



ANGELA K. CLAGUE

Specialist or Technical Career Track Officers in the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy

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About This Report

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) commissioned RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) to write two reports describing Warrant Officer (WO) and technical or specialist commissioned officer tracks in sister services (Givens et al., forthcoming). This report informs the DAF how other services manage specialist or technical officer career tracks. We summarize the accession and selection, education and training, and promotion of officers in the Army and the Navy who assume technical or specialist roles but are not WOs or Limited Duty Officer (LDOs). These officers are called Functional Area (FA) officers in the Army and Restricted Line (RL) officers in the Navy.

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Summary

Issue

To meet the challenges of Great Power Competition (GPC) with China and Russia, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is reintroducing a Warrant Officer (WO) career track and expanding specialist or technical tracks for commissioned officers. To develop these career tracks, the DAF needs to consider policy and practices for managing WO and specialist or technical commissioned officer accession and selection, education and training, and promotion. As a reference, a companion report provides information on WO and Limited Duty Officers (LDO) in the Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps. This report describes a specialist or technical commissioned officer career track that differs from WO or LDO roles in the Army and the Navy. These officers are called Functional Area (FA) officers in the Army and Restricted Line (RL) officers in the Navy. The Marine Corps does not have an equivalent commissioned officer career track. FA and RL roles focus on technology, mathematics, science, business, geopolitics, coordination, and communication.

Approach

To understand accession and selection, education and training, and promotion in the FA and RL officer career tracks, we conducted a review of Army and Navy policy documents, research reports, and military news articles.

Key Findings

- In both the Army and the Navy, commissioned officers typically start as generalists. Some officers may choose to transition to a specialist or technical role later in their career; other FA and RL officers are direct commissions.
- Commissioned officers in an Army Competitive Category (ACC) in the Regular Army are eligible to transfer from a generalist to a specialist or technical commissioned officer track.
- In the Navy, Regular and Reserve commissioned officers, and some WOs, are eligible to transfer from a generalist career track to a specialist or technical commissioned officer track.
- In both the Army and the Navy, transfers must possess a bachelor's or graduate degree in a relevant degree field. If accepted, those transfers must enroll in specialized training courses; they may also be encouraged to obtain additional civilian education.
- In both the Army and in the Navy, the promotion system for specialist or technical track commissioned officers is the same as that for other commissioned officers.

Implications

- The DAF could make commissioned officer specialist or technical tracks available to other commissioned officers through lateral transfers.
- To ensure that airmen are qualified for commissioned officer specialist or technical track positions, the DAF could require candidates to have relevant work experience, technical education, or a bachelor's degree or higher.
- The DAF could require commissioned officers to take specialized training courses or additional civilian education for specialist or technical tracks, depending on the relevant specialty or technical expertise.
- It may not be necessary to develop a promotion system for commissioned officers in specialist or technical tracks that differs from that used for other commissioned office

Contents

About This Report	iii
RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF)	iii
Acknowledgments	iii
Summary	v
Issue	v
Approach	v
Key Findings	v
Implications	vi
Contents	vii
Tables	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Approach	1
Overview	1
Chapter 2. The Army's Functional Area Officers	3
Accessions and Selection	3
Education and Training	6
Promotion	7
Summary	7
Chapter 3. The Navy's Restricted Line Officers	8
Accessions and Selection	8
Education and Training	10
Promotion	11
Summary	11
Chapter 4. Application to the Department of the Air Force	12
Abbreviations	13
References	15

Tables

Table 1.1. Functional Area Officers in the Army and Restricted Line Officers in the Navy.....	2
Table 2.1 VTIP Applicants and Approvals by Functional Area, 2014-2019	5

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) is expanding specialist or technical career tracks for commissioned officers. To support the development of these career tracks, the DAF commissioned RAND Project AIR FORCE to write a report that describes a specialist or technical commissioned officer career track that differs from Warrant Officer (WO) or LDO roles in the Army and the Navy. We provide information on policy and practices for accession and selection, education and training, and promotion of commissioned officers in a specialist or technical career track.

Rather than focusing on generalist or combat leadership, these officers hold advisory roles in technology, mathematics, science, business, geopolitics, coordination, and communication. In the Army, these officers are called Functional Area (FA) officers. In the Navy, these officers are called Restricted Line (RL) officers. The Marine Corps does not have equivalent roles. There are fewer FA officers and RL officers than there are officers assuming generalist or combat leadership roles in both services. In the Army, generalists in leadership are called Branch officers. In the Navy, combat leaders with command at sea are called Unrestricted Line (URL) officers.

Approach

We conducted a review of U.S. Army and U.S. Navy policy documents, research reports, and military news articles. This report documents stated policy and practices in other services for the DAF to consult while developing their own policy documentation. Outside the scope of this effort, interviews or discussions with subject matter experts could provide additional background and detail on the design and implementation of these policies and practices.

Overview

FA recruits in the Army are typically Branch officers who make mid-career transfers, and RL recruits in the Navy are typically URL officers who make mid-career transfers. However, the Army and the Navy have different eligibility requirements for these transfers. In the Army, a transfer entails a commitment to three additional years of service, whereas a transfer in the Navy requires two additional years of service. In some cases, FA and RL officers are recruited via direct commission. Becoming an FA or RL officer tends to require an undergraduate or graduate degree that is aligned with the technical or specialist field the officer is transitioning into and additional specialized military training. Specialist or technical career track officers may also be required to obtain additional civilian education or go on military tours as a part of their training. The promotion system for FA and Branch officers in the Army is the same, and that for RL and

URL officers in the Navy is also the same. Table 1 provides a brief comparison of FAs in the Army and RLs in the Navy.

Table 1.1. Functional Area Officers in the Army and Restricted Line Officers in the Navy

	Functional Area Officers	Restricted Line Officers
Accession Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP). • Assured Functional Area Transfer Program (A-FAT) • Direct commission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial assignment. • Lateral transfer. • Direct commission.
General Eligibility Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be in the Regular Army. • Must have completed initial branch assignment. • Must be a mid-career officer in the Army Competitive Category (ACC). • Must have a relevant degree field, knowledge, and skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be Regular or Reserve Navy. • Must have completed at least one year of obligatory service. • Must be a mid-career officer. Warrant officers must have completed 24 months of commissioned service at or above the CWO4 pay grade. • Must achieve warfare qualifications and have a bachelor's degree in a relevant field. • Some RLs must complete a tour as a department head or a position of seniority.
Training and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized qualification courses or certifications. • May be encouraged to take additional civilian education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized training courses. • Some RLs must complete military tours. • Some RLs may be encouraged to take additional civilian education.
Promotion System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same as for other commissioned officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same as for other commissioned officers.

Chapter 2. The Army's Functional Area Officers

There are two commissioned officer tracks in the Army: Branch officers and Functional Area (FA) officers. Nearly all officers are assigned to branches upon commissioning.¹ In the Army, branches refer to operational and tactical areas, such as Infantry, Aviation, Logistics, Cyber, Special Forces, and Civil Affairs.² Branch officers tend to be generalists who focus on leadership. Following four years of commissioned service in an initial branch assignment, mid-career officers can apply to transfer to another branch or to a career field that requires specialized or technical expertise, referred to as a Functional Area, through the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP).^{3,4} FA officers⁵ tend to serve as specialists or technical advisors in technology, mathematics, science, business, geopolitics, coordination, or communication, rather than as generalists in leadership. This section describes accession and selection, education and training, and promotion in the FA career track.

Accessions and Selection

The Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP)

The VTIP, introduced in 2010, replaced the career field designation board that assigned commissioned officers to FAs automatically based on operational needs.⁶ The objective of VTIP was to improve morale and increase retention. Eligible officers may submit a Department of the Army (DA) Form 4187 (Request for Personnel Action) to the VTIP on a quarterly basis, when the VTIP panel, composed of five colonels or civilian equivalents, meets at U.S. Army Human

¹ Royston, Ryan P. and Naiqing Lin, *Army-wide Job Analysis for Officers: Branch and Functional Area-specific Knowledge, Skills, and Behavior Requirements from the Army Talent Attribute Framework Volume 1: Main Report*, U.S. Army Research Institute, 2022.

² A full list includes Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Aviation, Air Defense Artillery, Corps of Engineers, Military Police, Chemical, Special Forces, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, Military Intelligence, Signal Corps, Logistics, Quartermaster, Transportation, Ordnance, Adjutant General Corps, Finance Corps, and Cyber.

³ U.S. Army, "U.S. Army Human Resources Command examines Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP), among other," webpage, December 20, 2010.

⁴ Army Pamphlet 600-3, U.S. Department of the Army, 2023.

⁵ In 2020, the Army required 5,643 FA officer positions (926 Captains, 2,502 Majors, 1,610 Lieutenant Colonel, and 605 Colonels) (Waggy, William H. II, *Attracting the Right Volunteers: U.S. Army Functional Areas and the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program*, RAND Corporation, 2020).

⁶ Pavlick, DesiRee, "Voluntarily Transfer Incentive Program now accepting applications for branch transfer," webpage, August 29, 2011.

Resources Command (HRC) to evaluate applicants.⁷ Commissioned officers from the Regular Army in an Army Competitive Category (ACC) are eligible to apply. ACC officers are those in all Army branches except for specialty branches, such as the Army Medical Department, Judge Advocate General's Corps, and Chaplain Corps.⁸ Warrant Officers (WOs) and reserve officers are not eligible for the VTIP.

ACC officers must meet additional eligibility requirements for an FA transfer, many of which are rank-specific. For example, ACC officers must hold the rank of first lieutenant (1LT) (O-2), 1LT promotable (selected for promotion to captain), captain (CPT) (O-3), or CPT promotable (selected for promotion to major) in the first quarter of the fiscal year.⁷ Majors (MAJ) (O-4) may apply for an FA transfer or to a branch in which they have previously served if they have fewer than 14 years of active federal commissioned service.⁷ ACC officers who have transferred to the Army from a sister service or were recalled to active duty from a reserve or retired status may apply if they have served at least 12 months in their current branch or FA.⁷ Some FAs, such as strategic intelligence (FA34), also require officers to be eligible for a top secret (TS) clearance.

Transfer approval is based on performance, skills and experience, and Army operational demands. For example, commissioned officers with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees are more likely to have approved transfers to space operations (FA40) than those without STEM degrees. Army Pamphlet 600-3 outlines specific knowledge and skills expected for each FA. For instance, Army Pamphlet 600-3 identifies knowledge of U.S. foreign policy, language skills, and regional proficiency as crucial to the foreign area officer (FA48) position.⁴ To help soldiers determine which applications are likely to succeed, HRC provides quarterly updates, or "in/out calls," about which branches or specialties need transfers, and which ones are closed to them.^{3,9} In return for a transfer approval, officers must undertake an additional three years of Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO).³ Table 2.1. reports these FAs, the number of applicants, and transfer approvals from fiscal years 2014 to 2019.

⁷ Tice, Jim, "The six hottest job transfers for officers," webpage, December 16, 2014.

⁸ Gibson, Hise O., *The Total Army Competitive Category Optimization Model: Analysis of U.S. Army Officer Accessions and Promotions*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2007.

⁹ Association of the United States Army, "Army Seeks 250 Officers to Transfer Branches," webpage, February 1, 2024.

Table 2.1 VTIP Applicants and Approvals by Functional Area, 2014-2019

Functional Area Name	FA Number	Number of Applicants	Number of Approvals (Approval Rate)
Acquisition Corps	FA51	1,261	582 (46%)
Electronic Warfare ^c	FA29	162	94 (58%)
Force Management	FA50	332	161(48%)
Foreign Area Officer	FA48	856	399 (47%)
Information Network Engineer ^b	FA26	300	186 (62%)
Information Operations	FA30	191	89 (47%)
Information Systems Management ^a	FA53	179	49 (27%)
Nuclear and Counter-Proliferation	FA52	215	121 (56%)
Operation Research/System Analysis	FA49	461	269 (58%)
Public Affairs	FA46	241	91 (38%)
Simulation Operations	FA57	308	133 (43%)
Space Operations	FA40	528	225 (48%)
Strategic Intelligence	FA34	251	135 (54%)
Strategist	FA59	232	145 (63%)
Telecommunications Systems Engineer ^a	FA24	109	66 (61%)

NOTE:

^aFA24 and FA53 merged into FA26 in 2017. Data includes VTIP results through first quarter in fiscal year 2017.

^bFA26 started after the first quarter VTIP panel in fiscal year 2017.

^cFA29 became Area of Concentration (AOC) 17B in the Cyber branch in 2017.

SOURCE: Waggy, William H. II, *Attracting the Right Volunteers: U.S. Army Functional Areas and the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program*, RAND Corporation, 2020.

Alternative Pathways

The VTIP is the most common pathway to the FA career track. However, there are alternative pathways for commissioned officers interested in technology, mathematics, and science FAs. Some individuals can enter these FAs through direct commission, which is typically reserved for those with highly specialized technical skills that the Army is looking for at a specific point in time,¹⁰ or through the Assured Functional Area Transfer Program (A-FAT). The A-FAT is a pilot program, introduced in 2019, that guarantees promising cadets in STEM fields at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point or in the Army Reserve Officers'

¹⁰ White, Dottle, "SMDC welcomes first direct commissioned officer to Army Space Operations," webpage, November 7, 2023.

Training Corps (ROTC) approval to become space operations (FA40) officers after their initial branch assignment.^{11,12}

Education and Training

For Army officers, military education typically begins prior to being commissioned. There are four pathways to becoming a commissioned officer in the Army: (1) participating in ROTC while obtaining a college degree, (2) attending the USMA at West Point, (3) enrolling in Officer Candidate School (OCS), and (4) direct commission. OCS is a twelve-week training program at Fort Moore, Georgia, for college graduates with no prior Army experience, enlisted servicemembers, and direct commission officers (DCOs). Candidates graduate from the program with the rank of second lieutenant (2LT) (O-1).¹³ Before attending OCS, DCOs will attend the Direct Commission Officer course,¹⁴ and college graduates with no prior Army experience and enlisted personnel transitioning to officer positions undergo nine weeks of basic training.¹⁵ ROTC and USMA at West Point graduates do not undergo basic training or attend OCS because this training is already built into existing curriculum.

Next, officers attend the six-week Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) for their initial branch assignment.^{16,17} After completing their initial branch assignment, which typically lasts four years, most officers approved for an FA transfer enroll in specialized qualification courses or obtain certifications. For example, candidates for public affairs (FA46) must attend the nine-week Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course (PACS-Q) at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Meade, Maryland.⁴ By contrast, the Army requires candidates for acquisition corps (FA51) to obtain a Back-to-Basics certification.^{4,18} For some FAs, officers are encouraged to get additional civilian education. In simulations operations (FA57), for example, candidates are encouraged to obtain a master's degree in modeling and simulation, in addition to completing an eight-week Simulation Operations Course (SOC).⁴

¹¹ Longino, Cecil, "Growing tomorrow's Army space operations officers," webpage, May 20, 2020.

¹² Mroszczyk, Joe, "A Sustainable Model to Ensure a Unique Joint Culture for the US Space Force," webpage, June 1, 2020.

¹³ Today's Military, "Officer Candidate School," webpage, undated.

¹⁴ U.S. Army, "Officer Training (BOLC)," webpage, undated.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Army Officer Candidate School (OCS)*, undated.

¹⁶ *A Guide to Military Police Basic Officer Leader Course*, U.S. Army, undated.

¹⁷ *Logistics Basic Officer Leadership Course*, U.S. Army, undated.

¹⁸ Johnson, Tonya, "Back-to-Basics Streamlines Acquisition Training," webpage, 2022.

Promotion

Branch officers and FA officers share the same promotion system; however, the promotion selection board may consider technical expertise or specialized skills more important for FA officers, and leadership experience more important for branch officers. The promotion selection board bases promotions upon projected operational needs for a skill or a specialty, performance, experience, military and civilian education, and time-in-grade (TIG).¹⁹ The TIG requirements for promotion of active-duty officers is 18 months for O-1 to O-2, two years for O-2 to O-3, three years for O-3 to O-4, three years for O-4 to O-5, three years for O-5 to O-6, and at minimum one year for O-6 and O-7.²⁰

Summary

- Commissioned officers in the Army can work either as generalists or specialists. Branch officers are generalists who assume leadership roles. FA officers are specialists who assume advisory, rather than a leadership, roles.
- Before becoming FA officers, candidates must complete an initial branch assignment. When this assignment is complete, candidates may apply for a transfer to an FA through the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP). If approved, officers undertake an additional three years of Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO). Alternatives to the VTIP process are direct commission and the Assured Functional Area Transfer Program (A-FAT).
- The VTIP evaluates candidates by their previous performance, their skills and experience, and Army operational demands.
- FA officers and Branch officers have the same initial training requirements. After obtaining transfer approval, however, aspiring FA officers are typically required to enroll in specialized training courses or obtain certifications. Some aspiring FA officers are encouraged to obtain advanced civilian degrees.
- Branch officers and FA officers share the same promotion system.

¹⁹ Department of the Army, HQDA Policy Notice 600-2: “Policies and Procedures for Active Duty List Officer and Department of the Army Selection Boards,” Headquarters, Department of the Army, November 23, 2021. p. 5.

²⁰ 10 U.S. Code § 619.

Chapter 3. The Navy's Restricted Line Officers

In the Navy, there are two types of commissioned officers responsible for warfighting capabilities: Unrestricted Line (URL) officers and Restricted Line (RL) officers. Most line officers are URL officers who are responsible for combat and are eligible to take command at sea.²¹ These officers manage aviation, surface, submarine, and special warfare communities.²² In contrast, RL officers²³ focus on operational missions, rather than combat, and are ineligible to take command at sea.²⁴ Most RL officers were mid-career URL officers who made a lateral transfer into the RL community.²⁵ Unlike URL officers who focus on combat leadership, RL officers are specialists providing critical expertise in technology, mathematics, science, business, geopolitics, coordination, or communication. Some examples of RL communities are Engineering Duty Officers (EDO), Aerospace Maintenance Duty Officers (AEDO), Public Affairs Officers (PAO), and Human Resources (HR).^{26,27} This section describes accession and selection, education and training, and promotion in the RL career track.

Accessions and Selection

Though the role of RL officer can be an initial assignment, most RL officers are either former URL officers who made a lateral transfer into the RL community or, in rare cases, direct commissions. Indeed, nearly all EDOs are lateral transfers.²⁵ Many PAOs and Naval Oceanographers are also lateral transfers.²⁵ Historically, around 90 percent of these lateral transfers come from either the surface warfare or aviation URL communities.²⁵ Most aviation transfers to the RL community failed to complete aviation training requirements, and ended up

²¹ D'Angelo, Bart, "Navy Information Operations: Time for a New Unrestricted Line Community," webpage, June 2023.

²² MyNavy HR, "Unrestricted Line Officer Community Managers," webpage, undated.

²³ The Restricted Line community consists of just over 545 officers (United States Naval Academy, "Special Duty – Information Professional (DESIG 1820)," webpage, undated).

²⁴ Rairden, Jr., P.W., "What Is A Line Officer," webpage, January 1954.

²⁵ Monroe, Albert B. and Donald J. Cymrot, *Enabling Officer Accession Cuts While Limiting Laterals*, Alexandria, Virginia: CNA, July 2004.

²⁶ MyNavy HR, "Restricted Line Officer Community Managers," webpage, undated.

²⁷ A full list includes Aerospace Engineering Duty Officer (AEDO), Aviation Maintenance Duty Officer (AMDO), Engineering Duty Officer (EDO), Foreign Area Officer (FAO), Human Resources (HR), Information Warfare Community (IWC), Oceanography (OCEANO), Cryptologic Warfare (CW), Intelligence (INTEL), Cyber Warfare Engineering (CWE), Maritime Space Officer (MSO), Maritime Cyber Warfare Officer (MCWO), Permanent Military Professor (PMP), and Public Affairs Officer (PAO).

being reassigned, whereas surface warfare officers (SWOs) tend to transfer to the RL community based on personal preference.²⁵

Lateral Transfer Requirements

Before making a lateral transfer to the RL officer community, URL officers must meet several requirements. For example, only Regular and Reserve URL officers who have completed at least one year of obligatory service are eligible for these transfers.^{28,29} However, Regular and Reserve URL officers transferring from the aviation community to the AEDO community can apply for an exemption from this obligatory service requirement.²⁸ If the transfer request is approved, Reserve URL officers in a grade of Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) (O-4) and above must be willing to accept possible reappointment to the Regular Navy if necessary.

Some RL communities have specific pay grade requirements. For example, serving as an Aviation Maintenance Duty Officer (AMDO) requires a grade of commander (CDR) (O-5) or below, while serving as an Intelligence Officer (INTEL) requires a grade of lieutenant (LT) (O-3) or below.²⁹ URL officers are also required to meet the physical standards expected of their pay grade, as determined by the Director of Naval Medicine or the Surgeon General of the Navy, before transferring.²⁹ Warrant officers (WOs) may make lateral transfers to the RL community if they complete a minimum of 24 months of commissioned service above the Chief WO 4 (CWO4) pay grade before making the request.^{28, 29} Lateral transfer among WOs is less common than among URLs.

Training is also a critical aspect of lateral transfer eligibility. URL officers are required to achieve warfare qualifications in their respective community before applying for a lateral transfer to the RL community.^{28,29} In addition, SWOs currently under orders to Department Head School—a specialized training program to prepare officers for the role of department head of a ship, submarine, or aviation squadron—must complete an initial Department Head Tour before applying for a transfer.^{28,29} URL officers must also have a bachelor's degree in a field relevant to the RL community to which they wish to transfer. For example, PAO transfers should have undergraduate degrees in public relations, communications, journalism, or marketing, whereas EDO transfers should have degrees in engineering or physical sciences.²⁹

There are service limits to requesting a lateral transfer. SWOs under agreement for special or incentive pay are not eligible to apply for a transfer within one year of satisfying that obligation.²⁸ Those officers must also complete a tour in a LCDR-grade nuclear billet on a nuclear-powered ship, or hold seniority over other assigned sailors before applying for a transfer, unless they have nuclear training and are applying to become EDOs.²⁹ Likewise, submarine warfare officers must complete a tour as a department head, or hold seniority over other assigned sailors before requesting a transfer.²⁹ Finally, URL officers' active commissioned service must

²⁸ MyNavy HR, "Lateral Transfer," webpage, undated.

²⁹ U.S. Navy MILPERSMAN 1212-010, "Lateral Transfer and Resignation," June 21, 2022.

not exceed 20 years in total by age 55.²⁹ In return for an approved transfer to the RL community, all officers must agree to serve on active duty for two or more years.

Education and Training

To become a commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy, a candidate must have a degree from a four-year university and complete officer training, unless they already have extensive service experience.³⁰ There are four ways to become an officer in the U.S. Navy: (1) participating in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) during college, (2) attending the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), (3) enrolling in Officer Candidate School (OCS), and (4) direct commission. OCS in the U.S. Navy is a twelve-week training program located at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island, for college graduates who did not attend USNA or NROTC, and for enlisted personnel transitioning into officer roles.^{31,13} After completing the program, graduates receive the rank of ensign (ENS) (O-1). DCOs are required to attend the U.S. Navy Direct Commission Officer Indoctrination Course (DCOIC), which is a twelve-day intensive training program.³² Furthermore, DCOs must attend the U.S. Navy Officer Development School (ODS), a five-week training program located at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island, within one year of commissioning.³³

After commissioning, URL and RL officers undergo training that is tailored to their specific community. This section focuses on training for the RL community. Many of these training programs range from one to two months. For example, EDOs attend the six-week Engineering Duty Officer School at Port Hueneme, California,³⁴ whereas PAOs attend the nine-week Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course (PACS-Q) at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Meade, Maryland.³⁵ However, some training programs are more extensive than this. For instance, aspiring INTEL officers must attend a five-month basic course at the Center for Information Dominance in Virginia.³⁶ Following specialized training courses, some RL officers are required to go on military tours or are encouraged to pursue additional civilian education.^{36,37}

³⁰ America's Navy, "Officer," webpage, undated.

³¹ MyNavy HR, "Faces of OCS," webpage, October 12, 2023.

³² Boot Camp & Military Fitness Institute, "US Navy Direct Commission Officer Indoctrination Course (DCOIC)," webpage, undated.

³³ U.S. Navy Reserve, "Direct Commission Officer," webpage, undated.

³⁴ MyNavy HR, "Engineering Duty Officer School," webpage, undated.

³⁵ U.S. Navy, "Public Affairs Officer," webpage, undated.

³⁶ U.S. Navy, "Intelligence Officer," webpage, undated.

³⁷ U.S. Navy, "Cryptologic Warfare Officer," webpage, undated.

Promotion

URL and RL officers share the same promotion system; however, they fall under different competitive categories.³⁸ Moreover, URL and RL officers are appraised differently by the promotion selection board, in light of the fact that they have different duties and responsibilities.³⁹ URL officers focus on combat leadership and command at sea, while RL officers have specialized or technical expertise and do not command at sea. As with the Army, the Navy's promotion selection board considers performance, experience, military and civilian education, and time-in-grade (TIG). The Navy's TIG requirements are comparable to the Army's; however, the Navy has recently considered promoting from O-1 to O-2 at 18 months after commissioning, rather than at two years, in an effort to improve retention.⁴⁰

Summary

- There are two types of line officers in the Navy: URL officers and RL officers. URL officers work in combat leadership and RL officers work as operational experts.
- It is possible to work as an RL officer in one's initial assignment. However, most RL officers are mid-career URL officers who made lateral transfers to the RL community.
- Lateral transfers are evaluated according to their component, pay grade, training, and time in the service.
- URL and RL officers have the same initial training requirements. After commissioning, URL and RL officers enroll in training programs tailored to their specific communities. These training programs are typically between one to two months long; however, some can last as long as five months. Some RL communities also require completing a military tour and additional civilian education.
- URL and RL officers share the same promotion system, but they fall into different competitive categories.

³⁸ SECNAVINST 1400.1C, April 5, 2019.

³⁹ SECNAVINST 1420.3, March 28, 2019.

⁴⁰ Stancy, Diana, "Navy considers accelerating promotion timeline for junior officers," webpage, Mary 7, 2024.

Chapter 4. Application to the Department of the Air Force

To maintain a competitive force in the Great Power Competition (GPC) era, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is expanding specialist or technical career tracks for commissioned officers. This report provides information about policy and practices for specialist or technical career tracks in the Army and the Navy for the DAF to use as a reference. These officers are called Functional Area (FA) officers in the Army and Restricted Line (RL) officers in the Navy. There are many common elements in accession and selection, education and training, and promotion policy across FA officer and RL officer career tracks. Here we discuss the DAF's options for developing specialist or technical career tracks for commissioned officers.

Beginning with accession, recruiting for FA and RL positions primarily involves lateral transfers. In the Army, commissioned officers must begin as Branch officers, but they may request a mid-career transfer to an FA officer position. The Navy does not impose this restriction; however, many RL officer positions are filled by URL officers who requested a lateral transfer. There are some advantages to having personnel begin in a generalist position before assuming a specialist or technical position. These include having exposure to personnel working in different roles, and gaining a broad understanding of how the force operates. In alignment with these positions in other services, the DAF could primarily recruit officers for specialist or technical career tracks through lateral transfers from other commissioned officer positions rather than through direct accession.

Transfer requests to FA and RL positions are unlikely to succeed unless a candidate has education and work experience relevant to the position to which they are applying. If the transfer is approved, most FA and RL positions require further training, either through military training courses or through additional civilian education. These requirements ensure that specialist or technical career track officers are fully qualified for their positions. It will likewise be important for the DAF to consider developing training requirements—and perhaps training programs—to ensure that specialist or technical career track officers are adequately prepared for their roles.

Finally, the promotion system does not significantly differ between Branch officers and FA officers, or between URL officers and RL officers. This suggests that the DAF may not need to develop a new promotion policy for a specialist or technical officer career track. While largely retaining the same promotion criteria, the promotion selection board can focus on different skills—leadership performance for generalist officers, and aptitude in their area of focus for specialist or technical career track officers. Aligning policy with those developed for analogous positions in the other services will go a long way toward supporting the success of a new specialist or technical track for commissioned officers in the DAF.

Abbreviations

ACC	Army Competitive Category
ADSO	Active-Duty Service Obligation
AEDO	Aerospace Maintenance Duty Officer
A-FAT	Assured Transfer Program
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
BOLC	Basic Officer Leadership Course
CPT	Captain
CDR	Commander
CWO4	Chief Warrant Officer 4
DA	Department of the Army
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DCO	Direct Commission Officer
DCOIC	Direct Commission Officer Indoctrination Course
DINFOS	Defense Information School
EDO	Engineering Duty Officer
ENS	Ensign
FA	Functional Area
GPC	Great Power Competition
HRC	Human Resources Command
INTEL	Intelligence
LCDR	Lieutenant Commander
LDO	Limited Duty Officer
LT	Lieutenant
MAJ	Major
NROTC	Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps
OCS	Officer Candidate School
ODS	Officer Development School
PACS-Q	Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course
PAO	Public Affairs Officer
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
RL	Restricted Line Officers
SOC	Simulation Operations Course
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SWO	Surface Warfare Officers

TIG	Time-In-Grade
TS	Top Secret
USMA	U.S. Military Academy
USNA	U.S. Naval Academy
URL	Unrestricted Line Officers
VTIP	Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program
WO	Warrant Officer
1LT	First Lieutenant
2LT	Second Lieutenant

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