



July 2022

MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES

Actions Needed to Better Assess Organizational Climate

Accessible Version

GAO Highlight

Highlights of [GAO-22-105130](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

According to the Department of Defense, creating an inclusive environment free from harassment and discrimination is a priority. As the military service academies are a major source of officer commissions, accounting for approximately 18 percent of all officer commissions in fiscal year 2019, they play a key role developing officers who will be responsible for leading a diverse military.

The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 included a provision for GAO to report on equal opportunity claims, climate surveys, and programs to address climate issues at the military service academies. Specifically, this report addresses (1) the extent to which the academies collect information to develop a complete picture of the climate; (2) the extent to which the academies have taken actions to improve the climate; and (3) the perceptions of current students concerning the climate.

GAO held 34 focus groups with current students across the three service academies, analyzed complaint data from fiscal years 2017 through 2021, reviewed documentation, and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that DOD capture information on incidents not submitted through the complaint system and develop performance measures for actions aimed at improving climate. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105130](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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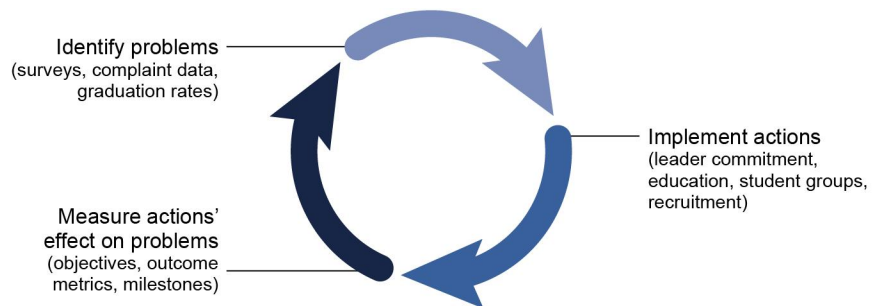
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What GAO Found

The United States Military Academy, United States Naval Academy, and United States Air Force Academy collect information about their organizational climate using a variety of tools. However, the DOD climate survey—the academies' primary tool for collecting information—does not provide complete and reliable information. Specifically, the survey has methodological issues concerning security, response rates, and post-survey weighting that limit its usability. In addition, while the academies monitor the number and basis of equal opportunity complaints, they do not fully capture information on alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. DOD is taking steps to address methodological issues with its survey, but without addressing alleged incidents that are not submitted through the complaint processing system, the academies will continue to have an incomplete picture of their organizational climate. This will limit the academies' ability to identify problems, implement actions, and measure outcomes.

Steps for Identifying and Correcting Organizational Climate Problems



Source: GAO analysis. | [GAO-22-105130](#)

The service academies have taken actions to improve organizational climate by incorporating leading practices for managing workforce diversity. Specifically, the academies have taken action to demonstrate leadership commitment, employ strategic planning, improve student involvement, and enhance recruitment, among others. For example, between 2019 and 2021, all three academies developed diversity and inclusion strategic plans, and each academy has created or restructured student leadership positions related to diversity and inclusion.

Each academy has plans to measure the effect of its actions aimed at improving climate. However, they are unable to assess their actions' effectiveness because they have not fully developed or implemented performance measures, such as measures to review disciplinary actions for bias. Without such measures, the academies cannot hold accountable those responsible for the actions.

Students at the academies expressed a range of perceptions regarding the academies' organizational climate in 34 GAO-conducted focus groups. For example, while most groups organized by race and ethnicity agreed that the use of offensive terms or slurs is uncommon, these groups differed in their view of how well command officials work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, most focus groups agreed that they would recommend the academy to a friend or family member.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Air Force Academy | United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado |
| climate survey | Defense Organizational Climate Survey |
| DEI | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion |
| DOD | Department of Defense |
| LGBTQ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer |
| MEO | Military Equal Opportunity |
| Naval Academy | United States Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland |
| NDA | National Defense Authorization Act |
| OPA | Office of People Analytics |
| West Point | United States Military Academy, in West Point, New York |

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July 29, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The military service academies are a key source of officer commissions, accounting for approximately 18 percent of all such commissions in fiscal year 2019. These future leaders within the Department of Defense (DOD) will command a diverse active duty force, where creating an inclusive environment free from harassment and discrimination is a priority. According to a survey by DOD's Office of People Analytics, in 2017, an estimated 17.9 percent of active duty servicemembers experienced racial or ethnic harassment and/or discrimination in the 12 months prior to taking the survey, with 24.4 percent of servicemembers from certain racial and ethnic demographic groups reporting such experiences compared to 12.7 percent of White servicemembers. Further, these active duty servicemembers reported lower levels of readiness on all indicators assessed than those who did not, including preparedness to perform their wartime mission.¹ The academies therefore play a critical role in shaping leaders who share DOD's vision of a diverse, inclusive, and cohesive

¹Office of People Analytics, *Executive Note: Impacts of Experiencing Racial/Ethnic Harassment and/or Discrimination on the Readiness of Active Duty Members*, Note No. 2021-046 (Jul. 2021). The target population for the 2017 survey consisted of active duty members from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, excluding National Guard and Reserve members, who were below flag rank. It was administered to a statistical sample of members as a confidential web-based survey beginning in November 2017 with an overall weighted response rate of 15.5 percent. The margins of error for estimates shown range from ± 0.8 percent to ± 7.6 percent.

force, which begins with cultivating a climate at the academies that reflects and models these values.

DOD has affirmed its commitment to becoming a workplace of choice that is characterized by diversity, equality, and inclusion and is free from barriers that may prevent personnel from realizing their potential and rising to the highest levels of responsibility. We have recently reported that DOD can strengthen its efforts in this area. Specifically, we highlighted two key recommendations from this work in a letter to the Secretary of Defense where we identified priority recommendations for implementation.² We identified recommendations related to strengthening the department's efforts to recruit and retain female servicemembers,³ as well as one to ensure better understanding of the reasons for racial and gender disparities in the military justice system.⁴ As of May 2022, these two recommendations have not yet been fully implemented.

Section 558 of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 included a provision for us to report

²GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Defense*, [GAO-21-522PR](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2, 2021).

³GAO, *Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, [GAO-20-61](#). (Washington, D.C.: May 19, 2020). DOD concurred with our recommendation. In May 2020, DOD officials indicated that the department would provide guidance to the services to develop and implement plans to guide and monitor their efforts to recruit and retain female servicemembers in its forthcoming DOD Diversity and Inclusion Instruction and Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. The aforementioned Instruction issued in September 2020, and the plan was scheduled for issuance in December 2020, but as of May 2022 the strategic plan had not been finalized.

⁴GAO, *Military Justice: DOD and the Coast Guard Need to Improve Their Capabilities to Assess Racial and Gender Disparities*, [GAO-19-344](#). (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2019). DOD partially concurred with our recommendation. As of March 2022, officials stated that DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) had contracted with a federally funded research and development center to conduct a study, which officials said would be completed in June 2022. According to ODEI officials, the multidisciplinary study team will use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to develop a comprehensive picture of military justice outcomes in all four military services and make recommendations for data collection and policy formulation. ODEI officials said that they plan to use the findings and recommendations from this study to identify the causes and the steps to take to address those causes, as noted in our recommendation. ODEI officials said that DOD will be better equipped to provide timeframes for implementation of any recommendations from this study after the study recommendations are submitted.

on equal opportunity claims, organizational climate,⁵ surveys, and programs to address any climate issues at the military service academies (hereafter, the service academies).⁶ Specifically, in this report we examine (1) the extent to which the service academies collect information to develop a complete picture of the organizational climate; (2) the perceptions of current students concerning the organizational climate at their respective service academies; and (3) the extent to which the service academies have taken actions to improve their climate.

For our first objective, we collected and reviewed equal opportunity complaint data from fiscal years 2017 through 2021 and documents related to DOD survey results from fiscal years 2016 through 2021. For our second objective, we held 34 focus groups with current students across the three service academies. For our third objective, we collected and reviewed documentation from the service academies from academic year 2016 to May 2022 about their efforts to improve their climate and assessed those efforts using leading practices for diversity management. For all three objectives, we interviewed officials in various DOD offices and at all three service academies, where appropriate. For a detailed description of our scope and methodology, see appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2021 to July 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁵DOD defines organizational climate as factors that represent military and civilian personnel perceptions and climate experiences of behaviors and inclusiveness in the workplace. This includes equal opportunity, sexual harassment and assault, hazing and bullying, and bias in disciplinary actions. Department of Defense Instruction 1020.05, *DOD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program* (Sept. 9, 2020).

⁶Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 558 (2021), as amended by Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 574 (2021).

Background

Diversity and Inclusion Management in DOD

DOD Directive 1020.02E establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for addressing unlawful discrimination and promoting equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion.⁷ DOD's most recent Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2012 to 2017 outlines the implementation of the President's Executive Order 13583 on establishing a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce.⁸ In 2021, the President issued Executive Order 14035, which directs federal departments and agencies to develop strategic plans that identify actions to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workforce; remove any potential barriers; and include quarterly goals and actions to advance initiatives.⁹ DOD is currently developing an updated diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility strategic plan, according to officials, which they state is in coordination for final signature as of May 2022.

In addition, the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021 added reporting requirements on diversity and inclusion, including annual reports from each military department. The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2022 specified that these reports should include the status of diversity and inclusion in the military service academies.¹⁰ The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021 also added a requirement for a report to accompany each national defense strategy that discusses the number of members of the armed forces,

⁷Department of Defense Directive 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DOD* (June 8, 2015) (incorporating change 2, effective June 1, 2018).

⁸Department of Defense, *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2012-2017* (2012); see also Exec. Order No. 13,583, 76 Fed. Reg. 52, 847 (Aug. 18, 2011). According to DOD, while Executive Order 13583 was focused on civilian personnel, DOD's strategic plan also addresses similar concerns for military personnel.

⁹Exec. Order No. 14,035, 86 Fed. Reg. 34,593 (June 25, 2021).

¹⁰Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 551(a)(1)(A) (2021) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 113(c)(2)); Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 573 (2021).

disaggregated by gender, race, and ethnicity, for each grade, and the same information for graduates of each military service academy.¹¹

Furthermore, the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021 added a requirement that each national security strategy must include strategic goals related to diversity and inclusion in the armed forces, and an assessment of measures of performance related to the efforts of the armed forces to reflect the diverse population of the United States eligible to serve.¹²

Military Equal Opportunity Program

DOD defines equal opportunity as the right of all persons to participate in, and benefit from, programs and activities for which they are qualified, and further states that these programs and activities must be free from social, personal, or institutional barriers that prevent people from rising to the highest level of responsibility possible.¹³ DOD operates a Civilian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program for civilian employees and a Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) program for uniformed servicemembers.¹⁴ The status of the complainant determines which program is utilized. For example, a civilian who wishes to file a complaint concerning a military alleged offender will utilize the civilian EEO program, while a servicemember who wishes to file a complaint concerning a civilian alleged offender will utilize the MEO program.

The MEO program promotes equal opportunity as being critical to mission accomplishment, unit cohesiveness, and military readiness. In addition, it emphasizes that the chain of command is the primary and preferred channel for processing and resolving complaints of unlawful discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment.¹⁵ There are some differences in protections under civilian EEO and MEO programs.

¹¹Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 551(a)(1)(B) (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 113(m)).

¹²Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 551(a)(1)(B) (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 113(g)(1)(B)(vii)).

¹³DOD Instruction 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program* (Sept. 4, 2020).

¹⁴See DOD Directive 1440.1, *The DOD Civilian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program* (May 21, 1987) (incorporating through change 3, Apr. 17, 1992; certified current as of Nov. 21, 2003); DOD Instruction 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program* (Sept. 4, 2020); see also DOD Directive 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DOD* (June 8, 2015) (incorporating change 2, effective June 1, 2018).

¹⁵DOD Directive 1020.02E.

For example, disability, age, and genetic information are listed as protected categories under the definition of civilian EEO but not MEO in DOD guidance.¹⁶

Each of the academies has offices focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and equal opportunity that supports the MEO Program. One of the central functions of these offices is to handle MEO complaints made at the academy. There are three types of MEO complaints: informal, formal, and anonymous.

- **Informal Complaints.** Informal complaints are written or oral allegations of prohibited discrimination or harassment that are not submitted as a formal complaint. Once an informal complaint is submitted, an MEO professional or a member in the complainant's chain of command, other than the commander, will initiate informal resolution procedures within 3 duty days. If the complaint is not or cannot be resolved within 30 duty days or the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, the complainant may file a formal complaint.
- **Formal Complaints.** Formal complaints are written allegations of prohibited discrimination or harassment submitted to the staff designated to receive such complaints. Commanders are also able to elevate informal complaints they are handling to formal complaints if they determine an investigation is warranted. Submitting a formal complaint begins a process where an MEO professional refers the complaint to the appropriate commander or supervisor associated with receiving complaints to conduct an investigation into the allegation. The commander or supervisor forwards the complaint to a level in the organization that has a legal office and initiates an investigation. The commander or supervisor provides the complainant(s) and alleged offender(s) information about the investigative process and notifies them of the results. Results of the completed investigation will identify substantiated, unsubstantiated, or dismissed allegations. The commander or supervisor will take appropriate disciplinary or administrative action when a complaint is substantiated.
- **Anonymous Complaints.** Anonymous complaints are allegations of prohibited discrimination or harassment that were submitted by an unknown or unidentified source. The academies' response to anonymous MEO complaints depends on the extent of information

¹⁶DOD Directive 1020.02E.

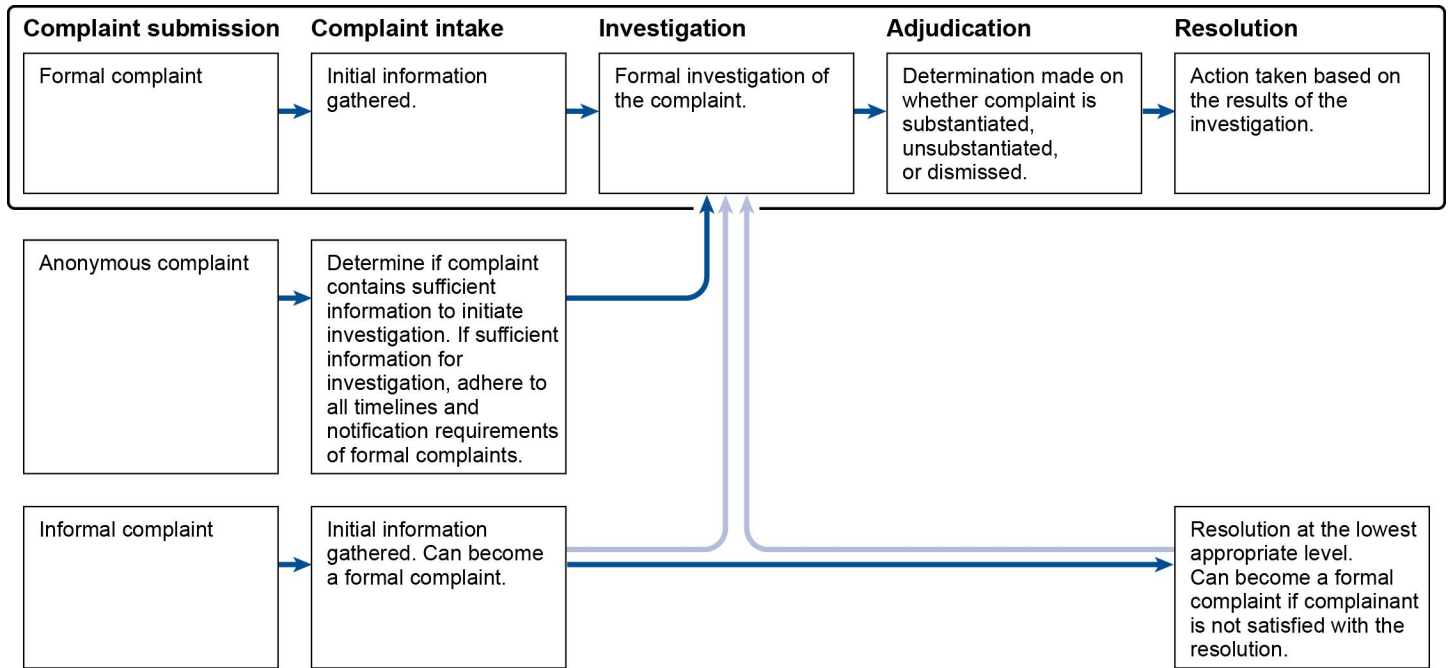
provided by the anonymous complainant. If the anonymous complaint contains sufficient information, such as the name of the alleged offender and the date of the incident, then the commander will initiate an investigation. Once initiated, an anonymous complaint investigation follows the same processes as a formal complaint investigation.

DOD Instruction 1350.02 requires the military departments to collect data on all military equal opportunity complaints, but the type of information that the academies must collect varies by MEO complaint type.¹⁷

In general, the same data collection requirements that apply to formal complaints also apply to informal complaints when the information is available. However, informal complaints do not always result in an investigation, and in cases where there is no investigation, the academies may not be able to report on factors related to the complaint investigation. The data collection requirements for anonymous complaints are less extensive. When an anonymous complaint is submitted, the academies are expected to collect 1) the date and time the complaint was received, 2) a detailed description of the facts and circumstances included in the complaint, 3) the date the complaint was closed and by whom, and 4) any other pertinent information they are able to gather. See figure 1 for the steps for processing MEO complaints.

¹⁷DOD Instruction 1350.02.

Figure 1: Procedures for Processing Military Equal Opportunity Complaints



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-22-105130

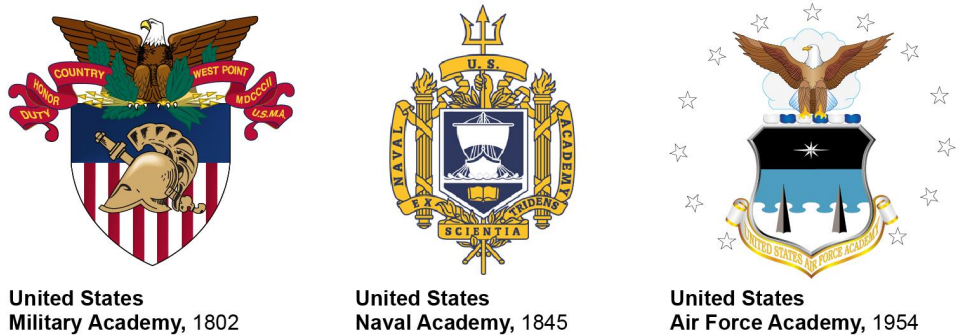
The military departments are required to collect and maintain information on all MEO complaints, which the Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion uses to compile an annual report for the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This report will include an aggregation and assessment of the data provided by the military departments, information regarding DOD efforts to improve MEO complaints prevention and response policies and procedures, and recommendations to strengthen MEO complaint prevention and response efforts, if appropriate.

Overview of Military Service Academies

The military departments operate tuition-free, 4-year degree-granting service academies—the United States Military Academy, in West Point, New York (hereafter, West Point); the United States Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland (hereafter, the Naval Academy); and the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado (hereafter, the Air Force Academy). While enrolled at the academies, students have the rank of cadet (Army and Air Force) or midshipman (Navy) and are considered to be on active duty. They live in military barracks, wear

uniforms, and, in addition to the academic curriculum, participate in military training and professional development on a daily basis. Upon graduation, students at the academies are obligated to accept an appointment as a commissioned officer and serve 5 years on active duty.¹⁸ See figure 2 for the founding dates of each academy.

Figure 2: Military Service Academies and Dates Established



Source: Military service academies. | GAO-22-105130

Three entities oversee the service academies: the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Board of Visitors of each academy, and the military department Secretaries. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness provides DOD oversight and management of the academies.¹⁹ The Board of Visitors is a statutorily mandated oversight body.²⁰ Each academy is led by a Superintendent who is responsible for the day to day operation of the academy as well as the welfare of cadets or midshipmen and staff. A Commandant of Cadets or Midshipmen and Dean of Faculty or Academic Board, or Academic Dean and Provost, serve under the Superintendent and have functional responsibility for the student body and faculty, respectively.

¹⁸10 U.S.C. §§ 7448(a)(2), 9448(a)(2), 8459(a)(2).

¹⁹DOD Instruction 1322.22, *Service Academies* (Sept. 24, 2015).

²⁰The Board consists of various congressional members (and congressionally designated persons in the case of the Air Force Academy Board of Visitors) and six persons designated by the President. The Board of Visitors is required to inquire into the morale and discipline, the curriculum, instruction, physical equipment, fiscal affairs, academic methods, and other matters relating to the respective military service academy that the Board of Visitors decides to consider. Each military service academy has a Board of Visitors. 10 U.S.C. §§ 7455, 8468, 9455.

To receive an offer of appointment to a military service academy, an applicant must first obtain a nomination from an official source.²¹ The primary sources include congressional and military-affiliated nominations. Upon receiving a nomination, candidates complete the application process with their chosen academy. To enroll at an academy, a nominated applicant must be between 17 and 23 years old at the time of admission.²² In addition, up to 60 foreign national students may be enrolled at each academy.

The academies first admitted Black or African American students in 1870 and women in 1976. As of fall 2021, non-White cadets accounted for between 36 and 40 percent, and women accounted for between 24 and 29 percent of each academy’s student body, as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Military Service Academy and Overall U.S. Undergraduate Fall Enrollment by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity, in Percentages

| Gender, Race, Ethnicity | USMA (2021) | USNA (2021) | USAFA (2021) | U.S. Undergraduate Enrollment (2020) |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Male | 76 | 71 | 71 | 42 |
| Female | 24 | 29 | 29 | 58 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 |
| Asian | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| Black or African American | 13 | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 12 | 13 | 11 | 20 |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 |
| White | 62 | 60 | 64 | 49 |
| Two or more races | 2 | 10 | 7 | 4 |
| Race/ethnicity unknown | <1 | <1 | 2 | 4 |
| Nonresident alien | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Non-white | 38 | 40 | 36 | 51 |

Legend:

USMA United States Military Academy

USNA United States Naval Academy

²¹Allocations for nominations are governed by law. Appointment, number, and territorial distribution information are codified at 10 U.S.C. § 7442, Military Academy; 10 U.S.C. § 8454, Naval Academy; and 10 U.S.C. § 9442, Air Force Academy.

²²Applicants may not have passed their 23rd birthday on July 1st of the year in which they enter a service academy. 10 U.S.C. §§ 9446(a), 7446(a), 8458(a).

USAFA United States Air Force Academy

Source: Data from USMA, USNA, USAFA, and the Department of Education. | GAO-22-105130

Note: Service academy data is for fall 2021 enrollment. U.S. undergraduate enrollment percentages are for fall 2020 enrollment because the National Center for Education Statistics had not yet completed processing fall 2021 U.S. undergraduate enrollment numbers at the time of this review. Figures represent percentages that may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in other race categories.

Service academy graduates become part of an officer corps that leads a diverse force. The active enlisted population is slightly more racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. population eligible for military service (47 percent versus 41 percent non-White); however, the officer corps is significantly less diverse than the enlisted population (22 percent versus 47 percent non-White).²³ As of March 2022, 17 percent of the active enlisted and 19 percent of the officer corps was female.²⁴

Information Collected by Academies to Monitor Organizational Climate Provides an Incomplete Picture

The military service academies use various methods to gather information on their organizational climate, but are unable to develop a complete picture of their organizational climate due to challenges with key information sources. Specifically, the academies' primary tool to collect information about organizational climate, the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (hereafter, the climate survey), has methodological issues that limit its usability, but the Office of People Analytics (OPA) is taking steps to address them. In addition, each of the military departments have issued guidance that encourage issues to be resolved at the lowest appropriate level, but the academies do not capture information on incidents that are addressed in this manner.

Data on equal opportunity complaints at West Point and the Air Force Academy provide valuable information concerning the organizational climate at the academies. However, the Naval Academy is not able to readily review its Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) complaint data. In addition, all three academies review information from several sources

²³Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report, Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military* (Dec. 18, 2020).

²⁴Defense Manpower Data Center (Mar. 2022).

concerning the climate, including graduation, attrition, and disciplinary data; “on-the-ground” monitoring, such as information provided by student diversity staff; internal assessments of the organizational climate; and the Service Academy Gender Relations Survey and Focus Group Reports.

Academies Face Challenges With Important Sources of Information on the Climate

Academies’ Primary Tool Does Not Provide a Complete and Reliable Picture of Organizational Climate

Senior leadership at each of the academies stated that the climate survey is the primary tool they use to monitor their respective organizational climate.²⁵ However, it does not provide a complete and reliable picture of the organizational climate because it has methodological issues that limit its effectiveness. OPA, within the Defense Personnel Analytics Center, administers the climate survey to units across DOD and includes questions that measure cross-cutting risk and protective factors to help DOD leadership and unit/organization leaders gain an understanding of problematic behaviors in their organization.

OPA administers a modified version of the climate survey at the academies annually, which academy leaders stated is critical to their understanding of academy organizational climate. One of the ways the climate survey helps inform academy leadership’s understanding of organizational climate is by presenting the top “risk factors” present at the academy. The fall 2021 climate survey report for each of the academies shows that they each had the same top four risk factors. Specifically, those risk factors at each academy were, in order, the presence of 1) sexually harassing behaviors, 2) moderate/high stress among students, 4) racially harassing behaviors, and 4) sexist behaviors.

However, OPA has previously issued a number of reports on challenges with the climate survey that limit its reliability and usefulness as a

²⁵For purposes of our report, we define senior leadership to include the academies’ Superintendents, Commandants, equal opportunity office officials, and other leaders. The Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS, which we refer to in this report as the climate survey,) is a survey tool for support of DOD’s command climate assessment program. See Under Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute Organizational Climate Survey Usage and Data Sharing* (Nov. 20, 2015).

monitoring tool.²⁶ While these reports identify a number of issues, we determined that three important issues highlighted in them affect the usability of the results of the climate survey:

- **Security issues.** When the climate survey is administered, entire units are given a single password they can use to sign in and complete the survey. Under this system, a respondent could complete the survey multiple times or an individual who is not within the survey group could complete the survey, potentially compromising the validity of the results.
- **Varying response rates.** Low response rates for the climate survey in some years may create high levels of nonresponse bias within the results.²⁷ According to the fall 2021 climate survey report from each academy, unweighted response rates ranged from 32 percent to 41 percent. However, given the security issues noted above, this may not reflect the true number of individuals within each group that responded. In contrast, the 2018 Gender Relations Survey had a weighted response rate of 73 percent across the academies.²⁸
- **Inability to conduct post-survey weighting.** Survey administrators can often control for nonresponse bias by conducting post-survey weighting. However, it is challenging for administrators to conduct post-survey weighting for the climate survey because the survey is entirely anonymous and administrators therefore do not have information regarding the characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents.²⁹ Without this information, survey administrators are not able to determine whether, for example, women are over or underrepresented relative to men in the survey results and therefore

²⁶OPA, *DEOCS 4.1 Evaluation Report* (June 2018). OPA, *Use of DEOCS Data-Best Practices* (Oct. 2019). OPA, *Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) Redesign: Phase 1 Overview Report* (Oct. 2021).

²⁷Low response rates increase the chances of non-response bias. Non-response bias occurs when those who respond to the survey are systematically different than those who do not respond to the survey. The presence of statistical non-response bias is tested for by comparing the characteristics of respondents versus non-respondents via response propensity models.

²⁸While weighted and unweighted response rates are not directly comparable, OPA officials acknowledged the Service Academy Gender Relations survey has a higher response rate than the climate survey.

²⁹The characteristics of climate survey respondents and non-respondents are unknown because the climate survey is anonymous.

cannot weight the results of women and men accordingly. This concept holds for other groups as well.

OPA has previously reported that the primary purpose of the climate survey is to serve as a tool for commanders to understand their climate, rather than serve as a generalizable survey, and further noted that the survey is the first step in a process to identify and address climate issues.³⁰ However, we maintain that these methodological issues limit the usability of the survey's results for the purpose of monitoring their organizational climate.

OPA officials stated that they are exploring new methods for administering and analyzing the survey that they believe will improve the usability of its results. For example, OPA officials stated that they have tested a new log-in process that requires survey participants to sign-in to the survey using their DOD email and have begun work on a weighting procedure to apply to unit level results which would account for nonresponse bias.³¹ In response to a 2018 memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and a 2019 memorandum from the Acting Secretary of Defense, OPA developed a plan to redesign the climate survey and address these issues. According to an update on the status of this project for the second quarter of 2022, OPA has developed a plan of action and milestones for addressing methodological issues with the climate survey, including those described in this section. While the project related to addressing weighting issues is delayed, an OPA official stated that the secure log-in process would be launched in June 2022.³²

Given the centrality of the climate survey to the academies' understanding of their organizational climate, we believe that OPA's planned steps to address these issues will have a positive effect on the academies' ability to fully understand and monitor their organizational climate.

³⁰Office of People Analytics, *Use of DEOCS Data—Best Practices* (Oct. 2019).

³¹Officials stated that OPA has conducted a pilot in which 10 percent of units receive this individual login. According to officials, this change has not resulted in a lower response rate. In addition, OPA officials stated that the weighting procedure would be based on demographic data from other sources and be applied automatically as an algorithm.

³²According to the update, the project related to weighting issues is delayed due to the diversion of fiscal year 2021 resources to support the DOD-wide climate survey.

Academies Do Not Fully Capture Information on Incidents That Are Not Submitted through the Complaint Processing System

The service academies do not fully capture information on alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. DOD-level guidance indicates that the chain of command is the primary and preferred channel for identifying and correcting unlawful discriminatory practices and resolving complaints of harassment, but does not address incidents that are not submitted through the complaint processing system.³³ Separately, each of the military departments have issued guidance that encourages issues to be resolved at the lowest appropriate level, and two military departments outline approaches to documenting alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. Specifically, an Army regulation states that concerns raised or resolved outside of the complaint processing system are considered problem-resolution or leadership actions, and are not considered MEO or harassment complaints.³⁴ The Air Force's equal opportunity instruction states a "Commander Worked Issue" occurs when allegations of unlawful discrimination or harassment are made either orally or in writing to the commander and the allegations have not been submitted as a formal or informal complaint through the Installation Equal Opportunity Office.³⁵ The Navy guidance requires commanders to ensure servicemembers are familiar both with their right to submit formal, informal, or anonymous harassment or discrimination complaints and the methods for submission. It also discusses an informal resolution system developed to facilitate resolution of interpersonal conflicts at the lowest appropriate level.³⁶

In practice, academy officials described various approaches to documenting alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment that are

³³DOD Directive 1020.02E. See also DOD Instruction 1350.02.

³⁴Army Regulation 600–20, *Army Command Policy* (July 24, 2020).

³⁵Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program* (incorporating Department of the Air Force Guidance Memorandum 2022-01, Apr. 6, 2022). Commanders document Commander Worked Issues on a standardized form and are also required to submit a "Commander Worked Issue Worksheet" to the academy equal opportunity office on a monthly basis. The "Commander Worked Issue Worksheet" details all equal opportunity issues that were worked within the unit over the past month

³⁶Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5354.1H, *Navy Harassment Prevention and Military Equal Opportunity Program Manual* (Nov. 3, 2021); see also Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5354.1G, *Navy Equal Opportunity Program* (July 24, 2017) (superseded by 2021 issuance).

not submitted through the complaint processing system. For example, officials from West Point and the Department of the Army stated that if an individual comes to the MEO office to discuss a situation but chooses not to take an informal or formal approach and instead addresses the situation without MEO involvement, then the MEO office would record this engagement on a Memorandum for the Record. The MEO office would retain that information only locally for future reference or discussion. In addition, participants in a group of commanders at West Point told us that the companies of cadets they oversee vary in the way they document incidents of alleged discrimination or harassment handled at their level outside of the complaint processing system. The commanders we interviewed stated that they have the option to file a Memorandum for the Record with the equal opportunity office; however, they are not required to do so. Several commanders also stated that there is no clear, institutionalized process for documenting these incidents.

At the Air Force Academy, “Commander Worked Issues” represent a majority of the incidents addressed there from fiscal years 2017 to 2021. Specifically, the academy received 47 Commander Worked Issues during this time period, compared to 22 formal or informal MEO complaints. Commanders stated that they have discretion over whether they document an incident as a Commander Worked Issue. They added that they do not always do so, noting their numerous responsibilities related to academy disciplinary and conduct systems.

At the Naval Academy, company officers stated that they may complete a Memorandum for the Record at their discretion for their own records when they address an alleged incident. They further stated that they will typically report on any incidents to their battalion officer, but noted that this practice varies between companies and battalions.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that management should use quality information and should design control activities to achieve objectives, such as by clearly documenting significant events in a manner that allows the documentation to be readily available for examination. Currently, the academies do not have quality information regarding the number and basis of alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system because they have not designed a process that ensures these incidents are clearly documented on a routine basis.

Senior leaders at all three academies stated that information on these incidents would be helpful and would contribute to a better understanding

of their organizational climate. While some expressed the need to ensure continued command discretion in the management of incidents, we believe that documenting this information to present a full picture of the climate does not impede commanders' discretion in addressing the issue.

Without the academies developing and routinely using a clear and consistent process for documenting information on alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system, they will not have an appropriate understanding of the scale of such issues. Specifically, they will lack a full understanding of the frequency and basis of all alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment.

Academies Collect and Review Additional Information on Organizational Climate

Military Equal Opportunity Complaint Data

The academies use MEO complaint data to help monitor organizational climate. For example, the Air Force Academy's Equal Opportunity Office reviews complaint data and reports the results to academy leadership on a monthly basis. Additionally, West Point leadership stated that their reviews of MEO complaint data influence their decisions on equal opportunity-related trainings and can also lead them to hold discussions with specific companies or departments regarding complaints within the unit. Officials at the Naval Academy stated that MEO complaint data helps them gain visibility into their organizational climate.

Data on equal opportunity complaints at the Air Force Academy and West Point provides valuable information concerning the organizational climate at the academies. However, the Naval Academy is not able to readily report historical complaint data (see section below). Table 2 provides information about the number and characteristics of MEO complaints and Commander Worked Issues at the Air Force Academy from fiscal years 2017 through 2021.

Table 2: Military Equal Opportunity Complaints and Commander Worked Issues Involving Cadets at the United States Air Force Academy and Disposition by Type and Basis of Complaint, Fiscal Years 2017–2021

| Type of Complaint | Fiscal Year | | | | | Total | Complaint Disposition | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | | Substantiated | Unsubstantiated | No Decision ^a |
| Formal | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Informal | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 13 | 3 | 8 | 2 |
| Commander Worked Issue | 7 | 3 | 15 | 8 | 14 | 47 | 18 | 21 | 8 |
| Total | 8 | 3 | 24 | 13 | 21 | 69 | 24 | 34 | 11 |
| Basis of Complaint | | | | | | | | | |
| Race | 3 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 11 | 4 |
| National Origin | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Color | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Religion | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Sex/Gender | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Sexual Orientation | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Sexual Harassment ^b | 2 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 12 | 27 | 13 | 10 | 4 |
| Disparaging Terms | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bullying/Hazing | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 0 |
| Other/Unknown | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 2 |

Source: GAO analysis of Air Force data. | GAO-22-105130

Note: Number of complaints by type and number of complaints by basis of complaint are not equal due to the separate nature of reporting. Specifically, an individual complaint can cite multiple bases. For example, an individual formal complaint may cite both race and national origin, and would be reflected in the table above as one formal complaint, one complaint based on race, and one complaint based on national origin.

^aComplaints that have “No Decision” for the complaint disposition are marked as such because the substantiation decision was left blank in the Air Force data source or because the complaint was withdrawn.

^bThe number of sexual harassment complaints reported here does not match the number of sexual harassment complaints reported for the Air Force Academy in in DOD’s Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies. This is because we determined that one of the cases the Air Force reported to DOD for that report did not involve a student, and because we are reporting in fiscal years while the Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies reports in academic program years.

There were nine formal complaints, 13 informal complaints, and 47 Commander Worked Issues involving students at Air Force Academy from fiscal years 2017 through 2021.

- The most common complaint bases across all complaint types (including formal and informal MEO complaints and Commander Worked Issues) at the Air Force Academy during this time were Sexual Harassment (27 complaints) and Race (20 complaints).

- Of the nine formal complaints, three were substantiated, five were unsubstantiated, and one did not have a substantiation decision. The most common complaint bases among substantiated formal complaints involving students at the Air Force Academy were National Origin (two complaints) and Bullying/Hazing (one complaint). Additionally, most formal complaints were submitted by a student and identified a non-student as the alleged offender (five complaints).
- Of the 13 informal complaints, three were substantiated, eight were unsubstantiated, and two did not have a substantiation decision. The most common complaint bases among substantiated informal complaints involving students at the Air Force Academy were Sexual Harassment (two complaints) and National Origin (one complaint). Additionally, most informal complaints either were submitted by a student and identified a non-student as the alleged offender (six complaints) or were submitted by a student and identified another student as the alleged offender (six complaints).
- Of the 47 Commander Worked Issues, 18 were substantiated, 21 were unsubstantiated, and eight did not have a substantiation decision. The most common complaint bases among substantiated Commander Worked Issues involving students at the Air Force Academy were Sexual Harassment (11 complaints) and Race (five complaints). Additionally, most Commander Worked Issues were submitted by a student and identified another student as the alleged offender (38 complaints).

DOD deemed that a table with information similar to table 2 concerning the number and characteristics of MEO complaints at West Point from fiscal years 2017 through 2021 to be sensitive and not publicly releasable. Therefore, we are providing limited analysis of MEO complaints at West Point. Specifically, there were 15 formal complaints and 15 informal complaints involving students at West Point from fiscal years 2017 through 2021.

- The most common complaint bases across all complaint types at West Point during this time were Race (21 complaints) and Sex/Gender (10 complaints).
- Of the 15 formal complaints, four were substantiated and 11 were unsubstantiated. The most common complaint bases among substantiated formal complaints involving students at West Point were Disparaging Terms (four complaints) and Race (three complaints). Additionally, most formal complaints were submitted by a student and identified a non-student as the alleged offender (eight complaints).

- Of the 15 informal complaints, none were substantiated. This is because West Point's practice is to not conduct an investigation for any informal complaints, according to an academy official. Additionally, most informal complaints were submitted by a student and identified a non-student as the alleged offender (10 complaints).

Naval Academy Is Not Able to Readily Report Historical Complaint Data

The Naval Academy is not able to readily report historical information on the number of military equal opportunity complaints, based on our review of military equal opportunity complaint data. Specifically, there were inconsistencies between the number of sexual harassment incidents in the data the Naval Academy provided to us and those reported in DOD's *Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies*. In an attempt to resolve the differences in the data, we asked the Naval Academy to review its equal opportunity complaint records. The academy was able to resolve some differences, according to a senior official at the academy, but the same official cited a lack of confidence in the academy's ability to readily report historical data on military equal opportunity complaints. Because sexual harassment complaints are part of the general complaint processing system, the issue extends to all equal opportunity complaints.

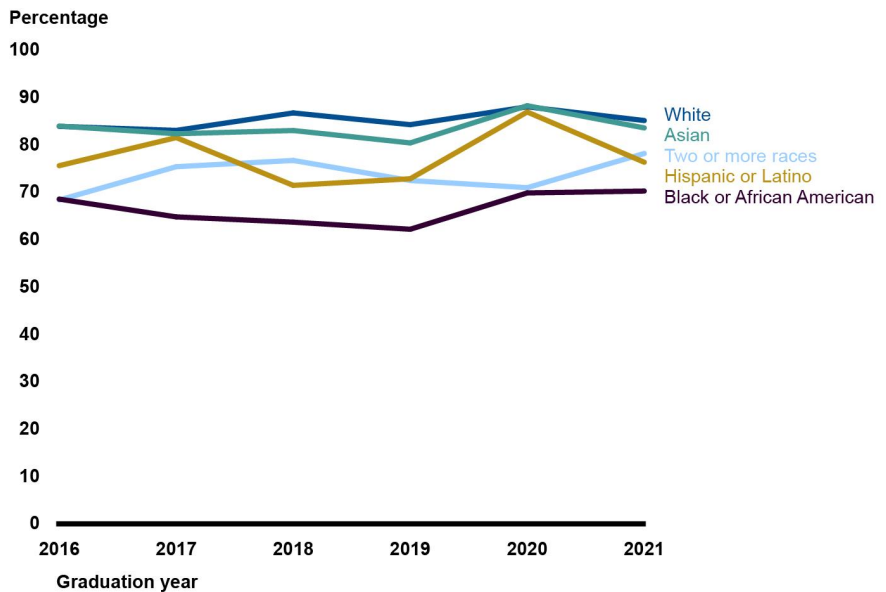
Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that management should design control activities to achieve objectives, such as clearly documenting significant events in a manner that allows the documentation to be readily available for examination. However, the Naval Academy does not have sufficient data collection and record-keeping processes in place for military equal opportunity complaints to allow these complaints to be readily examined. The Naval Academy senior official acknowledged this, citing a lack of sufficient internal controls to ensure accurate and reliable reporting of historical information.

The effectiveness of military equal opportunity complaint data as a method for gathering information about the organizational climate is limited when that data cannot be readily recalled and examined. To the extent that the Naval Academy cannot readily access information from one of its primary methods of gathering information about the organizational climate, it will continue to be limited in its understanding of organizational climate.

Graduation, Attrition, and Disciplinary Data

The academies monitor data regarding graduation, attrition, and discipline by gender, race, and ethnicity to help them to assess the experiences of different demographic groups and support their efforts to retain diverse cadets and midshipmen. During academic years 2016 through 2021 at West Point, the 4-year graduation rate for White and Asian students ranged from 80 to 88 percent, the rate for Hispanic or Latino students ranged from 71 to 87 percent, the rate for Black or African American students ranged from 62 to 70 percent, and the rate for students from two or more races ranged from 68 to 78 percent. During this same time period at the Naval Academy, the graduation rate for White, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and students of two or more races ranged from 83 to 95 percent, and the graduation rate for Black or African American students ranged from 72 to 86 percent. During this same time period at the Air Force Academy, the 4-year graduation rate for White, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and students of two or more races ranged from 80 to 91 percent, and the graduation rate for Black or African American students ranged from 61 to 86 percent. See figures 3-5 below for graduation rates by racial or ethnic group for academic years 2016-2021.

Figure 3: United States Military Academy 4-Year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



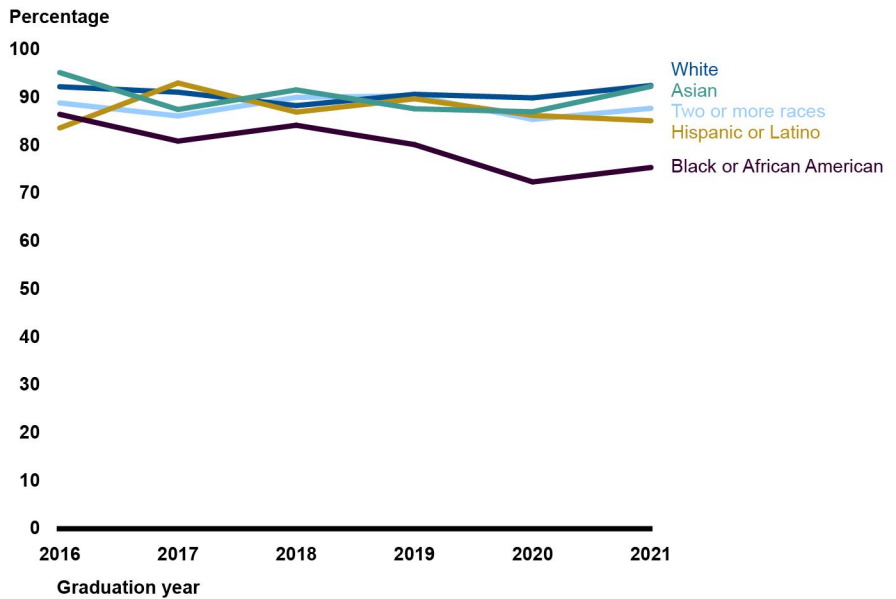
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and military service academy data. | GAO-22-105130

Accessible Data Table for Figure 3

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | White | Two or more races |
|------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| 2016 | 84% | 68% | 75% | 83% | 68% |
| 2017 | 82% | 64% | 81% | 83% | 75% |
| 2018 | 83% | 63% | 71% | 86% | 76% |
| 2019 | 80% | 62% | 72% | 84% | 72% |
| 2020 | 88% | 69% | 87% | 88% | 71% |
| 2021 | 83% | 70% | 76% | 85% | 78% |

Notes: Rates are for those who graduated within 4 years. Years are year of graduation, e.g., the cohort that enrolled in fall 2014 graduated in spring 2018. 2016-2018 is Department of Education data reported by service academies. 2019-2021 is service academy data. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Figure 4: United States Naval Academy 4-Year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



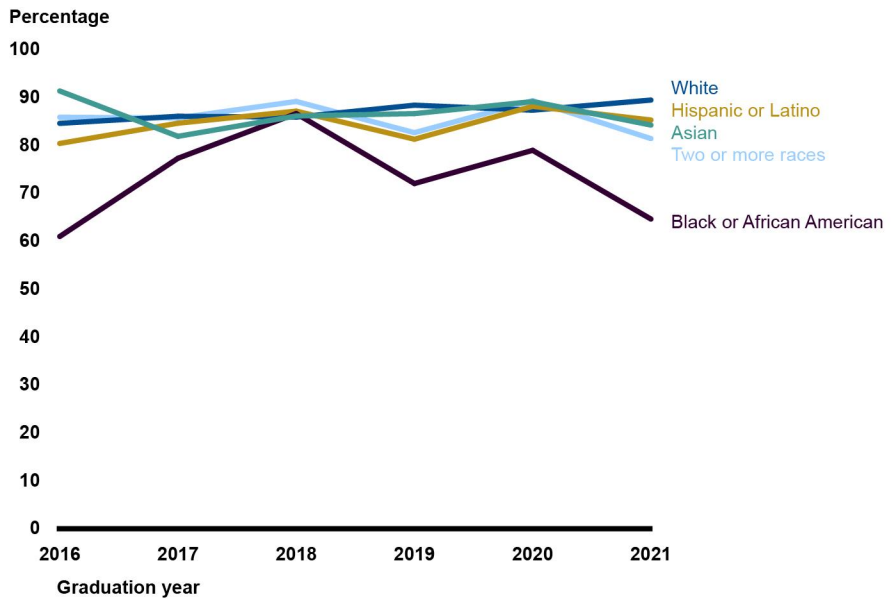
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and military service academy data. | GGAO-22-105130

Accessible Data Table for Figure 4

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | White | Two or more races |
|------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| 2016 | 95% | 86% | 83% | 92% | 88% |
| 2017 | 87% | 80% | 93% | 91% | 86% |
| 2018 | 91% | 84% | 87% | 88% | 90% |
| 2019 | 87% | 80% | 89% | 90% | 90% |
| 2020 | 87% | 72% | 86% | 89% | 85% |
| 2021 | 92% | 75% | 85% | 92% | 87% |

Notes: Rates are for those who graduated within 4 years. Years are year of graduation, e.g., the cohort that enrolled in fall 2014 graduated in spring 2018. 2016-2018 is Department of Education data reported by service academies. 2019-2021 is service academy data. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Figure 5: United States Air Force Academy 4-year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and military service academy data. | GAO-22-105130

Accessible Data Table for Figure 5

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | White | Two or more races |
|------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| 2016 | 91% | 61% | 80% | 84% | 85% |
| 2017 | 81% | 77% | 84% | 86% | 85% |
| 2018 | 86% | 86% | 87% | 85% | 89% |
| 2019 | 86% | 72% | 81% | 88% | 82% |
| 2020 | 89% | 79% | 88% | 87% | 89% |
| 2021 | 84% | 64% | 85% | 89% | 81% |

Notes: Rates are for those who graduated within 4 years. Years are year of graduation, e.g., the cohort that enrolled in fall 2014 graduated in spring 2018. 2016-2018 is Department of Education data reported by service academies. 2019-2021 is service academy data. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Each academy also collects attrition data by racial or ethnic group and type, which provides some insight into the differences in graduation rates.³⁷ For example, the Naval Academy uses five type categories to measure attrition: academic, conduct, medical, physical, and voluntary. These data show differences between racial and ethnic groups with regard to attrition. For example, during academic years 2016 to 2021, Black or African American students at the Naval Academy averaged 7 percent of total enrollment but represented 14 percent of attrition across all of the categories and 21 percent of attrition within the conduct category. Appendix II shows a comparison of average enrollment and average attrition by category at each academy during academic years 2016 to 2021.

In addition, each academy reviews or plans to review aspects of the differences in graduation and attrition rates. For example, West Point conducts biannual reviews of grades and punishments adjudicated under the Uniform Code of Military Justice by race and gender. The Naval Academy reviewed their previous peer-evaluation system, made changes to remove bias and unintended disadvantage, and put in place the revised system in the fall of 2021, according to an academy official. The Air Force Academy has plans to conduct root cause analyses of why Black or African American students face academic review boards and

³⁷Graduation rates exclude certain categories of attrition and are calculated using different methodology and timeframes than attrition, therefore graduation rates and attrition do not correspond exactly.

conduct probation at higher rates than their proportion of the student body.

Internal Assessments

Two academies have previously conducted internal assessments of their organizational climate as it pertains to equal opportunity. Specifically, both West Point and the Air Force Academy have conducted internal assessments focused on race within the past 2 years. In addition to evaluating the organizational climate as it relates to race, each academy's assessment also produced a series of recommended actions to address the problems identified. West Point's 2020 internal assessment included 50 recommendations and the Air Force Academy's 2020 assessment included nine recommendations. Recommendations were wide-ranging and related to topics such as diversity and inclusion training, data collection, and potentially offensive artifacts and memorials.

On-the-Ground Monitoring Tools

Academies also use a number of more informal "on-the-ground" monitoring tools, including:

- **Information gathered by student diversity, equity, and inclusion staff.** Each academy has student diversity, equity, and inclusion staff (hereafter, student diversity staff) that raise awareness of diversity initiatives or facilitate conversations on diversity topics, according to academy officials. The details of these programs vary across the academies, but their general roles are similar. Some of these staff also help resolve issues between students and report on the incidents they handle at their level, which helps the academy understand the issues that are currently affecting their organizational climate, according to those we talked to in these positions. Some officers at West Point stated that they find the information gathered by these student leaders to be useful when they are trying to identify climate issues within their unit.
- **Officer briefings.** Officers routinely brief their superior officer on climate issues within their unit, according to officials at each of the academies. These routine briefings help ensure that information on climate issues is passed up through the chain of command.
- **Discussion forums.** The Air Force Academy diversity staff occasionally hold listening sessions with students following country-wide events that could affect the academy's organizational climate,

according to Air Force Academy officials. Similarly, senior officials at West Point told us that they hold listening sessions that allow leadership to hear about concerns from students.

- **Engagement with students by senior leadership.** Senior leaders at each academy told us that they regularly talk with students to understand their views and perceptions of the organizational climate. For example, a member of academy leadership may make a plan to attend an affinity group meeting with the intent of discussing the group's perspectives on the climate or may have an impromptu discussion with a student who wants to discuss their perspective on the organizational climate at the academy. At West Point, the Superintendent stated that he has a monthly meeting with sexual assault victims at the academy where they can share their views on West Point's organizational climate as it relates to preventing sexual assault and supporting victims of sexual assault.

Service Academy Gender Relations Survey and Focus Group Reports

OPA administers the Service Academy Gender Relations Survey, herein referred to as the Gender Relations Survey, to each of the service academies in even numbered years.³⁸ It also administers the Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Groups, herein referred to as the Gender Relations Focus Groups, to each of the service academies in odd numbered years. Once administered, OPA analyzes the results of the surveys or focus groups and produces a report outlining the findings for the academies. The goal of the Gender Relations Survey is to provide statistical information about prevalence rates of unwanted gender-related behaviors and student perceptions on gender relations and academy culture, while the goal of the Gender Relations Focus Groups is to provide a deeper insight and understanding of the climate and culture at each academy.

³⁸The Service Academy Gender Relations Survey was not administered in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to OPA officials.

The 2018 Gender Relations Survey found that sexual harassment³⁹ and gender discrimination⁴⁰ at the academies have persisted since at least 2016. Additionally, the 2019 Gender Relations Focus Groups have highlighted concerns regarding gender discrimination and the experience of women at the academies more generally.⁴¹

Specifically, the 2018 Gender Relations Survey found

- between 46 percent and 56 percent of women at the academies experienced sexual harassment in 2018. In 2016 the range was 46 to 51 percent;
- between 13 percent and 17 percent of men at the academies experienced sexual harassment in 2018. In 2016 the range was 12 to 13 percent; and
- between 28 percent and 37 percent of women at the academies reported experiencing gender discrimination in 2018.

Regarding reporting of sex-based MEO violations,⁴² the 2018 Gender Relations Survey found that between 10 to 15 percent of women and between 5 to 7 percent of men who experienced sex-based MEO

³⁹According to the survey, sexual harassment includes two types of unwanted behaviors: sexually hostile work environment and sexual quid pro quo. Sexually hostile work environment is defined as unwelcome sexual experiences that are pervasive or severe so as to interfere with a person's work performance or creates a work environment that is intimidating, hostile, or offensive. Sexual quid pro quo behaviors are used to control, influence, or affect one's job, career, or pay.

⁴⁰According to the survey, gender discrimination is defined as behaviors or comments directed at someone because of his or her gender that harmed or limited his or her career. To be included in the estimated rate for gender discrimination, students must have: (a) Heard someone say that someone of their gender is not as good as someone of the opposite gender as a future officer, or that someone of their gender should be prevented from becoming a future officer, and thought this person's beliefs about someone of his or her gender harmed or limited his or her cadet/midshipman career; or (b) Been mistreated, ignored, excluded, or insulted because of his or her gender and thought this treatment harmed or limited his or her cadet/midshipman career.

⁴¹We found DOD's 2018 Gender Relations Survey to be a reliable tool for the purposes of reporting the incidence of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gender discrimination. The 2018 Gender Relations Survey captures incidents that occurred between summer 2017 and spring 2018. It is a statistical survey, and the ranges we are providing are the 95 percent confidence interval for each estimated percentage.

⁴²Sex-based MEO violations are defined as having experienced at least one of the behaviors in line with sexual harassment and/or gender discrimination, according to the 2018 Gender Relations Survey.

violations indicated that they discussed or reported their experiences to an authority or organization. Women consistently report their experience at higher rates than men, but men who report their experience are more likely to indicate that their situation was corrected.⁴³ Additionally, men and women at each of the academies reported experiencing negative outcomes as a result of reporting or discussing their experience. For example, among those who chose to report or discuss their experience

- 32 to 41 percent of women and 25 to 58 percent of men indicated that they were encouraged to “let it go” or “tough it out”;
- 19 to 33 percent of women and 25 to 49 percent of men indicated that they were ridiculed or scorned;
- 28 to 35 percent of women and 17 to 48 percent of men indicated that the situation was discounted or not taken seriously;
- 4 to 15 percent of women and 6 to 9 percent of men indicated that disciplinary action was taken against them; and
- 11 to 25 percent of women and 8 to 26 percent of men indicated that they do not know what happened after they had their discussion or filed their report.

In addition to the Gender Relations Surveys, the Gender Relations Focus Groups can also provide insight in to the organizational climate at the academies. Specifically, the 2019 Gender Relations Focus Group Report found that

- “bro culture” at the academies leads to behaviors that are “uncomfortable or offensive to female cadets and midshipmen” and that the “culture of tolerance” for these behaviors can lead to sexual harassment;
- female students at the academy are expected to adapt their attitudes to “be one of the bros” and those who are unwilling to engage in or allow for “locker room talk” are often avoided or shunned;
- female students described feeling as if they need to work much harder to be considered deserving of a position by their peers and by middle level leaders at the academy due to the perception that they only received a leadership position in order to fill a gender quota; and

⁴³Between two-fifths and three-fourths of men who chose to report their experience indicated their situation was corrected, while between approximately one-third and two-fifths of women who chose to report their experience indicated their situation was corrected.

- male students described a belief that female physical achievements are less valuable because their standards are considered easier, while female students expressed a belief that their male peers often were dismissive of their abilities.

Student Perceptions of the Organizational Climate at Military Service Academies

To obtain the perceptions of current students concerning the organizational climate at the academies, we conducted 34 focus groups across the three service academies. Specifically, we conducted six focus groups for each of four racial or ethnic groups, including two focus groups at each academy with groups of Black or African American, White, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students. We also conducted four focus groups with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students, including at least one session at each academy, and six focus groups with student leaders, individuals selected for positions of responsibility in relation to their fellow students, including two focus groups at each academy. At the conclusion of each of these groups, we administered a short, anonymous online survey to the participants with questions related to the climate, and the results are noted as such where appropriate.

In addition to our focus groups, we conducted nine discussion groups, including one group at each academy with (1) military and civilian faculty, (2) members of student diversity teams, and (3) active-duty command staff who oversee students. Our discussion groups differed from focus groups, in part, because we did not attempt random selection of volunteers as participants, as was the preferred practice for our focus groups. The perceptions of participants in our discussion groups and our focus groups of student leaders are presented in this section as additional views on specific topics, where appropriate. See appendix I for a full description of our methodology for this objective, including information on how students were identified for participation in our focus groups.

Based on our analysis of the results from our focus groups, students' perceptions of climate were generally consistent within demographic

groups⁴⁴ regardless of academy, with differences most apparent between demographic groups. Demographic groups expressed varying perceptions of the academies' organizational climates across a number of issues, such as the prevalence of derogatory language or the fairness of the disciplinary process. However, demographic groups also described positive aspects of their experience at the academies, including general confidence in senior leadership, and most stated they would recommend the academy to a friend or family member considering attending.

Demographic Groups Expressed Varying Views of the Academies' Climate

Demographic groups expressed varying perceptions of the academies' organizational climate regarding a number of issues, such as the prevalence of derogatory language or the fairness of the disciplinary process.

Offensive terms or slurs and social media. Racial and ethnic groups generally agreed that the use of offensive racial or ethnic terms or slurs directed at individuals is relatively uncommon, with no groups stating that the use of slurs was very frequent or frequent. Groups of student leaders also generally agreed with this assessment. However, more than half of groups of LGBTQ students expressed concern regarding the use of the term "gay" in a derogatory manner.⁴⁵

In addition, some demographic groups expressed concern with offensive posts on an anonymous social media application where users make posts tied to small geographic areas, such as the military service academies. Specifically, more than half of groups of LGBTQ students and one-third of groups of Black or African American students and Hispanic or Latino students noted concerns regarding the use of this platform to make offensive statements.⁴⁶ Individual participants in some groups stated that the application allowed users to make statements or use language that

⁴⁴Throughout this section, demographic groups refers to all racial and ethnic groups as well as LGBTQ students who participated in our focus groups. Racial and ethnic groups refers to groups of Black or African American, White, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students who participated in our focus groups.

⁴⁵Specifically, three of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies.

⁴⁶Specifically, three of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies, two of six groups of Black or African American students at one academy, and two of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at two academies.

Letter

would otherwise be unacceptable at the academies. Similarly, social media was highlighted as a concern by the Superintendent or Commandant at two academies and by two faculty discussion groups.

Contrasting Views on Racial Jokes from Our Post-Focus Group Online Survey

People make jokes sometimes involving race/ethnicity but it is never in a negative connotations [sic]. It is almost always said by someone of that community. Racial jokes are not an issue at the academy.

I don't think problems will be very apparent at the surface level. Behind closed doors and comments to good friends are where people's true thoughts come out. It is a cultural problem. I have only experienced discrimination from close friends behind closed doors, and nowhere else.

Source: GAO survey of military service academy focus group participants. | GAO-22-105130

Racial jokes. Racial and ethnic groups varied in their perceptions regarding the frequency of racial or ethnic jokes (see sidebar), but rarely characterized them as very frequent. However, several groups stated that the context for these jokes was important for interpreting their tone and intent. Specifically, several racial and ethnic groups stated that racial jokes were generally made by someone of a certain background about themselves, within a group of people of the same background, or in the context of friendships. This view was expressed by more than half of groups of White students, as well as half of groups of Asian and Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino students.⁴⁷ This view was not expressed by any groups of Black or African American students. Command staff at one academy expressed concern over the prevalence of racial or ethnic jokes, noting that it undermines academy efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Command officials. Racial and ethnic groups expressed different perceptions about how well command officials work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, more than half of groups of White, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students stated that command officials who oversee students generally work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds.⁴⁸

However, participants in several of these focus groups also provided examples of when differential treatment did occur or highlighted experiences of officials who did not work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds, noting that individual officials can set the tone for the culture of the unit they oversee. Similarly, participants in our discussion groups with members of student diversity teams at two academies expressed the view that command officials provided varying levels of support for their efforts, ranging from dismissive and uninterested to receptive and supportive.

Focus Group Comment

During physical training, I had [a hairstyle] and was pulled to the side. An officer said it was

⁴⁷Specifically, four of six groups of White students at all three academies, three of six groups of Asian and Pacific Islander students at all three academies, and three of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at all three academies.

⁴⁸Specifically, five of six groups of White students, five of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students, and four of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at all three academies.

out of regulations and asked me if I really want to make it in the [military]. I was concerned about that the rest of the year...On the weekend, I won't even walk outside my room with [a hairstyle] because any little thing could get me in trouble. People get in trouble for the littlest things. I try not to be seen.

Note: Details withheld.

Source: GAO-conducted focus group of military service academy students. | GAO-22-105130

More than half of groups of Black or African American students expressed mixed opinions about how well command officials work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, with all six groups expressing concerns in regard to disciplinary issues, as outlined below.⁴⁹ In addition, a prominent theme in all six groups of Black or African American students across academies was their view that some command staff and fellow students make negative associations with Black or African American students' hairstyles. For example, individual participants in all six groups of Black or African American students reported instances in which command officials counseled Black or African American students that their hairstyles were outside of regulations, which several participants stated were incorrect assertions. Individual participants also reported incidents in which criticism of their hairstyle was accompanied by criticism of their professionalism, and in some instances questioning of their future at the academy (see sidebar). Individual participants in several groups expressed what they perceived as unfair negative associations accompanying their hairstyles, such as criticism for wearing durags. Separately, all six groups of Black or African American students expressed their perception that they are often unfairly characterized as angry or aggressive. For example, individual participants described the need to more closely choose their words or "play a part" in their interactions with others.

Groups of LGBTQ students expressed a range of views on this issue, with participants citing both negative and positive experiences with command officials. For example, individual participants described experiences in which they believed command officials were actively targeting them for being LGBTQ as well as experiences in which command officials were supportive of LGBTQ students.

Discipline. Racial and ethnic groups differed in their perception of the fairness of the disciplinary process. Specifically, while this issue was not a prominent theme in groups of Asian and Pacific Islander students, one half of groups of groups of White students generally agreed that the process is fair, and one-third of groups of Hispanic or Latino students generally agreed that the process is not always fair.⁵⁰ In contrast, all six groups of Black or African American students expressed the perception that the disciplinary process is not always fair and unbiased. Specifically,

⁴⁹Specifically, four of six groups at all three academies.

⁵⁰Specifically, three of six groups of White students at two academies and two of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at one academy.

students expressed the perception that Black or African American students are punished more harshly than other students for similar offenses, or for infractions for which other students are not punished. Individual students cited examples of differential treatment ranging from minor infractions to actions resulting in separation from the academy. Half of the groups of Black or African American students discussed retention of Black or African American students, with individual participants noting overall higher levels of attrition and personal experiences of friends and classmates who were separated from the academy.⁵¹ These groups expressed the perception that the academies will strive to retain non-Black or African American students but will not make the same effort for Black or African American students.

Quotas in admissions and leadership positions. A prominent theme in several of our groups organized by race and ethnicity was the perception that other students sometimes questioned whether they were admitted to the academy or had been selected for student leadership positions on diversity grounds or to fill a “quota,” and not on their own merit. This perception was noted in more than half of the groups of Black or African American students and one-third of groups of Asian or Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino students.⁵² Participants stated that this manifests in different ways. For example, one-third of groups of Black or African American students reported instances in which other cadets assumed that they had attended the respective military academy’s preparatory school.⁵³ The preparatory schools are a significant source for enrollment of underrepresented demographic groups at the service academies.

Similarly, individual participants cited instances in which other students speculated as to whether individuals earned a leadership position when, for example, the same position is occupied consecutively by individuals from non-White backgrounds. Command staff at one academy expressed concern regarding the perception among some students of “tokenism” in the selection of students for leadership positions. In contrast, half of groups of White students and one third of groups of Asian or Pacific

⁵¹Specifically, three of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies.

⁵²Specifically, four of six groups of Black or African American students at all three academies, two of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies, and two of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at two academies.

⁵³Specifically, two of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies.

Islander students generally agreed that the process for selecting student leaders is generally fair.⁵⁴

Classroom environment. Most racial and ethnic groups generally agreed that they have either not observed differential treatment in the classroom based on race or ethnicity, or that military and civilian faculty work well with people individuals from diverse backgrounds. These groups expressed these views in different ways depending upon the nature and context of the discussion. For example, most groups agreed that civilian faculty work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This view was shared by all six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students, and more than half of groups of White, Hispanic or Latino, and Black or African American students.⁵⁵ A slightly smaller number of groups agreed that military faculty work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, more than half of groups of White and Hispanic or Latino students, and one third of groups of Black or African American students.⁵⁶

In addition, a number of groups discussed their views on the classroom more generally, agreeing that they had generally not observed differential treatment in the classroom based on race or ethnicity. This view was expressed in more than half of groups of White and Asian or Pacific Islander students, half of groups of Hispanic or Latino students, and one third of groups of Black or African American students.⁵⁷ In addition, all groups of LGBTQ students generally agreed that they had not observed differential treatment in the classroom against LGBTQ people and that civilian faculty work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds, with

⁵⁴Specifically, three of six groups of White students at two academies and two of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies.

⁵⁵Specifically, five of six groups of White students, five of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students, and four of six groups of Black or African American students at all three academies.

⁵⁶Specifically, five of six groups of White students, four of six groups of Hispanic or Latinos students at three academies, and two of six groups of Black or African American students at one academy.

⁵⁷Specifically, five of six groups of White students, four of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at three academies, three of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies, and two of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies.

more than half of LGBTQ students holding the same view regarding military faculty.⁵⁸

Participants expressed various rationales for their assessments. For example, individual participants noted that civilian faculty may be attuned to social issues, which is reflected in their interactions with students in the classroom. Similarly, individual participants commented that military faculty typically have experience working with a diverse group of people in the wider military and bring this experience with them. Individual participants in groups of LGBTQ students reported that many faculty provide support to LGBTQ students and also provide clear messaging that LGBTQ students are welcome, which these students stated they appreciated.

However, participants in more than half of the groups of Black or African American students expressed mixed opinions on whether military faculty work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds.⁵⁹ In addition, participants in half of groups of Hispanic or Latino students and one third of Asian or Pacific Islander students expressed mixed opinions about whether they had observed differential treatment in the classroom based on race or ethnicity more generally.⁶⁰ Individual participants reported that this manifested as, for example, being singled out for additional attention or scrutiny.

In addition, despite their overall assessment, individual participants in multiple racial and ethnic groups cited examples of differential treatment in the classroom. For example, a prominent theme in more than half of groups of Black or African American students was the perception of a culture in which faculty and fellow students often assume Black or African American students were recruited primarily as athletes.⁶¹ Individual participants described experiences in which faculty assumed Black or

⁵⁸Specifically, three of four groups of LGBTQ students at all three academies.

⁵⁹Specifically, five of six groups of Black or African American students.

⁶⁰Specifically, three of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at two academies and two of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies.

⁶¹Specifically, five of six groups of Black or African American students at all three academies.

African American students were athletes, sometimes incorrectly, and doubted their academic abilities.

Student Leaders. Several racial and ethnic groups expressed at least some reservations regarding the extent to which student leaders work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, participants in all groups of Black or African American students, and one-third of groups of Asian and Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino students expressed mixed opinions or concerns regarding how well student leaders work with individuals from diverse backgrounds.⁶² In explaining their assessment, individual participants noted that student leaders are, by definition, learning how to appropriately manage conflict and may make the wrong decision. Students in one-third of groups of White students expressed similar views, noting that student leaders are learning to handle conflict.⁶³

Post-Focus Group Online Survey Comment

It's really scary to be a [student] and LGBT because you don't know how people will take it, and unlike in the civilian world you can't just leave and in a lot of people's cases it affects your career.

Source: GAO survey of military service academy focus group participants. | GAO-22-105130

LGBTQ concerns. LGBTQ students in our groups expressed several concerns (see sidebar). Specifically, a prominent theme in all four focus groups of LGBTQ students was concerns regarding the experience of transgender and non-binary students at the academies. These issues included confusion over the ability of students to transition at the academy, the ability to access gender-affirming medical care, and command support for the use of their correct pronouns. In addition, participants in all four groups of LGBTQ students expressed the view that among members of their community, men faced comparatively greater challenges than women did. Specifically, these groups stated that the academies emphasize traditionally masculine traits and values, and that men who do not meet these expectations are devalued compared to women who do meet them.

Focus Group Comment

Once you call someone out to say something is not right, there is a hesitation when you are in the room. People feel like they cannot joke.

Source: GAO-conducted focus group of military service academy students. | GAO-22-105130

Addressing and reporting discrimination. Most demographic groups generally agreed that if they heard offensive jokes, stereotypes, or slurs, they would address the individual who made these statements personally. Specifically, this view was shared by all six groups of White students and more than half of groups of Hispanic or Latino and Black or African

⁶²Specifically, two of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies and two of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at two academies.

⁶³Specifically, two of six groups of White students at two academies.

American students.⁶⁴ In half of groups of Black or African American students, including some groups where participants stated they would address the issue personally, students expressed some hesitation with this approach for fear of being labeled as angry or as complainers by fellow students (see sidebar).⁶⁵

In our online survey of focus group participants, we asked students how confident they were that reporting discrimination would result in their military service academy taking appropriate action to address the issue, and responses varied by demographic group. Specifically, on a five point scale of *very confident to not confident*,⁶⁶ most respondents from more than half of the groups of White and Asian and Pacific Islander students stated that they were at least confident in their academy's response.⁶⁷ Respondents in all six groups of Hispanic or Latino students stated that they were at least *somewhat confident* in their academy's response, while respondents in more than half of groups of Black or African American and LGBTQ students stated that they were either *somewhat confident or not very confident* in their academy's response.⁶⁸

Students were asked to explain their responses in the survey and expressed a variety of reasons. For example, individual respondents in all six groups of Black or African American and Asian or Pacific Islander students and in more than half of groups Hispanic or Latino and LGBTQ students stated that academy leadership would not properly handle the issue, understand the magnitude of it, or create change as a result.⁶⁹ Similarly, respondents in more than half of groups of Black or African American students and half of groups of Asian or Pacific Islander and

⁶⁴Specifically, five of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students and four of six groups of Black or African American students at all three academies.

⁶⁵Specifically, three of six groups of Black or African American students at all three academies.

⁶⁶The five point scale consisted of Very confident, Confident, Somewhat confident, Not very confident, and Not confident.

⁶⁷Specifically, respondents in five of six groups of White students and four of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at two academies.

⁶⁸Specifically, respondents in five of six groups of Black or African American students and in three of four groups of LGBTQ students stated that they were either somewhat confident or not very confident.

⁶⁹Specifically, four of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students at all three academies and three of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies.

LGBTQ students cited possible backlash from reporting, the “burden” of reporting, or the rank of those involved as challenges.⁷⁰

In contrast, some respondents across demographic groups expressed their confidence in academy leadership, programs, policies, or processes to address discrimination. Specifically, this view was expressed by some respondents in all groups of White and Asian or Pacific Islander students, more than half of groups of Hispanic or Latino students, and half of groups of Black or African American and LGBTQ students.⁷¹

Groups Described Positive Aspects of the Service Academies

Most racial and ethnic groups generally agreed that senior leadership at the academies works well with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Further, most demographic groups stated that they would recommend the academy to a friend or family member considering attending.

Post-Focus Group Online Survey Comment

I personally believe that West Point has gotten much better in taking action and addressing issues regarding race. I saw jokes and stereotypes happen a lot more during the early part of my time here at West Point, but it has gotten a lot better.

Source: GAO survey of military service academy focus group participants | GAO-22-105130

Leadership. Most racial and ethnic groups generally agreed that academy senior leaders, including the Superintendent and Commandant, generally work well with individuals from diverse backgrounds (see sidebar). This view was generally shared by all groups of Asian and Pacific Islander students, more than half of groups of White and Hispanic or Latino students, and one-third of groups of Black or African American students.⁷² For example, individual participants cited outreach to affinity clubs and messaging by senior leaders as evidence of their commitment. Discussion groups with command officials who oversee students at all three academies generally agreed that senior leadership is committed to diversity and inclusion.

However, participants in half of groups of Black or African American students expressed mixed opinions on how well senior leaders work with

⁷⁰Specifically, four of six groups of Black or African Americans students at all three academies, three of six groups of Asian or Pacific Islander students at all three academies, and two of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies.

⁷¹Specifically, five of six groups of Hispanic or Latino students, three of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies, and two of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies.

⁷²Specifically, five of six groups of White and Hispanic or Latino students, respectively, and two of six groups of Black or African American students at one academy.

individuals from diverse backgrounds, and discussion groups with faculty at all three academies stressed the need for senior leadership to focus on diversity and inclusion as a priority.⁷³ In addition, more than half of groups of LGBTQ students expressed reservations regarding the level of support from senior leadership for issues facing them.⁷⁴ Specifically, these students cited a lack of attention to or emphasis on ensuring LGBTQ students can attend the academy openly.

Recommending the academy. Demographic groups generally agreed that they would recommend their academy to a friend or family member with a similar or diverse background who was considering attending. Specifically, this view was generally held by all groups of White, Asian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, and LGBTQ students, along with more than half of groups of Black or African American students.⁷⁵ The majority of participants in two groups of Black or African American students stated that they were either unsure or would not recommend the academy.

However, individual participants in groups of Black or African American and LGBTQ students, including those in which the majority of participants recommended the academy explained that their recommendation would depend on the individual's resilience to the challenges they may confront. For example, individual participants in groups of Black or African American and LGBTQ students stated that they would want their friend or family member considering the academy to understand the challenges they would likely face as discussed above, with LGBTQ students expressing further reservations about recommending the academy to a trans or non-binary friend or family member.

Individual participants in groups of Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino students noted the significant life advantages that attending the academy offered them, and reflected on their family's pride at being admitted. In addition, individual participants in one third of groups of Black or African American students characterized attending an

⁷³Specifically, three of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies.

⁷⁴Specifically, three of four groups of LGBTQ students at two academies.

⁷⁵Specifically, four of six groups of Black or African American students at two academies.

academy as a developmental opportunity to become more resilient and overcome life obstacles in the future.⁷⁶

Service Academies Are Working to Improve Their Climate but Are Unable to Fully Assess Efforts

Service Academies Have Recently Taken Actions to Improve Organizational Climate

The academies have recently taken actions or have plans to take actions aimed at improving their organizational climate. We compared the academies' actions to improve their climate with the nine leading practices for managing workforce diversity. The academies have recently implemented or plan to implement a number of these leading practices by taking actions to demonstrate leadership commitment, strategic planning, accountability, student involvement, and by enhancing recruitment, among other leading practices. Table 4 below describes the nine leading practices.⁷⁷ We combined multiple leading practices in the sections below in order to summarize the academy efforts.

Table 3: Leading Practices for Managing Workforce Diversity

| Leading practice | Description |
|---|---|
| Top leadership commitment | A vision of diversity demonstrated and communicated throughout an organization by top-level management. |
| Diversity as part of an organization's strategic plan | A diversity strategy and plan that are developed and aligned with the organization's strategic plan. |
| Diversity linked to performance | The understanding that a more diverse and inclusive environment can yield greater productivity and help improve individual and organizational performance. |
| Accountability | The means to ensure that leaders are responsible for diversity by linking their performance assessment and compensation to the progress of diversity initiatives. |
| Student involvement | The contribution of students in driving diversity. |
| Diversity training | Organizational efforts to inform and educate management and staff about diversity. |

⁷⁶Specifically, two of six groups at two academies.

⁷⁷GAO, *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*, [GAO-05-90](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 14, 2005).

| Leading practice | Description |
|---------------------|---|
| Succession planning | An ongoing, strategic process for identifying and developing a diverse pool of talent for an organization's potential future leaders. |
| Recruitment | The process of attracting a supply of qualified, diverse applicants. |
| Measurement | A set of quantitative and qualitative measures of the impact of various aspects of an overall diversity program. |

Source: GAO. | GAO-22-105130

Note: We adapted employee involvement to student involvement for purposes of this review.

Leadership Commitment and Strategic Planning

Our leading practices for managing workforce diversity specify that leaders of an organization are primarily responsible for the success of diversity management because they provide the visibility and commit the time and necessary resources. Sustained leader presence and involvement sends a clear message that the organization is committed to diversity management; leadership involvement also underscores the seriousness and business relevance of these actions.⁷⁸

Senior leaders of the academies have taken actions to demonstrate their commitment to improving their organizational climate. Specifically, Superintendents, Commandants, and Deans have begun to

- establish strategic plans and policies,
- communicate the importance of diversity and equal opportunity to staff and students, and
- assign staff and resources to address climate issues.

Strategic plans and policies. Each academy developed one or multiple diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategic plans at the direction of senior leadership that list objectives and initiatives for improving organizational climate. These plans and the dates they were issued are shown in figure 6 below.

⁷⁸[GAO-05-90](#).

Figure 6: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plans at the Military Service Academies



Source: Military service academy documentation. | GAO-22-105130

Strategic Plans Link Diversity to Organizational Performance

West Point’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan states:

“The Armed Forces represent the nation it defends, including reflecting our nation’s diversity...An Army not representative of the nation risks becoming illegitimate in the eyes of the people...Increasing diversity in the Officer Corps and developing officers who engage and understand American society will foster a better civil-military relationship and assist in shrinking the gap between the military and civilian leaderships.”

The Air Force Academy’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan states:

“Our cadets come from increasingly diverse communities across our nation, and our graduates must be prepared to lead increasingly diverse Airmen and Guardians. Our graduates must enable and empower the diversity of thought that can be derived from this uniquely American strength. In order to outpace and outthink our adversaries, we must fully employ the diverse creative, innovative, and problem solving capabilities of our people.”



Source: Military service academy documentation (text); U.S. Air National Guard/Airman J. Masoner (photo). | GAO-22-105130

These plans include statements linking diversity to organizational performance. Our leading practices for managing workforce diversity state that a more diverse and inclusive environment at an organization can yield greater productivity and help improve individual and organizational performance.

The academies’ strategic plans seek to address a range of diversity and inclusion challenges.⁷⁹ These include 1) improving access to the academies for underrepresented populations, 2) recruiting faculty that represents the diversity of the country, 3) ensuring students across identities have academic and professional support, and 4) fostering an organizational culture that understands and values diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.

In addition, officials identified a policy framework related to organizational climate issues. The policies the officials listed cover topics such as diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, sexual harassment/assault, and retaliation prevention.

Communicate importance of diversity and equal opportunity. In addition to establishing strategic plans and a policy framework, academy leadership have taken actions to communicate the importance of diversity and equal opportunity to staff and students. For example, West Point’s Superintendent named a focus on equity, inclusion, dignity, and respect as a strategic area of improvement in his academic year 2022 annual guidance memorandum, which West Point distributed to all directorates and staff.⁸⁰ West Point also holds semi-annual “stand down days” during which students are given time off regular activities to reflect on topics related to character. The fall 2020 topic was on racism and involved Black or African American students sharing their life experiences on this subject.

⁷⁹We reviewed the strategic plans, including the actions listed in these plans, as part of the academies’ overall actions to improve climate.

⁸⁰Superintendent, United States Military Academy Memorandum, *Superintendent’s Annual Guidance (AY22: 1 JUL 21 – 30 JUN 22)* (Apr. 16, 2021).

Air Force Academy Promotes Video Emphasizing Dignity and Respect

In March 2021, the Air Force Academy produced a video for its social media called “We’re All Up Here Together” which recognized the academy’s history of accepting few people of varying racial and ethnic identities and no women until the 1970s. The video also acknowledged that some current students experience racism or hear inappropriate jokes.

The video adds that the academy “can’t move forward without looking at where we stand,” highlighting that “we can’t represent the best of America if we do not look like America. We can’t defend the rights of every citizen if we don’t stand up for the rights of our fellow cadets.”



The academy distributed this video across the organization through emails and webpage postings.

Source: U.S. Air Force Academy YouTube channel and officials (text and photo). | GAO-22-105130

In January 2022, the Air Force Academy created draft public affairs guidance to support implementation of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. This draft guidance describes the academy’s four core messages regarding diversity, namely, that (1) diversity is a military necessity; (2) students come from increasingly diverse communities, and graduates must be prepared to lead in an increasingly diverse military; (3) diversity enhances the educational experiences, in part, by enabling robust exchange of ideas and preparation for the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce; and (4) the academy seeks to recruit, develop, retain and sustain students, faculty, staff, and service members that value diversity and lead inclusively.⁸¹ The draft guidance also names the academy’s target audience for these messages including graduates and current and prospective students, faculty, and staff.

Senior leaders at each academy emphasized that continually reinforcing their diversity messages is important because the student body changes regularly at the academies as new classes enter and others graduate. For example, most of the students who may have heard a key speech from the Superintendent will graduate within 4 years, and the message will need to be communicated to a new group of students.

Assign support. The academies’ leadership have also taken actions to assign staff and resources to address climate issues. For example, each academy has offices and staff dedicated to diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, and sexual harassment and assault prevention. Each academy also has a Chief Diversity Officer position. Staff in these roles stated that they generally have sufficient resources to execute their programs.

Staff from the Air Force Academy said that the academy must redirect resources from other areas for DEI initiatives because it does not receive additional resources from the military department-level, even as the Air Force has added DEI requirements. However, they stated that senior leadership at the academy have been supportive of their efforts. Students in DEI-related leadership positions at the Naval Academy stated that DEI staff are not well-resourced and are unable to give them adequate support. Naval Academy officials stated that the academy has two military positions dedicated to DEI, and that they are requesting additional staff to provide continuity and meet the objectives of their Diversity and Inclusion

⁸¹Air Force Academy, *Draft Public Affairs Guidance for the USAFA DEI Strategic Plan Implementation* (Jan. 1, 2022).

Strategic Plan. Faculty at West Point stated there are not sufficient resources or attention diverted towards DEI, in part because the academy has many other legitimate priorities. They said it was a positive step that West Point raised the Chief Diversity Officer's pay grade.

Accountability. In the context of diversity management, accountability refers to the means to ensure that leaders are responsible for diversity by linking their performance assessments to the progress of actions meant to improve organizational climate. Service academy officials said that the DOD and military department policies that require regular command climate assessments, development of action plans, and briefings on the results to supervisors are the academies' primary means for holding leaders accountable for their organizational climate.⁸²

Command climate assessments provide an opportunity for servicemembers and civilian employees to express opinions regarding the manner and extent to which leaders, including commanders and supervisors, respond to allegations of problematic behaviors. Climate assessment at the academies consists of the climate survey, and may include focus groups or discussions with students. Though the climate survey is not a reliable tool to describe prevalence of problematic behaviors, as we discussed in the prior section of this report, academy officials stated that the survey and the themes it identifies are a useful tool for commanders as a pulse check or starting point for further analysis.

⁸²See related DOD and military department policies: Department of Defense, Instruction 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program* (Sept. 4, 2020); Army Regulation 600-20, *Personnel-General: Army Command Policy* (July 24, 2020); OPNAVINST 5354.1H, *Navy Harassment Prevention and Military Equal Opportunity Program Manual* (Nov. 3, 2021); Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program* (incorporating Department of the Air Force Guidance Memorandum 2022-01, Apr. 6, 2022).

DOD is required by statute to complete command climate assessments.⁸³ In September 2015, we reported on DOD's compliance with certain statutory requirements related to conducting command climate assessments. We recommended that the Army and Air Force review and update guidance to require that commanders include in commanders' performance evaluations and assessments a statement about whether the commander conducted the required command climate assessments, as required by the statute.⁸⁴

We reviewed examples of action plans that academy commanders created in response to climate assessments. The level at which action plans are created varies by academy.⁸⁵

In line with Army requirements, West Point commanders create action plans at the company, battalion, and brigade level.⁸⁶ For example, a climate assessment completed in spring 2021 identified sexually harassing behaviors as one of the main issues in a company. The company Tactical Officer's action plan stated that the officer would

⁸³See National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-239, §§ 572(a)(3) (2013); National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-66, §§ 587, 1721 (2013). DOD guidance on the MEO Program notes that, to determine the overall health and effectiveness of an organization, command climate assessments provide an opportunity for service members and civilian employees to express opinions regarding the manner and extent to which leaders, including commanders and supervisors, respond to allegations of problematic behaviors, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and prohibited discrimination. DOD Instruction 1350.02.

⁸⁴GAO, *Military Personnel: Additional Steps Are Needed to Strengthen DOD's Oversight of Ethics and Professionalism Issues*, [GAO-15-711](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 3, 2015). We noted that without this updated guidance the Army and Air Force will continue to have limited visibility and oversight over this important commander responsibility aimed at ensuring the overall health of the organization. At the time of our recommendation, the Navy had developed guidance that addressed all of the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act's requirements. DOD partially concurred with this recommendation, stating that existing Army practice is consistent with the intent of departmental guidance for command climate survey utilization. DOD confirmed its position with regard to this recommendation on October 19, 2015. As of August 17, 2021, DOD has not responded to further inquiries regarding any actions it has taken to implement this recommendation. We still believe that DOD should act on our previous recommendation.

⁸⁵Action plans in response to climate assessment results are a requirement in military department policy for commanders at different levels of the organization. These actions plans for unit commanders are different than the overall academy strategic plans described earlier in this report.

⁸⁶Army Regulation 600-20.

provide the company with an in-person briefing by the campus Sexual Assault Response Coordinator and nurse to establish relationships with these positions and reinforce the resources that are available for sexual harassment and assault prevention. Following this, the plan stated that the company tactical officer would hold a squad “breakout session” to reinforce the message.

In line with Navy requirements, company commanders at the Naval Academy conduct climate assessments.⁸⁷ The Naval Academy develops action plans at the brigade-level that include the entire academy, according to officials. Naval Academy officials told us that this is because the academy is a unique military organization where culture transcends the company level, as students spend significant time with others outside their company in classes or extracurricular events. Therefore, action plans target the academy as a whole.

In line with Air Force requirements, Air Force Academy squadron commanders create an action plan on any factors identified in the climate survey that relate to diversity, inclusion, belonging or equal opportunity that receive scores of “improvement needed” or below 49 percent of favorable responses within 60 days of receiving the climate survey report. This Air Force-wide requirement, implemented in September 2020, aligns with the climate risk factors in the redesigned climate survey.⁸⁸ For example, a climate assessment completed in fall 2021 identified racially harassing behaviors as one problem area within a squadron at the academy. The squadron commander prepared an action plan in response that included giving a more prominent role to the student in the squadron responsible for diversity and inclusion education in the squadron, and space to facilitate more discussions.

We have previously made two priority recommendations to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness that DOD (1) develop a strategy for holding leaders accountable for implementing DOD’s sexual harassment policies and programs and (2) implement an oversight

⁸⁷OPNAVINST5354.1H.

⁸⁸Air Force Instruction 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program* (with change Sept. 9, 2020). In April 2022, as this report was in final processing, the Air Force issued an updated instruction with slightly different wording, requiring commanders to create an action plan on factors that relate to diversity, inclusion, connectedness, or equal opportunity topics with unfavorable ratings above 49 percent. Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program* (Apr. 6, 2022).

framework to help guide the department's efforts.⁸⁹ The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 included a related requirement.⁹⁰ In May 2021, DOD issued its Harassment Prevention Strategy for the Armed Forces for fiscal years 2021-2026, which is to be used for holding individuals in positions of leadership accountable. However, in reviewing this strategy as part of updating the status of our recommendation, we found that it is missing key elements of strategic planning such as objectives, milestones, strategies to accomplish goals; criteria for measuring progress; adequate resources; and performance measures. In February 2022, DOD provided an update, noting that it is revising its Harassment Prevention Strategy to 1) incorporate the elements of our recommendation and the recommendations and best practices of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military and 2) align the strategy with the government-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan under Executive Order 14035. DOD expects to complete its work by September 2022. We will continue to monitor DOD actions on these issues.

Student Involvement and Training

Students can become involved in the academies' diversity management efforts by advising leadership, forming groups, and facilitating and receiving training. The academies have taken actions to involve students in improving organizational climate by establishing 1) student leadership positions that advise the chain of command and 2) training and events.

Student leadership and succession planning. The academies' student leadership positions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion involve some combination of peer education and conflict resolution. For example, the Naval Academy's Diversity Peer Educators program, which is still under development according to an academy official, facilitates monthly peer-to-peer conversations regarding DEI. The Air Force Academy's Diversity and Inclusion Officers serve at the squadron, group, and wing

⁸⁹GAO, *Preventing Sexual Harassment: DOD Needs Greater Leadership Commitment and an Oversight Framework*, [GAO-11-809](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2011).

⁹⁰Specifically, the act required the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a DOD-wide strategy to hold individuals in positions of leadership in the Department accountable for the promotion, support, and enforcement of DOD policies and programs on sexual harassment, including providing for an oversight framework for the department's efforts to promote, support, and enforce such policies and programs. Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 539B (2021).

level. Officers stated that they facilitate conversations and help resolve low-level conflicts. See table 4 below for student positions by academy.

Table 4: Positions within Student Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Teams at the Military Service Academies

| Position | Description | Year Established |
|--|--|----------------------|
| United States Military Academy | | |
| Cadet Respect Staff | Raises awareness of diversity-related programs and helps mediate respect-related conflicts. Advises Cadet Chain of Command on the equal opportunity program. Reports to their officer in charge. | Restructured in 2020 |
| United States Naval Academy | | |
| Brigade Dignity and Respect Officer | Serves as student point of contact for DEI matters, coordinates DEI initiatives, training, and student groups. Responsible to the Brigade Commander and Chief Diversity Officer. | 2021 |
| Diversity Peer Educators | Facilitates monthly peer-to-peer conversations on DEI topics and informs students on reporting procedures for instances of discrimination. Reports to Brigade Dignity and Respect Officer and Chief Diversity Officer. | 2021 |
| Midshipmen Diversity Team | Plans cultural awareness months and DEI conferences. Reports to Brigade Dignity and Respect Officer and Chief Diversity Officer. | 2020 |
| United States Air Force Academy | | |
| Diversity & Inclusion Officers | Facilitates conversations on DEI topics, receives conflict mediation training, and helps resolve low-level issues. Reports to respective squadron, group, and wing commanders. | 2021 |

Source: GAO review of documentation and interviews with officials from the military service academies. | GAO-22-105130

The academies also have comparable, longer-standing positions related to sexual harassment and assault prevention, namely:

- West Point Trust Cadets, who are involved in sexual harassment and assault education and prevention.
- Naval Academy Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education peer educators, who facilitate peer education and raise awareness.
- Naval Academy GUIDEs, who provide guidance, understanding, information, direction and education to fellow students regarding equal opportunity, sexual harassment or sexual assault incidents.
- Air Force Academy Personal Ethics and Education Reps, who provide support to fellow students through education, outreach, and active listening.

Students See Affinity Groups as Important Medium for Support and Cultural Exchange

Each academy has affinity groups related to different demographic groups or cultures. These include the National Society of Black Engineers at West Point, the Secular Cadet Alliance at the Air Force Academy, and the Native American Heritage Club at the Naval Academy. Each academy also has a Spectrum Club for LGBTQ students.

Affinity groups at the academies hold cultural events, conduct educational outreach, and provide support networks for students. Affinity groups can also help an organization identify issues, recommend actions to leadership, and develop initiatives.



Source: U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class J. L. Correa. | GAO-22-105130

Succession planning in the context of workforce diversity management means having an ongoing, strategic process for identifying and developing a diverse pool of talent for an organization’s potential future leaders. Each academy has processes for considering demographic representation among student leadership positions. West Point conducts a biannual review of student leadership positions by factors such as gender, race, prior service, and athletics participation; and whether they are varsity athletes or preparatory school graduates, according to academy officials. Naval Academy policy requires battalion officers to review and carefully consider the demographics of their battalion prior to nominating student leaders, such that their nominations fully represent academy demographics. At the Air Force Academy, staff from the Culture and Climate Division told us they sit in on student leadership interviews.

As previously discussed, various focus groups of Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students expressed the perception that other students sometimes questioned whether they were admitted to the academy or had been selected for student leadership positions on diversity grounds or to fill a “quota,” and not on their own merit. West Point officials said they are working to address this perception regarding leadership positions by making the selection process more transparent.

Training and events. The academies provide students with educational opportunities related to organizational climate challenges through various mandatory courses, as well as through general character or leadership instruction. For example:

- The Naval Academy’s Command Managed Equal Opportunity program includes mandatory training on harassment and sexual harassment, and starting in 2022, mandatory training in discriminatory harassment and hazing, bullying, and stalking.
- Students at the Air Force Academy take required equal opportunity, sexual assault, and hazing and bullying training soon after enrollment to the academy. In addition, as part of the academy’s leadership curriculum, students take 16 hours of diversity and inclusion training over 4 years.
- At West Point, character integration education includes discussion of DEI-topics. Additional commissioning education requirements related to DEI are currently under review, according to officials.

The academies also have optional events, courses, or programs for students looking for additional education. Each academy holds a

conference that highlights diversity, inclusion, or ethical decision making, among other topics.⁹¹ The academies hold observances such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, and LGBT Pride Month. The Air Force Academy's Center for Character and Leadership Development offers optional courses for students on having critical conversations, being a leader of character, and unconscious bias. West Point has offered a Diversity and Inclusion Studies minor since 2018, according to academy officials. The Air Force Academy has offered one since 2021. The academies also offer elective academic courses related to DEI.

DOD is working on a department-wide DEI core competency framework in order to standardize the services' learning objectives, according to department officials. The competencies will serve as the foundation for every department component's education program, including the academies. The department's Diversity Management Operations Center is leading this effort and finalized draft core competencies in February 2022, according to department officials. Department officials stated that after finalizing the competencies, the Diversity Management Operations Center began working first with the pre-commissioning sources, which includes the service academies, on learning objectives, and that they have completed development of draft learning objectives. The Air Force Academy's Chief Diversity Officer co-leads the effort to develop department-wide learning objectives based on the competencies for pre-commissioning requirements, according to an academy official.

Recruitment

Recruitment is a key process by which an organization can attract a supply of qualified, diverse applicants. The academies have taken actions aimed at improving diverse recruitment, including a number of actions to expand the pool of both potential students and new faculty.⁹²

⁹¹Naval Academy Diversity and Inclusion Conference, West Point Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Conference, and Air Force Academy National Character and Leadership Symposium.

⁹²To receive an offer of appointment to a military service academy, an applicant must first obtain a nomination from an official source. The primary sources include congressional and military-affiliated nominations. Upon receiving a nomination, candidates complete an application process with the academy. Though applicants who receive congressional nominations make up the majority of the applicant pool, academies can expand the pool of those who seek nominations in the first place through recruitment initiatives.

According to academy officials, the academies advertise specifically to diverse applicants or to those from underrepresented areas using names gathered from college entrance exam companies. Further, academy officials stated that in 2021, the Naval Academy began contracting with a civilian college marketing firm that focuses on increasing awareness and interest among underserved groups and in congressional districts from which the academy receives less interest. According to documentation and officials, each academy has a visitation program meant to expose a diverse population to the academy. This program enables candidates and an accompanying parent to visit the academy and experience student life, including the barracks, academic classes, athletics, and student clubs. Each academy also has science, technology, engineering, and mathematics outreach programs that encourage and prepare prospective students from underrepresented demographic groups in those subjects.

Military academy preparatory schools operated by each military department are another key source for outreach and recruiting. Students who complete the 10-month preparatory curriculum—a blend of academics, military training, and physical fitness—then have the opportunity to enter the relevant service academy the following year. These schools are a significant source for enrollment of underrepresented demographic groups at the service academies. For example, in recent years more than 60 percent of those who attended the Naval Academy Preparatory School have been students from underrepresented demographic groups, according to Naval Academy officials.

The academies reported that there is less diverse representation among military and civilian faculty compared to the student body. However, each academy has taken actions to recruit more diverse faculty.⁹³ For example

- West Point recruiters' Task Force Teamwork Initiative, begun in March 2018, seeks to recruit women and ethnically-diverse military and civilian faculty and staff. The initiative includes representatives across 11 academic departments and the Brigade Tactical Department, among other departments. West Point's Superintendent released a memo in July 2018 committing to seeking a diverse pool of candidates as professors and staff officers.
- West Point's Diversity of Talent Search conducts three annual trips to historically black colleges and universities to identify, track, and

⁹³Service academy faculty are a mix of active duty military and civilian personnel.

maintain relationships with Reserve Officers' Training Corps students in order to recruit for military faculty positions.

- The Naval Academy's Diversity Search Advocates are faculty members who are trained to ensure that diverse faculty candidates are treated equitably by search committees throughout the search process, according to academy officials. Academy officials told us hiring diverse military faculty is a challenge because they are limited by the demographics of the military applicant pool and are competing with other military components for talent.
- The Air Force Academy has multiple initiatives planned for recruiting faculty, including creating an accountability plan by September 2022 and establishing a DEI endowed chair, among others.

Service Academies Are Unable to Fully Assess the Effectiveness of Their Actions to Improve Organizational Climate

The academies have ongoing plans and actions aimed at improving their organizational climate, but are unable to fully assess the effectiveness of specific actions. Specifically, the academies are unable to fully assess the effectiveness of specific actions in their plans to improve organizational climate because they have not fully developed or implemented performance measures. Performance measures may be targeted percentage or numerical values or they may be designed to indicate a level or degree of performance, such as a milestone, according to our *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.⁹⁴ Service academy officials stated that they have not fully developed performance measures because their strategic plans and the objectives and actions in those plans are relatively new, but that they have identified the need for these measures and have plans to develop them.

West Point performance measures. West Point's strategic plans do not have performance measures tied to all actions for improving organizational climate. For example, its Corps of Cadets DEI strategy describes the Cadet Respect Staff, who help resolve conflicts at a low-level and encourage equal opportunity reporting for unresolved concerns

⁹⁴[GAO-14-704G](#). GAO's Standards for Internal Control states that for quantitative objectives, performance measures may be a targeted percentage or numerical value. For qualitative objectives, management may need to design performance measures that indicate a level or degree of performance, such as milestones.

involving a lack of respect or inclusion.⁹⁵ However, the plan does not include a way to measure the success of the program in the form of performance measures. Further, the plan states that the Cadet Respect Staff will be mentored to develop standard operating procedures clearly outlining their roles, responsibilities, and relationships to other agencies, including specific goals and objectives, but does not include a deadline date for completing standard operating procedures.

In addition, the Corps of Cadets DEI strategy states that the Brigade Tactical Department will conduct biannual reviews by race/ethnicity and gender of student leadership positions, grades, and Uniform Code of Military Justice adjudicated punishments; however, the plan does not include what the department will do with the results of the reviews or identify target metrics or deadlines tied to addressing concerns uncovered in the reviews.

Some West Point actions include performance measures. For example, the Excel Scholars Program identifies and nurtures students from historically underrepresented groups and encourages them to compete for post-graduate scholarships. The program has target metrics, such as:

- 20 percent of participants compete and win post-graduate educational opportunities,
- 25 percent of participants are eligible to be interviewed for the West Point Graduate Scholarship Program, and
- 25 percent of participants are selected for key leadership positions in the Corps of Cadets.

These metrics enable the program to assess whether it is successful and identify any places for improvement. In the class of 2021, 23 percent of Excel participants won post-graduate scholarships, including two Rhodes Scholarships and two Fulbright Scholarships.

West Point developed and is piloting 47 “performance indicators” tied to the high-level lines of effort in their strategic plans. Some of these indicators may be useful for measuring the success of specific initiatives, such as cultural and gender diversity percentages to monitor the success of recruitment initiatives. However, others target broader measures of

⁹⁵United States Military Academy Memorandum, *United States Corps of Cadets (USCC) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy* (Sept. 18, 2020).

organizational climate, such as results from culture surveys or numbers of equal opportunity complaints.

Though West Point has performance measures for some of its individual actions and has pilot indicators for high-level lines of effort, it has not yet completed measures for all of its actions to improve organizational climate. A West Point official said the academy continues to focus on the integration of the efforts of various offices that have an impact on culture and climate, while sharpening and streamlining the metrics that each office tracks.

Naval Academy performance measures. The Naval Academy's strategic plans do not include performance measures tied to all actions for improving organizational climate. For example, one action in its Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan is to "[d]evelop a diversity and inclusion checklist and schedule to inventory and assess all academic classes and training events," and "[p]artner with Academic Departments in conducting a comprehensive curriculum review prioritizing the inclusion of marginalized scholarship and hidden histories within midshipmen education."⁹⁶ However, this action does not include any metrics to assess the impact of such a review or changes to curriculum and does not include any deadlines for completing a checklist or curriculum review.

A Naval Academy progress update to its diversity and inclusion plan states that the academy completed a review of its previous peer evaluation measurement system for the influence of bias and unintended disadvantages to underrepresented populations. The progress update states that the academy will put in place the new system by spring 2022; however, the academy has not yet established target metrics to measure the success of this new system and its effect on organizational climate.

Some actions in the academy's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan are themselves plans to create performance measures. For example, an action supporting the objective of "Increase Belongingness" is to "create a metric that can measure and track belongingness with a bi-annual survey for students, cadre, and academic staff." Another action is to "develop an automated mechanism to gather and analyze data and report on outcomes of the admissions process and meeting diversity and inclusion objectives." However, neither action includes a deadline for completion.

⁹⁶United States Naval Academy, *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* (Mar. 2021).

Some Naval Academy actions include performance measures in the form of metrics. For example, the academy's admissions department tracks application completions, and reports that 68 percent of students who visit the academy complete their applications for admission, compared to under 40 percent for those who do not visit the campus. This suggests that programs like the Minority Visitation Program may have an effect on expanding the pool of potential students.

Though the Naval Academy has performance measures for some of its actions and has plans to develop other measures, it has not yet completed performance measures for all of its actions to improve organizational climate. Academy officials stated that the academy is working to identify action officers and develop baselines for its metrics before creating the metrics.

Air Force Academy performance measures. The Air Force Academy approved a draft data plan to accompany its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan in October 2021.⁹⁷ The data plan includes metrics for almost all of the actions in its strategic plan, along with offices of responsibility and deadline dates for task completion or frequency dates for data collection. For example, the academy's retention goal includes a task to review why Black or African American students have historically been placed on conduct and aptitude probation at rates higher than other identities and, as needed, develop a plan to address this disparity. The plan features a four-part analysis and measurement plan to track this action that includes annual tracking by demographic of students on probation; and deadlines for completing a root cause analysis, implementing a plan to address disparities, and targeting reduction of Black or African American students on probation.

Though the Air Force Academy has begun this data plan that includes metrics with specific targets and deadlines for most actions, it is still a draft, and the academy has not yet identified performance measures for some of the actions in the plan. For example, the action to ensure students of diverse demographics are considered for leadership positions does not yet have a metric, office of responsibility, or deadline date assigned. Air Force Academy officials said they presented the draft data plan to the academy's institutional effectiveness board and added it to a draft instruction related to institutional effectiveness measures. In

⁹⁷United States Air Force Academy, *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2021* (Oct. 2021).

addition, the academy's Office of Diversity and Inclusion recently created a data analyst position to assist the academy with implementing the draft data plan.

Leading practices for diversity workforce management state that quantitative and qualitative performance measures help organizations translate their workforce diversity aspirations into tangible practice.⁹⁸ In addition, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission's final report states that successful implementation of diversity initiatives requires a deliberate strategy that ties the new diversity vision to desired outcomes via policies and metrics. With such data and tools, military leaders at all levels can be held accountable for their performance in diversity management and rewarded for their efforts.⁹⁹

Without completing the development and implementation of performance measures that allow the academies to assess the effectiveness of their efforts, the academies will not have information to determine which actions have led to measurable improvement in the organizational climate and cannot hold accountable the leaders responsible for those actions.

Conclusions

The military service academies play a critical role in shaping leaders who share DOD leadership's vision of a diverse, inclusive, and cohesive force. Academy leaders therefore play a crucial role in cultivating an organizational climate that reflects and emphasizes these values in its daily operations. The academies have a variety of methods for gathering information on the state of their organizational climates, including surveys and military equal opportunity complaint data. However, some of these key methods do not provide a complete and reliable picture of climate. The climate survey has security, response rate, and weighting limitations which affect the academies' ability to understand and monitor their organizational climate, but DOD is taking actions to address these issues. In addition, processes for documenting information on alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment that are not submitted through the complaint

⁹⁸[GAO-05-90](#).

⁹⁹Military Leadership Diversity Commission, *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military, Final Report* (2011).

processing system affect the academies' ability to understand the frequency and basis for alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment.

The academies have taken actions to improve organizational climates. These actions include involving student leaders in improving climate, implementing recruitment initiatives to expand the applicant pool, and senior leaders emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion to military performance. However, the academies are unable to fully assess the effectiveness of those actions because they have not completed and implemented performance measures. Without this information, the academies will not be able to undertake evaluations to determine which actions have led to measurable improvement in their organizational climates and cannot hold accountable the leaders responsible for those actions.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following seven recommendations. Specifically:

The Secretary of the Army should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy develops a clear and consistent process to document and report alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. [Recommendation 1]

The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Naval Academy develops a clear and consistent process to document and report alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. [Recommendation 2]

The Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy develops a clear and consistent process to document and report alleged incidents of discrimination and harassment that are not submitted through the complaint processing system. [Recommendation 3]

The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Naval Academy develops internal controls that ensure all military equal opportunity complaints are documented in such a way that they are readily available for examination. [Recommendation 4]

The Secretary of the Army should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy completes the development of performance measures for actions in its diversity, equity, and inclusion plan, and implements them, so that it can assess the effectiveness of its efforts to improve organizational climate. [Recommendation 5]

The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Naval Academy completes the development of performance measures for actions in its diversity, equity, and inclusion plan, and implements them, so that it can assess the effectiveness of its efforts to improve organizational climate. [Recommendations 6]

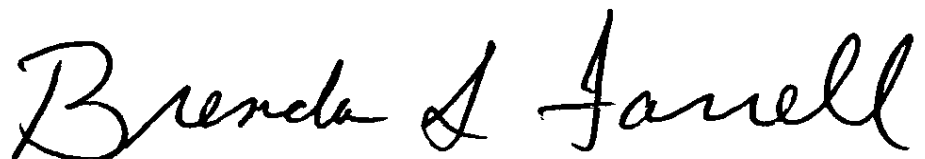
The Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy completes the development of performance measures for actions in its diversity, equity, and inclusion plan, and implements them, so that it can assess the effectiveness of its efforts to improve organizational climate. [Recommendations 7]

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In an email, the Director of DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion stated that DOD generally agreed with the findings of the report and concurs with all seven recommendations.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Superintendents of the United States Military Academy, United States Naval Academy, and United States Air Force Academy; and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or FarrellB@gao.gov. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



Letter

Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Statutory Requirement and Objectives

Section 558 of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 included a provision for us to report on equal opportunity claims, organizational climate,¹ surveys, and programs to address any climate issues at the military service academies (hereafter, the service academies).² This report addresses the following objectives:

1. the extent to which the academies collect information to develop a complete picture of the organizational climate;
2. the perceptions of current students concerning the organizational climate at their respective service academies; and
3. the extent to which the service academies have taken actions to improve their climate.

Methods Used to Evaluate Information Collection to Develop a Complete Picture of Organizational Climate at the Academies

To evaluate the extent to which the academies collect information to develop a complete picture of the organizational climate, we obtained, reviewed, and analyzed various sources of information about the organizational climate at the service academies. Specifically, we analyzed the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (the climate survey), the Service Academy Gender Relations survey and focus groups, graduation and attrition data, and equal opportunity complaints, among others. We also interviewed senior officials about the information collection methods

¹The Department of Defense (DOD) defines organizational climate as factors that represent military and civilian personnel perceptions and climate experiences of behaviors and inclusiveness in the workplace. This includes equal opportunity, sexual harassment and assault, hazing and bullying, and bias in disciplinary actions. DOD Instruction 1020.05, *DOD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program* (Sept. 9, 2020).

²Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 558 (2021), as amended by Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 574 (2021).

they use to monitor the organizational climate, including informal, “on-the-ground” monitoring practices.

Climate survey. We obtained annual climate survey reports for each of the academies for 2016 through 2019. We also obtained documents concerning climate surveys for 2020 and 2021 for West Point and the Naval Academy. In addition, we obtained and reviewed assessments of the climate survey methodology, including our prior work in this area and assessments by the Office of People Analytics (OPA).³ We interviewed OPA officials to discuss DEOCS, including methodological issues highlighted in these reports and the impact they may have on the reliability of the resulting data. We compared this information with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*. Specifically, we determined that the information and communication component of internal controls was significant to this objective, along with the underlying principle that management should use quality information to achieve the entity’s objectives. We determined that the Defense Organizational Climate Survey results were not sufficiently reliable for describing the organizational climate at the academies over time.

Equal opportunity complaints. We reviewed, summarized, and analyzed military equal opportunity complaint data. We obtained data on formal, informal, and anonymous military equal opportunity complaints for each of the academies between fiscal years 2017 and 2021. We reviewed the data to determine their reliability and completeness and worked with the academies to resolve inconsistencies and fill in missing data points. Additionally, we requested and obtained information from knowledgeable officials about how the academies ensure the integrity of the data they provided us.

Because we were primarily concerned with the organizational climate at the academy as it relates to cadets and midshipmen, we determined that incidents at the prep schools and incidents that did not involve cadets or midshipmen were outside of our scope. We filtered the data to exclude complaints that occurred at the academies’ prep schools and to include only complaints where a cadet or midshipman was involved (either as the complainant or the alleged offender).

³GAO, *Defense Nuclear Enterprise: DOD Can Improve Processes for Monitoring Long-Standing Issues*, [GAO-21-486](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 18, 2021). OPA, *DEOCS 4.1 Evaluation Report* (June 2018). OPA, *Use of DEOCS Data-Best Practices* (Oct. 2019).

We determined that we wanted to include the complaint data elements that described for each complaint the academy where the complaint occurred, year of the complaint, complaint type (formal, informal, anonymous), complaint basis, complaint disposition, and the relationship between the complainant and alleged offender (complainant and alleged offender are both students, complainant or alleged offender is a student and the other is not). Because the academies do not use the same categories for complaint bases, we used the DOD Instruction governing the military equal opportunity (MEO) complaint process to develop 13 more general categories: Race, National Origin, Color, Religion, Sex, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Sexual Harassment, Bullying, Hazing, Retaliation, Disparaging Terms, and Other.

As a data quality check, we compared complaint data for sexual harassment against sexual harassment incidents reported in DOD's *Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies*. This analysis revealed differences between these sources concerning the number of sexual harassment complaints at the Naval Academy, and we took steps to determine the cause of these discrepancies.⁴ Specifically, we interviewed a senior official with the academy's Inspector General's Office who raised concerns regarding the reliability of the Naval Academy's MEO complaint data. Specifically, this official expressed a lack of confidence in the comprehensiveness of the academy's MEO complaint data, citing a lack of internal controls to ensure all complaints are captured. We therefore determined that the Naval Academy's MEO complaint data was not sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting the number and type of complaints, as discussed in this report. Further, we compared the Naval Academy's data maintenance practices against Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government. Specifically, we determined that the information and communication and control activities components of internal controls were significant to this objective, along with the underlying principles that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives and design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks.

Chain of command reporting requirements. We obtained and reviewed guidance from the services that describe the reporting requirements

⁴An official stated that West Point MEO complaint data did not include sexual harassment complaints because Army sexual harassment complaints must be submitted to the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program.

associated with equal opportunity incidents that are addressed outside of the complaint processing system.⁵ We also interviewed command staff and members of student diversity teams at each academy concerning reporting practices associated with equal opportunity incidents that are handled within the chain of command. We assessed current reporting practices for equal opportunity incidents handled within the chain of command against *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*. Specifically, we determined that the information and communication and control activities components of internal controls were significant to this objective, along with the underlying principles that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives and design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks.

Service Academy Gender Relations Survey and focus group reports. We obtained the reports on the Service Academy Gender Relations surveys and focus groups for 2016 through 2019. We summarized the results of the survey and focus group reports and their key findings. We assessed the methodology used to develop the survey reports and determined that the survey results were sufficiently reliable to describe aspects of the climate at the academies related to gender. We also reviewed the methods used in the 2019 Service Academy Gender Relations focus group report and determined the findings were reliable for the purpose of supplementing the Gender Relations survey results of student views regarding gender climate and culture at the academies.

Enrollment, attrition, and graduation. We analyzed data on enrollment, attrition, and graduation by race, ethnicity, and gender at the service academies. We obtained data either from the service academies directly or from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System which collects and validates data from the service academies. We collected some data from recent years directly from the academies because the data was not yet available from the Department of Education at the time of our review. Years and sources of the data we analyzed are listed below:

⁵This included Army Regulation 600-20 and Air Force Instruction 36-2710.

- Enrollment from academic year 2016 to academic year 2022
 - Academic years 2016 through 2021 from the Department of Education
 - Academic year 2022 directly from the academies
- Attrition from academic year 2016 to academic year 2021
 - All data from the academies
- Graduation from the fall 2012 cohort through the fall 2017 cohort
 - Fall 2012 through 2014 cohorts from the Department of Education
 - Fall 2015 through fall 2017 cohorts directly from the service academies

We calculated the average percent of enrollment over the entire timeframe from academic years 2016-2021 for races and ethnicities with enrollment over 1.5 percent (Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Two or more races, and White), also excluding the Race/ethnicity unknown category. We then compared these average enrollment percentages with the percent of attrition overall and attrition by type represented by those races and ethnicities during that same timeframe.⁶ For example, during academic years 2016 to 2021, Black or African American students at the Naval Academy averaged 7 percent of enrollment but represented 14 percent of all attritions and 21 percent of conduct attritions. Because West Point data included 23 types of attrition, we combined similar types to form nine general categories.⁷

Graduation. We calculated 4-year graduation rates by race, ethnicity, and gender for the fall 2012 cohort through fall 2017 cohort at each service academy. To calculate graduation rates, we used IPEDS

⁶Each service academy labels attrition with type categories. For example, the Naval Academy uses five type categories for attrition: academic, conduct, medical, physical, and voluntary.

⁷West Point uses the following attrition types: conduct (includes Army Mentor Program conduct, resigned conduct, and separated conduct), academic (includes resigned academic, separated academic, separated academic and military development, and suspension academic), honor (includes resigned honor, separated honor, and Army Mentor Program honor), medical (includes separated medical), misconduct (includes resigned misconduct and separated misconduct), new cadet training (includes resigned new cadet training), physical (includes resigned physical fitness, separated physical fitness, and separated weight control program), voluntary (includes resigned motivation and resigned personal), and other (includes administrative error, deceased, religious, and separated military development).

methodology: namely, the number of students who completed their program within four years divided by the number of students in an adjusted fall cohort.⁸

To assess the reliability of the enrollment, attrition, and graduation data, we reviewed information on IPEDS website regarding its data collection and release procedures and enrollment and graduation rate methodology. We requested and obtained information from knowledgeable officials about the completeness and accuracy of the data on enrollment, attrition, and graduation, including about any existing internal controls of their databases. Based on our review of this information, we determined these data are sufficiently reliable for presenting enrollment data by race, ethnicity, and gender, and for comparing enrollment, attrition, and graduation over time by race and ethnicity.

Methods Used to Determine Student Perceptions of Climate

To obtain the perceptions of current students concerning the organizational climate at the academies, we conducted 34 focus groups across the three service academies. Consistent with typical focus group methodologies, our design included multiple groups with varying characteristics but some demographic similarities. Specifically, we conducted six focus groups for each of four racial or ethnic groups, including two focus groups at each academy with groups of Black or African American, White, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students. In addition, we conducted four focus groups with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students, including at least one session at each academy. We also conducted six focus groups with student leaders, individuals selected for positions of responsibility in relation to their fellow students, including two focus groups at each academy. These meetings involved structured small-group discussions designed to gain more in-depth information about equal opportunity climate issues that cannot easily be obtained from single or serial interviews. We determined it was not necessary to conduct focus groups separated by sex on the subject of gender at the academies, since data from the Service Academy Gender Relations

⁸An adjusted cohort may exclude students if they left the institution for one of the following reasons: death or total and permanent disability; service in the armed forces (including those called to active duty); service with a foreign aid service of the federal government, such as the Peace Corps; or service on official church missions.

survey was relevant to our objectives. Groups varied in size, with an average of 8 participants in our groups organized by race or ethnicity and LGBTQ students.

We recruited academy students for our focus groups in their second, third, and fourth years. We generally did not include first year students due to their limited experience with their respective academies. To identify participants in our focus groups of racial and ethnic groups, we obtained demographic data on academy students within each racial or ethnic group, sorted students into subgroups by class year and gender, and randomly selected students within each subgroup to invite to participate in our focus groups. We followed a similar approach for our focus groups of student leaders; however, as student leaders are generally third or fourth year students, we did not sort them by class year.

To accommodate scheduling conflicts and in respect of the voluntary nature of the groups, we invited more students than necessary to ensure a sufficient number of participants. We asked invitees to notify us if they were incorrectly identified as members of a particular racial or ethnic group or as student leaders. For three focus group sessions at one academy, we were unable to secure sufficient volunteers through this approach and solicited participants from the academy affinity groups for these racial or ethnic groups. To identify participants in our focus groups of LGBTQ students, we solicited volunteers from each academy's LGBTQ affinity group. At two academies, we were unable able to solicit sufficient volunteers for two focus groups and therefore held a single session. Because we did not select participants using a statistically-representative sampling method, the information collected from the focus groups is not generalizable and, therefore, cannot be projected across a particular demographic group or academy.

To conduct the focus groups, one of our trained facilitators moderated each of the sessions. The moderator followed a protocol that included discussion guidelines and a set of seven or eight questions, depending on the group. The focus group protocol was validated by one of our methodologists with a social science background and knowledge of small group methods. To the extent possible, racial and ethnic focus groups were moderated by a trained facilitator of similar race and ethnicity to support discussion on potentially sensitive topics. The same focus group protocol was used for all racial and ethnic focus group sessions, with some minor modifications made after the pilot group session at the Naval Academy. A similar protocol was used for LGBTQ students, with questions tailored to the experiences of this group. See tables 5 and 6 for

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

the questions used in our focus groups organized by race or ethnicity and for LGBTQ students.⁹

⁹A protocol combining questions for groups organized by race and ethnicity and groups of LGBTQ students was used for focus groups of student leaders.

Table 5: Focus Group Protocol Questions the GAO Moderator Asked Service Academy Students during Focus Groups Organized by Race or Ethnicity

1. With regard to race and ethnicity, was there anything about being a cadet/midshipman at [service academy] that surprised you or wasn't expected?
2. Based on your experience, are any cadets/midshipmen at the Academy treated differently in the classroom?
3. Based on your experience, are you aware of or have you seen differential treatment of any cadets/midshipmen by officers in the chain of command?
4. On a typical grading scale of A to F, how would you grade each of the following on how they work with people of differing and diverse backgrounds?
 - Student leaders?
 - Officers in your chain of command?
 - Civilian faculty?
 - Military faculty?
 - Superintendent, Commandant, and other senior leaders?What are your thoughts about these responses?
5. How often have you observed any of the following directed at cadets/midshipmen?
[Responses include very frequently, frequently, somewhat frequently, infrequently, or not at all]
 - Racial/ethnic jokes?
 - Expressions of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes?
 - Offensive racial/ethnic terms or slurs?
 - Other demonstrations of a lack of respect?How do these Poll results strike you?
Without providing any names or identifying information, could you give examples of what you observed?
What kinds of people made these statements or engaged in these behaviors? For example, were they:
 - Fellow cadets/midshipmen?
 - Officials in the chain-of-command?
 - Military or civilian faculty, staff, or someone else?
6. If you were to experience or witness these types of negative behaviors, how would you respond? Why would you respond in that way?
7. Would you recommend [service academy] to a friend or family member who shares your racial or ethnic background? (Yes, No, Uncertain)

Source: GAO. | GAO-22-105130

Table 6: Focus Group Protocol Questions the GAO Moderator Asked Service Academy Students during LGBTQ Focus Groups

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | Was there anything about being an LGBTQ cadet/midshipman at [service academy] that surprised you or wasn't expected? |
| 2. | In general, how comfortable are cadets/midshipmen with others at [service academy] knowing that they identify as LGBTQ? |
| 3. | Based on your experience, are LGBTQ cadets/midshipmen at the Academy treated differently in the classroom? |
| 4. | Based on your experience, are you aware of or have you seen differential treatment of LGBTQ cadets/midshipmen by officers in the chain of command? |
| 5. | On a typical grading scale of A to F, how would you grade each of the following on how they work with LGBTQ cadets/midshipmen and colleagues? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student leaders? • Officers in your chain of command? • Civilian faculty? • Military faculty? • Superintendent, Commandant, and other senior leaders? <p>What are your thoughts about these responses?</p> |
| 6. | How often have you observed any of the following directed at cadets/midshipmen? [Responses include very frequently, frequently, somewhat frequently, infrequently, or not at all] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homophobic or transphobic jokes? • Expressions of negative stereotypes about LGBTQ people? • Offensive terms or slurs directed at LGBTQ people? • Other demonstrations of a lack of respect? <p>How do these Poll results strike you? Without providing any names or identifying information, could you give examples of what you observed? What kinds of people made these statements or engaged in these behaviors? For example, were they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fellow cadets/midshipmen? • Officials in the chain-of-command? • Military or civilian faculty, staff, or someone else? |
| 7. | If you were to experience or witness these types of negative behaviors, how would you respond? Why would you respond in that way? |
| 8. | Would you recommend [service academy] to an LGBTQ friend or family member? (Yes, No, Uncertain) |

Source: GAO. | GAO-22-105130

We performed a content analysis on the responses to identify common themes from across the responses to determine their frequencies. Specifically, we developed a coding scheme to identify common themes and determine their frequencies.

At the conclusion of each of these groups, we administered a short, anonymous online survey to the participants with questions related to the organizational climate. Focus group participants were provided a link to the online survey at the end of each session. The link was active for a limited period of time, so the responses were captured at the time of the

discussion. See table 7 for the questions posed to students in our post-focus group survey.

Table 7: Questions Posed to Service Academy Students in Post-Focus Group Survey

1. How confident are you that reporting discrimination will result in your military service academy taking appropriate action to address the issue?
 - Very confident
 - Confident
 - Somewhat confident
 - Not very confident
 - Not confident
2. Why or why not? Would you please briefly explain your response?
3. Would you like to share any experiences or views related to today's discussion anonymously? If so, we welcome your thoughts.

Source: GAO. | GAO-22-105130

We performed a content analysis on the responses to identify common themes from across the responses to determine their frequencies. Specifically, we developed a coding scheme to identify common themes and determine their frequencies.

Because of the limitations on the use of data derived from the focus group meetings, including the non-generalizable sample and results reported in the aggregate, we did not rely entirely on focus groups, but rather used several different methodologies to corroborate and support our conclusions. Specifically, we conducted nine discussion groups, including one group at each of the academies with military and civilian faculty, members of student diversity teams, and active-duty command staff who oversee students. Our discussion groups differed from focus groups, in part because we did not attempt random selection of volunteers as participants, as was the preferred practice for our focus groups.

Methods Used to Evaluate Programs to Improve Climate

To evaluate the extent to which the service academies have taken actions to improve their climate, we collected and reviewed policies, strategic planning documents, and other documentation from the service academies from 2016 to May 2022 about their efforts to improve their organizational climates. We collected evidence through several rounds of information requests and interviews with service academy officials.

We used leading practices for workforce diversity management to compile and summarize academy efforts. In 2005, GAO identified and defined

nine leading practices for managing workforce diversity.¹⁰ These practices are: top leadership commitment, diversity as part of an organization's strategic plan, diversity linked to performance, measurement, accountability, succession planning, recruitment, employee involvement, and diversity training. We adapted these leading practices to align with the academies' university environment, such as by renaming employee involvement to student involvement. We identified specific parameters with which to operationalize each leading practice criteria. For example, for student involvement we identified parameters such as: (1) the academy has student groups related to diversity; (2) leadership seeks input from students on climate issues; and (3) students are involved in organizing and implementing diversity initiatives.

We applied this assessment framework to the information we gathered from the service academies to develop an understanding of each service academy's application of the individual leading practices. Specifically, an analyst reviewed the documentation relevant to individual parameters for each academy and developed a summary statement based on the analyst's assessment of the documentation. Based on the sum of the parameters for each leading practice, the analyst developed an overall summary of the respective academy's application of the leading practice. A second analyst verified the accuracy and completeness of the overall summaries of the leading practices by reviewing and verifying the summaries and source documents that the first analyst recorded for each parameter. If there were any disagreements between the two analysts on how to summarize the information, they discussed and recorded notes. If the two analysts could not agree, a third analyst adjudicated and made a final decision on the summaries.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2021 to July 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

¹⁰GAO, *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*, [GAO-05-90](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 14, 2005).

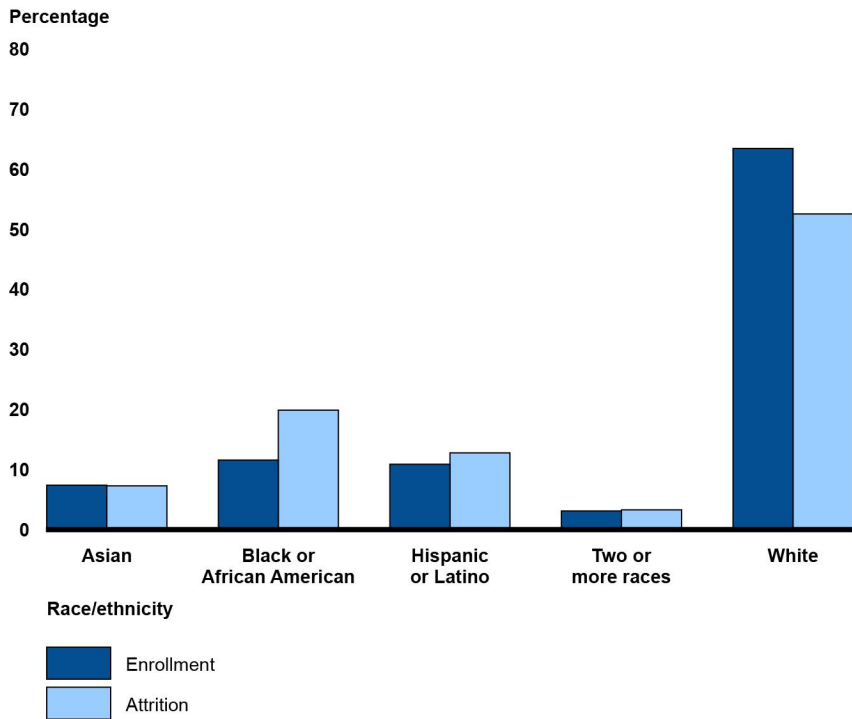
Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

Each academy collects attrition data by race, ethnicity, and type. Figures 7 through 12 below show, for each academy, a comparison of average enrollment and attrition by race, ethnicity, and attrition type during academic years 2016 to 2021. West Point uses 23 attrition types, and we combined similar types to form nine general categories in figure 8.¹ The Naval Academy uses five attrition types, as listed in figure 10. The Air Force Academy uses nine attrition types, as listed in figure 12.

¹West Point uses the following attrition types: conduct (includes Army Mentor Program conduct, resigned conduct, and separated conduct), academic (includes resigned academic, separated academic, separated academic and military development, and suspension academic), honor (includes resigned honor, separated honor, and Army Mentor Program honor), medical (includes separated medical), misconduct (includes resigned misconduct and separated misconduct), new cadet training (includes resigned new cadet training), physical (includes resigned physical fitness, separated physical fitness, and separated weight control program), voluntary (includes resigned motivation and resigned personal), and other (includes administrative error, deceased, religious, and separated military development).

United States Military Academy

Figure 7: Average Enrollment and Attrition at United States Military Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Military Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

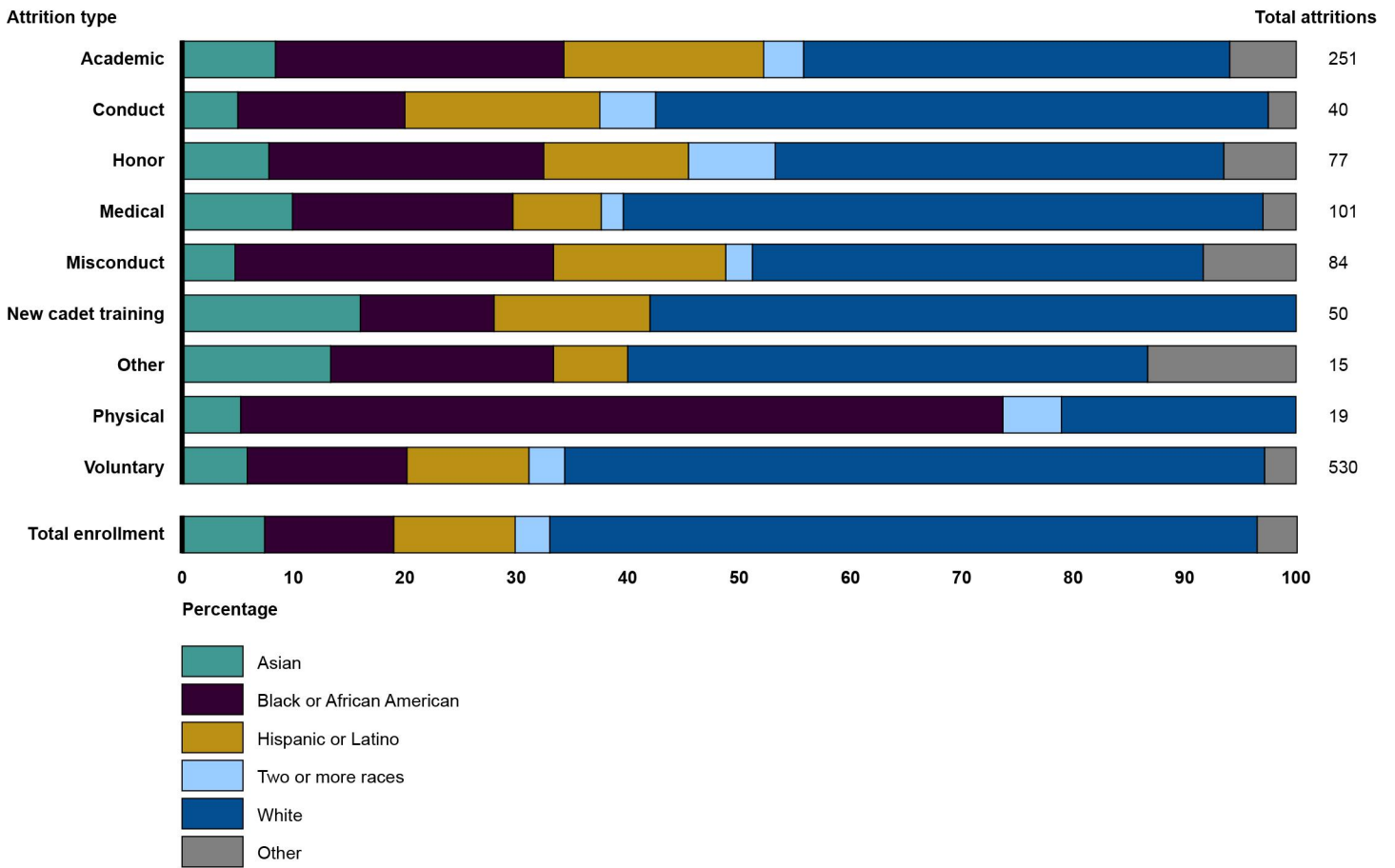
Accessible Data Table for Figure 7

| | % of Enrollment | % of All Attritions |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Asian | 7.4 | 7.3 |
| Black or African American | 11.6 | 19.9 |
| Hispanic | 10.9 | 12.8 |
| Two or more races | 3.1 | 3.3 |
| White | 63.5 | 52.6 |

Note: Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

Figure 8: Attrition by Type and Average Enrollment at United States Military Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Military Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

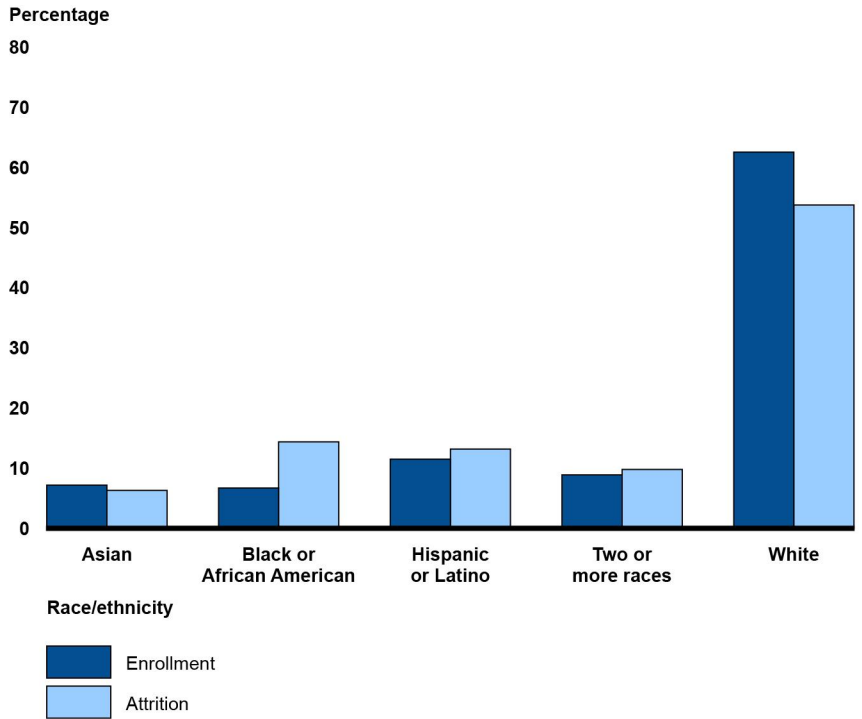
Accessible Data Table for Figure 8

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | Two or more races | White | Other |
|--------------------|---------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| Academic | 8.37 | 25.9 | 17.93 | 3.59 | 38.25 | 5.98 |
| Conduct | 5 | 15 | 17.5 | 5 | 55 | 2.5 |
| Honor | 7.79221 | 24.6753 | 12.987 | 7.79221 | 40.2597 | 6.49351 |
| Medical | 9.9 | 19.8 | 7.92 | 1.98 | 57.43 | 2.97 |
| Misconduct | 4.76 | 28.57 | 15.48 | 2.38 | 40.48 | 8.33 |
| New Cadet Training | 16 | 12 | 14 | 0 | 58 | 0 |
| Other | 13.33 | 20 | 6.67 | 0 | 46.67 | 13.33 |
| Physical | 5.26 | 68.42 | 0 | 5.26 | 21.05 | 0 |
| Voluntary | 5.85 | 14.34 | 10.94 | 3.21 | 62.83 | 2.83 |
| Total Enrollment | 7.4 | 11.6 | 10.9 | 3.1 | 63.5 | 3.6 |

Note: Numbers in far right column are total attritions for each attrition type, not percentages. Total enrollment percentages for racial and ethnic groups are shown below attrition types for comparison. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories. Conduct refers to violations of the cadet disciplinary system. Honor refers to violations of the cadet honor code. Misconduct can be related to a number of violations such as alcoholic beverages, sexual misconduct, or indebtedness. Physical includes physical fitness and weight control. Voluntary includes resigned motivation and resigned personal. Other includes administrative error, deceased, religious, and separated military development.

United States Naval Academy

Figure 9: Average Enrollment and Attrition at United States Naval Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Naval Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

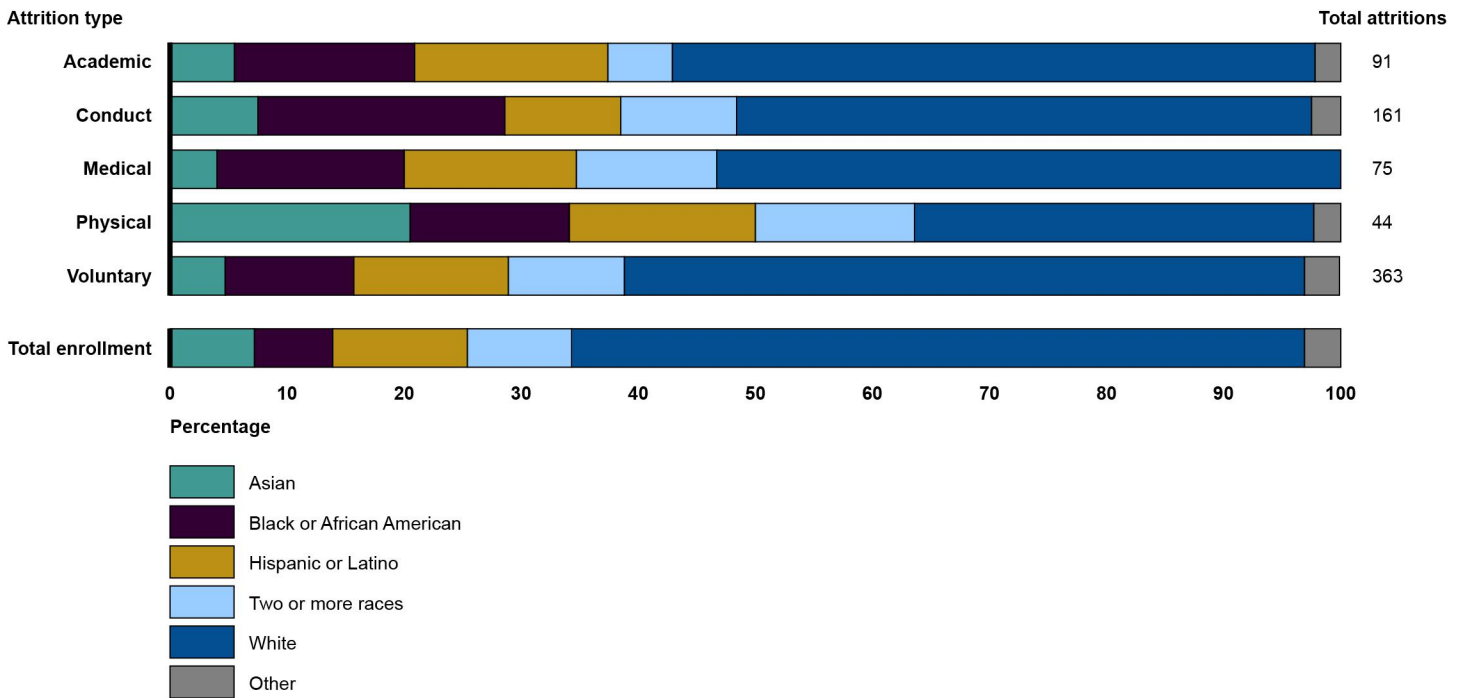
Accessible Data Table for Figure 9

| | % of Enrollment | % of All Attritions |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Asian | 7.2 | 6.3 |
| Black or African American | 6.7 | 14.4 |
| Hispanic | 11.5 | 13.2 |
| Two or more races | 8.9 | 9.8 |
| White | 62.6 | 53.8 |

Note: Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

Figure 10: Attrition by Type and Average Enrollment at United States Naval Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Naval Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

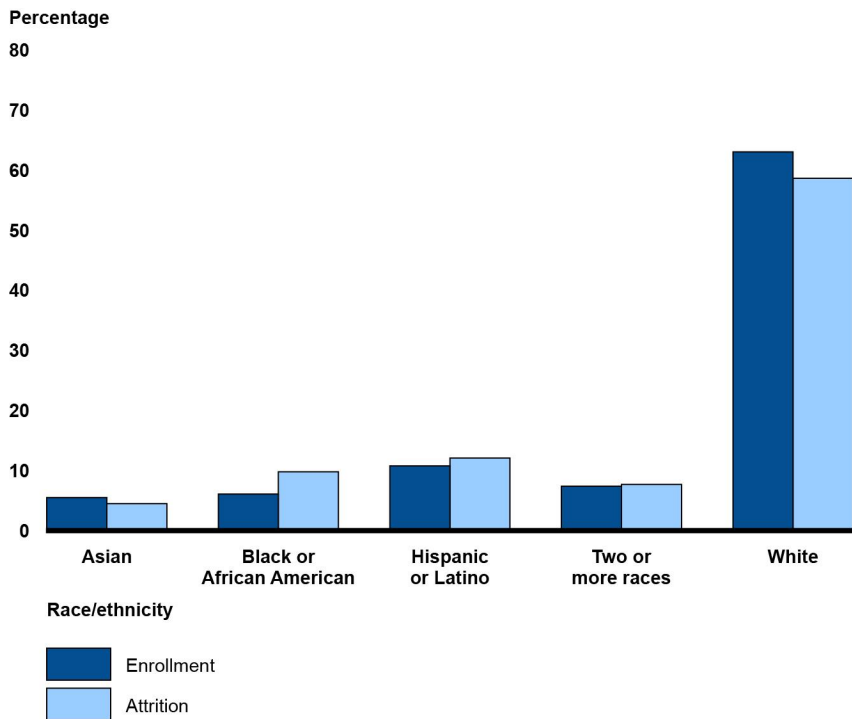
Accessible Data Table for Figure 10

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | Two or more races | White | Other |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------|-------|
| Academic | 5.5 | 15.4 | 16.5 | 5.5 | 54.9 | 2.2 |
| Conduct | 7.5 | 21.1 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 49.1 | 2.5 |
| Medical | 4 | 16 | 14.7 | 12 | 53.3 | 0 |
| Physical | 20.5 | 13.6 | 15.9 | 13.6 | 34.1 | 2.3 |
| Voluntary | 4.7 | 11 | 13.2 | 9.9 | 58.1 | 3 |
| Total Enrollment | 7.2 | 6.7 | 11.5 | 8.9 | 62.6 | 3.1 |

Note: Numbers in far right column are total attritions for each attrition type, not percentages. Total enrollment percentages for racial and ethnic groups are shown below attrition types for comparison. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories. Academic refers to academic performance or aptitude. Conduct refers to violations of the Brigade of Midshipmen Honor Concept or the Administrative Performance and Conduct System. Medical refers to medical discharge or death. Physical refers to physical education deficiencies. Voluntary refers to voluntary resignations initiated by a student in good standing in every area, including performance, conduct, academic, and physical education.

United States Air Force Academy

Figure 11: Average Enrollment and Attrition at United States Air Force Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Air Force Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

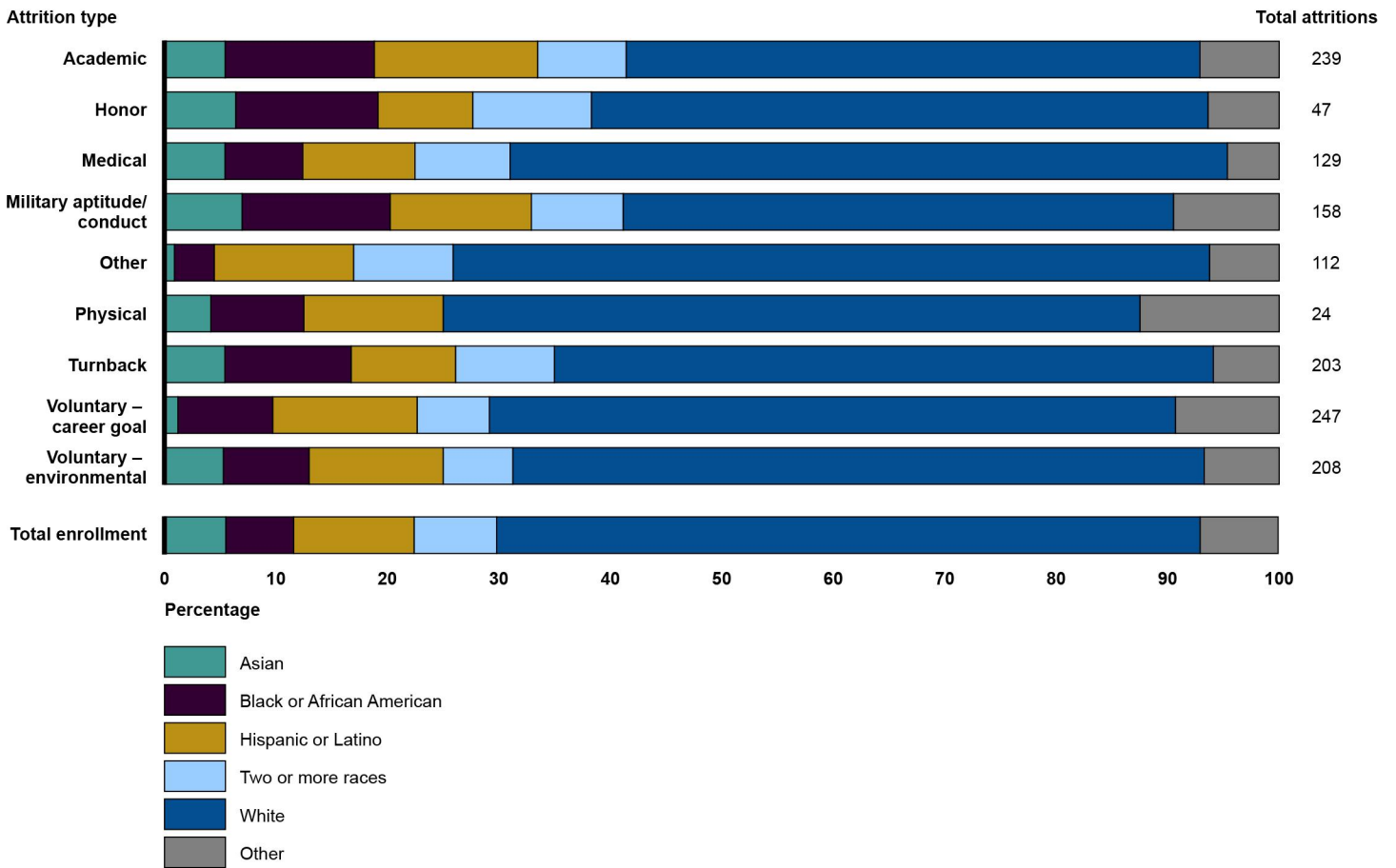
Accessible Data Table for Figure 11

| | % of Enrollment | % of All Attritions |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Asian | 5.5 | 4.5 |
| Black or African American | 6.1 | 9.8 |
| Hispanic | 10.8 | 12.1 |
| Two or more races | 7.4 | 7.7 |
| White | 63.1 | 58.7 |

Note: Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories.

Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

Figure 12: Attrition by Type and Average Enrollment at United States Air Force Academy, by Race/Ethnicity, Academic Years 2016–2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education and United States Air Force Academy data. | GAO-22-105130

Appendix II: Attrition at the Military Service Academies

Accessible Data Table for Figure 12

| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic | Two or more races | White | Other |
|---------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Academic | 5.43933 | 13.3891 | 14.6444 | 7.94979 | 51.4644 | 7.11297 |
| Honor | 6.38298 | 12.766 | 8.51064 | 10.6383 | 55.3191 | 6.38298 |
| Medical | 5.42636 | 6.97674 | 10.0775 | 8.52713 | 64.3411 | 4.65116 |
| Military Aptitude/Conduct | 6.96203 | 13.2911 | 12.6582 | 8.22785 | 49.3671 | 9.49367 |
| Other | 0.892857 | 3.57143 | 12.5 | 8.92857 | 67.8571 | 6.25 |
| Physical | 4.16667 | 8.33333 | 12.5 | 0 | 62.5 | 12.5 |
| Turnback | 5.41872 | 11.33 | 9.35961 | 8.867 | 59.1133 | 5.91133 |
| Voluntary - Career Goal | 1.21457 | 8.50202 | 12.9555 | 6.47773 | 61.5385 | 9.31174 |
| Voluntary - Environmental | 5.28846 | 7.69231 | 12.0192 | 6.25 | 62.0192 | 6.73077 |
| Total Enrollment | 5.5 | 6.1 | 10.8 | 7.4 | 63.1 | 7 |

Note: Numbers in far right column are total attritions for each attrition type, not percentages. Total enrollment percentages for racial and ethnic groups are shown below attrition types for comparison. Individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are included in the Hispanic or Latino category regardless of race and are not included in the race categories. According to an academy official, academic refers to departed for academic reasons, either voluntary or involuntary. Honor refers to honor issues, either voluntary or involuntary. Medical refers to medical reasons. Military aptitude/conduct refers to military aptitude or conduct issues, either voluntary or involuntary. Other refers to personal reasons that are primarily mission, parental pressure, or personal hardship. Physical refers to athletic or physical fitness issues, either voluntary or involuntary. Turnback refers to when a cadet is on extended leave, usually for temporary medical, personal hardship or personal reasons. Career goal refers to students that changed their mind about a military career or never really wanted one. Environmental refers to

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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Staff Acknowledgements:

In addition to the contact named above, Lori Atkinson (Assistant Director), Adam Howell-Smith (Analyst in Charge), Pedro Almoguera, David Blanding, Juliee Conde-Medina, Caitlin Cusati, Alexandra Gonzalez, David Jones, Ronald La Due Lake (retired), Serena Lo, Patricia Powell, Monica Savoy, Jacob Selgestad, Breana Stevens, William Tedrick, Emily Wilson, and Lillian Moyano-Yob made key contributions to this report.

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