector). Decision Paper #8 identifies several potential approaches to assessing inclusiveness, including the use of surveys to evaluate organizational climate. One example of such a survey already in use is the DEOMI Diversity Management Climate Survey, which specifically measures climate factors associated with diversity and inclusion.

⁴¹ See Decision Paper #5 and Decision Paper #6 for more on inclusion.

Recommendation 2—

DoD should continue to require that its Services use a common survey instrument to monitor and periodically report on servicemembers' perceptions about promotion opportunities. The Coast Guard should participate in this effort. DoD and the Services should take corrective actions whenever negative perceptions emerge or persist.

Like promotion rates, survey results regarding servicemembers' perceptions about the fairness of the promotion system can be good indicators of the inclusiveness of the organizational climate and the extent to which diversity management policies are being successfully implemented. They can also help uncover reasons for any racial, ethnic, or gender gaps that are revealed when tracking actual promotion outcomes.

The Promotion Subcommittee used two large-scale, cross-Service surveys to assess servicemembers' perceptions about the fairness of their promotion opportunities and performance evaluations. As noted, the WEOA is conducted because it is required by law. Specifically, Title 10, Section 481, requires that the Secretary of Defense carry out surveys to “identify and assess racial and ethnic issues and discrimination, and to identify and assess gender issues and discrimination, among members of the armed forces.” A similar requirement is specified for the Coast Guard in Title 6 of the U.S. Code, which covers the Department of Homeland Security. The WEOA addresses the requirement for racial and ethnic issues, and a companion survey, the Workplace and Gender Relations Survey, addresses the requirement for gender issues. These surveys are designed to solicit information on the following:

- Indicators of positive and negative trends for professional and personal relationships among members of all racial and ethnic groups and between men and women.
- The effectiveness of DoD policies designed to improve relationships among all racial and ethnic groups and between men and women.
- The effectiveness of current processes for complaints on and investigations into racial/ethnic and gender discrimination.

The SOFS, in contrast, is not required by law and has a broader focus. In particular, it is not specifically intended to address racial, ethnic, and gender issues, though its results can be analyzed to determine whether attitudes differ along these demographic dimensions.

With this recommendation, the Commission acknowledges the value of these surveys—especially given the fact that they are used commonly across Services—and explicitly encourages their use to understand reasons not only for the differences in promotion outcomes documented in this decision paper, but also for any other differences that may emerge in the future. The recommendation also explicitly exhorts the Services to act on any results that indicate there may be problems in their organizational climates: Simply collecting and reporting data is of no value if the data are not used to guide policies and decisionmaking. A recommended first step is to understand the differences in promotion-related results from the two surveys.

Recommendation 3—

The Services shall ensure that promotion board precepts provide guidance regarding Service-directed special assignments outside of normal career paths and/or fields. As appropriate, senior raters' evaluations should acknowledge when a servicemember has deviated from the due-course path at the specific request of his/her leadership.

The subcommittee's review of the fairness of the military promotion system focused on identifying instances of institutional bias and areas where individual bias could be introduced. The subcommittee concluded that individual bias is most likely to enter the system via commanding officers' evaluations of their subordinates, and that institutional bias is most apparent in the assignment process. This recommendation deals with the latter. Specifically, there is some indication that minority officers are disproportionately diverted from their due-course career paths to fill recruiting and equal opportunity assignments, thus making them less competitive for promotion.⁴² This result is mainly supported by the Commissioners' collective wisdom and by Hosek et al. (2001), who recommended the following:

Avoid atypical assignment policies wherever possible. Fitting in all the assignments and education necessary for advancement is difficult, and other assignments make this even more difficult. Disproportionately assigning minorities and women to jobs, such as recruiting or equal opportunity, where diversity is highly valued, also removes them from operational units where they can mentor younger officers.

The Commission acknowledges that this conclusion is both dated and unconfirmed by systematic analysis of officer assignment patterns across the Services, but nevertheless felt strongly that minority officers should not be penalized for helping their Services execute their diversity efforts—it is not only unfair to the officers, but self-defeating to the Services' demographic diversity goals. Of course, the Services should use personnel data to examine both whether minority officers are indeed more likely to be assigned to these diversity-related positions and whether these assignments are, in fact, career-damaging. Regardless of the results of such an investigation, however, the Services should still ensure that promotion board precepts provide guidance to board members on how to value service-directed assignments that take officers off the due-course path and that performance evaluations should, when possible, note when a candidate has taken an unusual assignment at the request of his or her leadership.

Although the main motivation for this recommendation was to eliminate institutional bias that might contribute to the promotion gap between minority and white officers, the wording is intentionally general, referring to any Service-directed assignment that falls outside the community norm. This wording reflects the Commission's position that diversity both encompasses many kinds of human difference and contributes to mission capability. In particular, diversity of experience, potentially reflected in deviations from the due-course path, is expected to be of extra value in the context of changing warfighting environments and the development of new doctrine. Indeed, Decision Paper #2 notes that the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan may already be changing the Services' ideas about what is considered a "key" assignment, and Decision Paper #7 reviews the new skill requirements laid out in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (U.S. Department of

⁴² The Branching and Assignments Subcommittee addresses other assignment-related barriers to career progression for minorities and women (Decision Paper #2).

Defense, 2010). Both changes mean that promotion boards must be open to nontraditional assignment histories until due-course career paths need to be reevaluated.

Recommendation 4—

DoD and the Services must ensure that there is transparency throughout the entire promotion system so that servicemembers may better understand performance expectations and promotion criteria and processes.

Both the Promotion Subcommittee and the Branching and Assignment Subcommittee found that the Services use multiple approaches to educate their members about how to be successful in general, and about the promotion system in particular. These approaches include formal seminars, formal and informal mentoring, and the establishment of websites that provide general and community-specific information about key career milestones and due-course career paths. Both subcommittees also found, however, that, despite the time and resources expended on these efforts, no Service is systematically evaluating their effectiveness—either overall or for the different demographic groups.

Given the Commission’s timeline and scope, the subcommittees had only limited ability to conduct their own investigations into the effectiveness of the Services’ career-development and promotion-education resources. The results from both subcommittees’ additions to the DEOCS indicate that servicemembers are neither very satisfied nor very dissatisfied with their Services’ efforts and that these opinions do not meaningfully vary by race, ethnicity, or gender. However, as noted earlier, self-assessed knowledge is not the same as actual knowledge, and servicemembers may not be aware of their lack of knowledge. For example, in the informal information sessions conducted by the Promotion Subcommittee, servicemembers did not uniformly report being formally educated about the promotion process or receiving such education from a supervisor.

This recommendation is intended to emphasize the importance of making the promotion system as transparent as possible to ensure that all servicemembers have adequate and equal knowledge in their efforts to proactively manage their own careers. It reflects lessons from the private sector, which show that providing the information needed for self-guided career management is an important aspect of successful diversity management.⁴³ In particular, the subcommittee calls out the importance of providing information from previous promotion boards to help servicemembers better understand performance expectations, promotion criteria, and the promotion process. While the subcommittee understands that only a limited amount of information can be disclosed from these proceedings, the Services should ensure that servicemembers know how to obtain any information that is released, such as promotion board precepts (an indicator of what is valued), the career fields of selectees, and any briefings that emerge after a board convenes.

Recommendation 4a—

The Services shall educate and counsel all servicemembers on the importance of, and their responsibility for, a complete promotion board packet.

As part of the educational efforts mentioned above, the Services already provide their officers with some instruction on how to construct a complete promotion packet in preparation for being evaluated by the promotion board. With this recommendation, the Commission calls out this

⁴³ See Issue Paper #50.

fundamental step as necessary for ensuring that the promotion system works minimally well for all officers. This is a simple procedural step that, if not done properly, could decrease a servicemember's chances to promote. The Services should ensure that education on doing this is effective and reaches all servicemembers equally.

Conclusion

The Promotion Subcommittee was tasked with evaluating the extent to which the Services establish and maintain fair promotion opportunities for women and men and members of all races and ethnicities. As the first step in its evaluation, the subcommittee showed that, across Services, over time, and roughly controlling for military occupation, minority officers have promoted to the ranks of O-4 through O-6 at lower rates than white officers.

This gap does not, on its own, however, indicate that the military promotion system is unfair. Thus, the subcommittee's next step was to evaluate the promotion process, looking specifically for instances of, or potential for, institutional and individual bias, as well as explanations for the observed white-minority differential. The subcommittee found that the promotion board process—in which eligible officers' records are reviewed and evaluated for promotion selection—is designed to be institutionally fair and likely mitigates any individual bias that may arise during the review and evaluation process. The subcommittee also found, however, indications that bias may be introduced into the system *before* the promotion board convenes. In particular, institutional bias that values having minorities in positions related to recruiting and equal opportunity may knock these officers off their due-course career trajectories and make them less competitive for promotion. Finally, the subcommittee looked for evidence that the Services' career-development resources help *all* servicemembers successfully manage their own careers. Although it uncovered no evidence to the contrary, the subcommittee also found that the Services do not systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their career-development programs.

The Commission's promotion-related recommendations reflect these findings by identifying aspects of the promotion system that should be improved and reemphasizing aspects that should be continued to ensure that all members have equal opportunity to be competitive for promotion.

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