

AN INSTITUTION IN CRISIS: THE ARMY RESERVE OFFICER CORPS

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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The officer shortage in the United States Army Reserve has reached critical levels and the overall impact threatens the long-term health of the organization. Insufficient recruiting, low accessions, and increased officer attrition driven by a multitude of internal and external factors have all contributed to these shortages. Significantly, the shortage of junior and mid-grade officers can derail current efforts to transform the US Army Reserve (USAR) from its traditional role as a strategic reserve into its current use as an operational reserve. Unfortunately, corrective measures have done little to mitigate this problem. These short-term expedient measures have satisfied deploying unit requirements but failed to address the underlying management issues causing these shortages. This paper briefly examines the background leading to current shortage of junior and mid-grade officers in the USAR; it then evaluates the officer manning challenges and highlights the related contributing factors in recruiting, accessions, and retention. The paper proposes several long-term policies and process changes to help resolve officer shortages and concludes with an assessment of the ability of the USAR to meet continued GWOT readiness requirements.

AN INSTITUTION IN CRISIS: THE ARMY RESERVE OFFICER CORPS

The Army Reserve is facing a critical junior- and mid-grade officer shortage that has persisted since the end of the Cold War. When asked how this situation occurred, LTG Helmly, Chief of Army Reserve (CAR), bluntly testified to Congress “we had folks... asleep at the wheel.”¹ The severity of this shortage is an impediment to achieving unit readiness and hinders the on-going transformation of the US Army Reserve (USAR) from a Strategic Reserve into an Operational Reserve.²

Superimposed on the Reserve Component (RC) transformation into an operational reserve are the Army’s efforts to manage scarce resources and institutionalize a cyclical readiness cycle to meet the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) operational force requirements. The Army developed and is currently using the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model as the overarching process to provide trained and ready units to combatant commanders and civil authorities to meet their mission requirements. Operational requirements drive the model that generates forces from all components on a sustained and cyclical basis.³ ARFORGEN prioritizes and synchronizes “institutional functions to resource, recruit, organize, man, equip, train, sustain, source, mobilize, and deploy cohesive units more effectively and efficiently.”⁴ In doing so, ARFORGEN manages the structured progression of increased readiness of units through preparation, training, ready, available, and deployment statuses.

Correspondingly, the transformation of the RC within the context of ARFORGEN implementation has surfaced numerous resourcing challenges primarily resolved through ‘makeshift’ management efforts including personnel and equipment ‘cross leveling’ that cannibalizes other non-deploying units. Although successful in meeting

rotational operational demands, these makeshift processes have obscured and, in some cases, delayed or prevented the resolution of many other issues that affect the long-term viability and health of the RC in general and the USAR in particular. Many of these obscured issues may come to the fore as the Army begins to limit mobilization to 12-month increments and confines mobilizations of combat, combat support and combat service support organizations to existing 'unit' organizations and restricts personnel cross leveling and stop-loss measures.⁵ With these new constraints, the USAR will need to confront the severe shortage in low and mid-grade officer manning and develop long-term management reforms to meet the readiness and deployment requirements inherent in the train-mobilize-deploy ARFORGEN framework.⁶

This paper briefly examines the background leading to current shortage of junior and mid-grade officers in the USAR; it then evaluates the officer manning challenges and highlights the related contributing factors in recruiting, accessions, and retention. The paper proposes several long-term policies and process changes to help resolve officer shortages and concludes with an assessment of the ability of the USAR to meet continued GWOT readiness requirements in the face of growing officer disaffection and continued institutional ineptness.

Background

The Army consists of three components: the Active Army, referred to in this paper as the Active Component (AC), the United States Army Reserve (USAR), and the United States Army National Guard (ARNG). Inside the Army Reserve are numerous sub-categories of personnel. The major focus of this paper is on the Selected Reserve that consists of Troop Program Units (TPU), Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) and

Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA) categories. The largest group is comprised of TPU soldiers. These soldiers attend twelve 2-day drill weekends annually, train for two-weeks of annual training (AT) each year, and serve primarily in units intended to deploy and fight our nation's wars.

The Army Reserve is approximately 20 percent of the total force; however, it contains 75 percent of the Civil Affairs and PSYOPs units in the Army as well as 57 percent of Combat Service Support units at Echelons Above Brigade (EAB). Forty percent of EAB Combat Support units including Military Police and Engineers, currently in great demand in the GWOT, also reside in the Army Reserve.⁷ Thus, much of the needed skill sets and manpower required for today's long, persistent conflict reside in the Army Reserve.

As of October 28, 2008, 27,524 Army Reserve soldiers are serving on active duty and since September 11, 2001, over 167,000 Army Reservist have mobilized in support of the Nation.⁸ The RC is an essential component of the Total Army. It has proven critical in meeting our Nation's security demands. Although heretofore successful in meeting deployment and warfighting mission requirements, the Army Reserve faces a growing challenge in overcoming a shortage of officers that has grown to over 10,000 vacancies.

The continuing shortage of junior- and mid-grade officers is a serious impediment to meeting the operational force requirements of the GWOT. Overcoming other readiness challenges, such as equipment shortages, while problematic, is usually resolvable with increased funding and correctable in a relatively short period. This is not the case with accessing, training, and developing officers. Generally, the

professional development of competent and confident officers requires experience and education gleaned through the expenditure of time and within the context of their eventual leadership service. Resultantly, reform measures targeted to increase officer mid-level strength and quality may not resolve problems for 5 to 10 years and, conversely, if not acted upon immediately can seriously damage the readiness of the USAR before corrective measures can take effect.

Numerous studies, reports, and articles have addressed the issue of officer shortages and have not only explained the policies that led to the current situation, but have recommended solutions to resolving these issues.⁹ Nonetheless, most of these recommendations have gone unheeded while the severity of the officer-manning problem approaches catastrophic proportions. There exists a complex array of factors influencing the recruitment, accession, and retention of officers within the USAR.

Officer Recruitment and Accessions

USAR officer accessions depend on the ability of the Army/USAR to entice potential candidates to enter the three pre-commissioning programs, the capacity of those programs to educate and graduate recruits, the attrition of those candidates while taking those programs, and the proportion of the graduates who select the USAR as their component of service. Additionally, USAR officer accessions occur when soldiers transfer into the USAR from another component (Active or USARNG) or are selected to receive a direct commission from the USAR enlisted ranks.

Traditionally the Army commissions officers from three programs: The United States Military Academy, the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate Schools (OCS). When the first two programs fail to produce sufficient

accessions, the Army increases OCS commissions to compensate for the shortage. For instance, between Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 and 2005 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) reported that the Army doubled its OCS accessions because of declining enrollments at the Academy and ROTC.¹⁰ From a macro perspective, entry into these programs necessarily depends upon volunteers drawn from the US population base. In making this choice, these volunteers must balance the benefits afforded service in the USAR compared to those of serving on active duty and with those associated with a career pursued solely in the private sector. Generally, the volunteer conducts an opportunity cost-benefit analysis considering pay, benefits, recreational time, family time, stability, and risk. Recent studies indicate disturbing trends in the US population eligibility and propensity to serve in the military that may severely constrain the pool of potential volunteers.

Challenges in Recruiting

The use of surveys and demographic trends can help forecast challenges to officer recruiting and help in the formulation of recruiting strategies to meet manning requirements. With the advent of the volunteer force, those who are not interested in military service reduce the pool of eligible candidates. A relatively recent survey reflects a severe decline in interest in serving in the military (see Figure 1).¹¹ The chart shows responses to the question of “how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military in the next few years?”¹² According to the survey, following the initial period of euphoria associated with the successful toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, the propensity of likely candidates has progressively declined from a high of 23 % in November ’03 to the current level of 13% (June ’07).

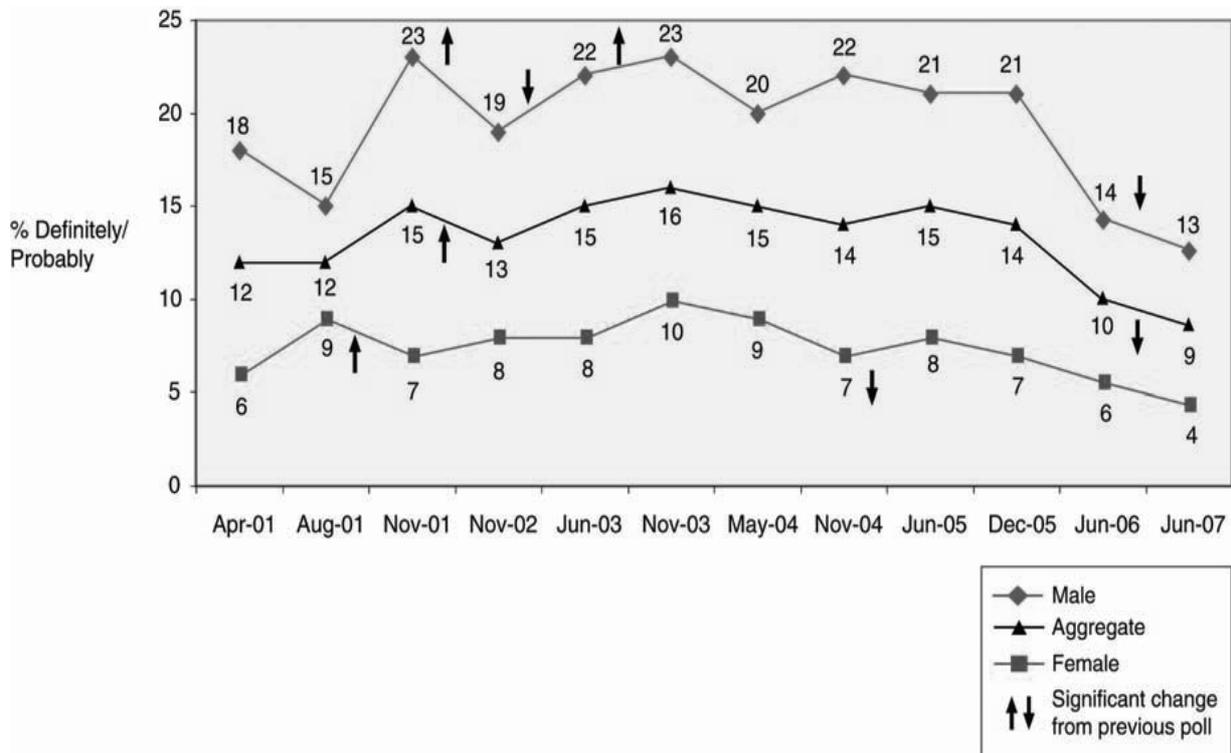


Figure 1.¹³

Moreover, a recent review by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve (CNGR) found that demographic trends through the middle of this century project a dramatic decrease in eligible military recruits due to age and other factors.¹⁴ Consequently, competition for eligible candidates will likely accelerate and, for the USAR, increase the difficulty in recruiting educated, technologically proficient, and morally suitable candidates willing to commit the personal sacrifices associated with reserve duty.¹⁵

Figure two shows one reason why this is going to be more problematic in the future. Less people from the target age groups are eligible to recruit for enlistment or to access as officers because of educational, physical, moral, or single parent disqualifiers. This information taken together with the previous survey data on the

propensity of candidates to serve in the military reflects a need to develop better policies to improve the desirability of RC service.

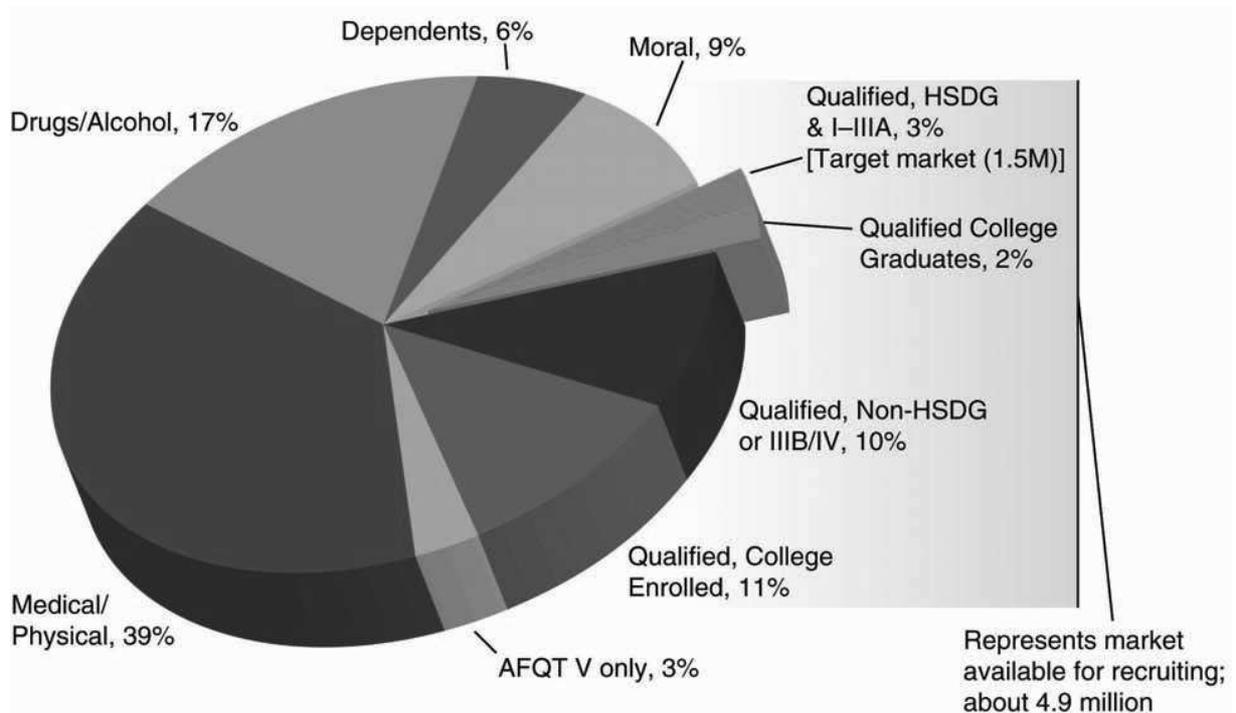


Figure 2.¹⁶

Clearly, there are numerous factors influencing the proclivity of eligible candidates to serve in the military, some of which can swing in favor of its desirability. However, those factors dissuading eligible candidates that are associated with the prospects of repeated deployments in support of the 'persistent conflict' are likely long-term negative influencers that portend an even further decline. Even in 'steady-state' conditions, the projected routine operations tempo will likely cause irreparable damage to junior and midgrade officers' budding civilian careers and negatively affect the families of those officers. At the junior and mid-grade levels, these officers usually have younger children, marital relationships that are more fragile, dual employment of both spouses, and are more highly leveraged with housing mortgages and personal debts.

These factors all combine to discourage reserve service that can place civilian employment in jeopardy and require frequent absences from homes and families. Compounding these negative influences are the limited health care benefits for non-mobilized RC soldiers and a relatively poor retirement incentive that does not commence until after serving 20-years of equivalent creditable service and they reach age 60. Similarly, those RC officers predisposed to routine deployments and regular service commitments are more likely to transition from reserve to active status while still early in their career. Faced with the prospect of routine and repetitive deployments in the RC, it simply becomes more rewarding for soldiers to accrue greater benefits on active duty doing these same activities and they avoid any conflicts with civilian employers.

The net effect of these factors is to discourage volunteers, increase attrition, and entice officers into inter-component transfers. If these issues were only a result of the current long-running GWOT, it would be problematic enough, however, given that the officer shortage is now in its second decade it may become catastrophic to the long-term health of the Army Reserve. Moreover, implementation of short-term and uncoordinated solutions by HRC and the Army Reserve G1 has met with mixed results.

Officer Accessions into the USAR

The USAR accessions in junior and mid-grade levels comes from a variety of sources that include ROTC, OCS, active component transitions, and direct commissioning. Each of these sources presents potential policy alternatives for resolving the Junior and Mid-grade officer shortages.

The roots of the current officer strength shortages began with the reduction in accessions from the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) in the early 1990s. ROTC accessions have historically been the largest source for Army Reserve Lieutenants. However, Army Year Groups 1992 through 2001 generally witnessed the Active Army increasingly accessing a larger *proportion* of ROTC lieutenants than the RC.¹⁷ Additionally, the AC has accessed more ROTC lieutenants than the RC every year since 1991. Interestingly, the post-Cold War drawdown itself may not have contributed directly because eliminating Army organizational structure actually reduced the requirements for officers.¹⁸ However, the United States Army Accessions Command (USAAC) reduced overall officer accessions from all sources for all components and was thus forced to use ROTC accessions normally targeted for the RC to make up for lieutenant accession shortages for the active component.¹⁹ This dramatically reduced the 1992-2005 USAR officer accession year-groups that 15 years later has also reduced the current mid-level officer populations. While increases in RC ROTC accessions has occurred in the last few years, it is still below those achieved in 1994 and earlier and is still insufficient to meet RC officer manning requirements.²⁰

Complicating and undermining efforts to access adequate numbers of ROTC graduates is the limitation of the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to meet the training requirements of the Army with adequate officer education throughput. The most pervasive impact on accessions is with the Basic Officer Leadership Course Phase II (BLOC II).

ROTC Annual LT Production by Active Army and Reserve Components

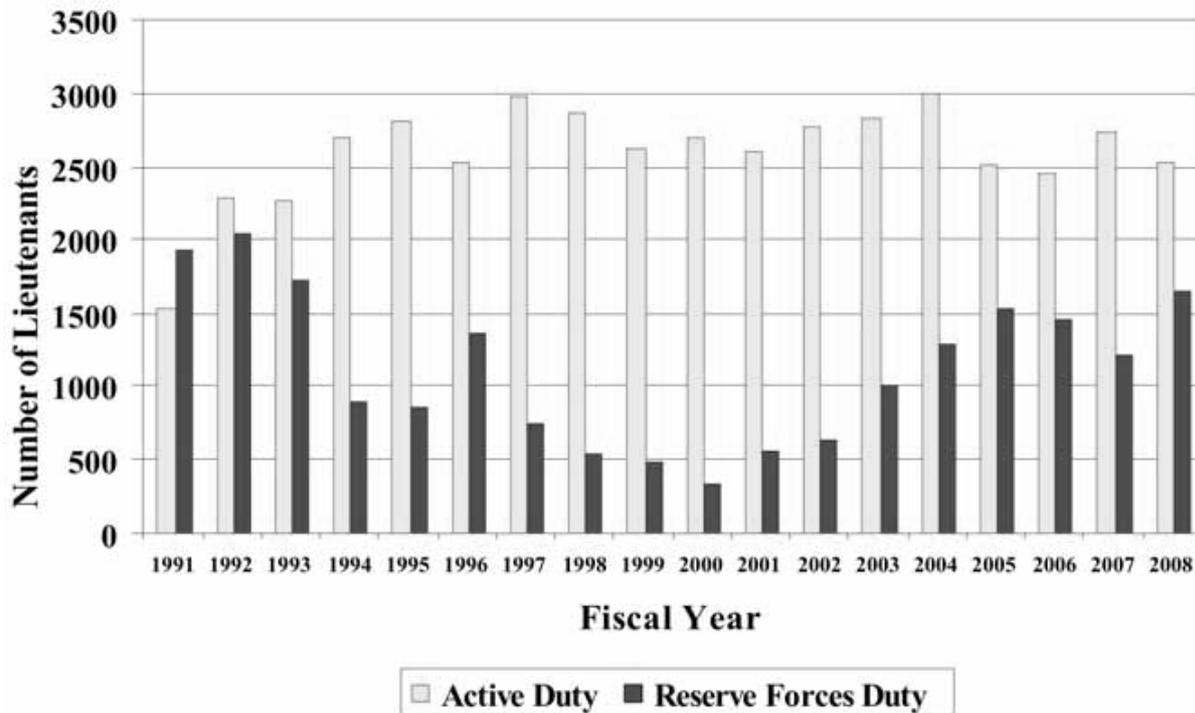


Figure 3.²¹

Generally, the Army loses 10% of the available lieutenants each year for failing to attend BOLCII within the required period. The cause of this failure is the absence of available slots in the corresponding BOLC officer’s school.²² In total, there are 3200 BOLC II (formally known as the Officer Basic Course or OBC) seats available annually.²³ Conversely, ROTC graduates over 4000 annually. The current policy is to discharge Second Lieutenants who fail to attend BOLC II within 24 months. This is an egregious waste of qualified personnel, especially in the face of unfilled RC officer requirements.

The recent expansion of all components with the Grow-The-Army (GTA) initiative also aggravates the USAR officer manning shortage. All components (AC, ARNG, and

USAR) have expanded their authorizations and are under increasing pressure to reach 100% authorized manning levels to improve the readiness of all units...not just those deploying or preparing to deploy (see previous discussion on ARFORGEN implementation). In particular, the USAR authorized end-strength is increasing by 6,000 (from 200,000 in 2007) to 206,000 (by 2013)²⁴ and its current assigned strength has increased from around 186,000 to 198,000 soldiers.²⁵ This increase in assigned soldiers, though below its projected ceiling of 206,000, still requires a corresponding increase in officers.

Despite having the challenge to “grow” junior officer into mid-level career professionals over 5-10 years, the USAR has several other sources of officer accessions that can both increase officer strength and fill personnel shortages. US Military Academy (USMA) graduates are all required to access into the Active Component (currently for a 5-year period) and then must serve the remaining portion of their commitment (3 years) in the inactive Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). However, once their active commitment is complete, they can also choose to serve their remaining commitment in the Selected Reserve. This same option is available to ROTC scholarship recipients who access into the AC and usually serve 4 years on active status and have 4 years in the inactive IRR. These officers were once a key source of mid-grade officers for the USAR but transitions have significantly declined in recent years.²⁶ This source of lateral accessions decreased as the deployment requirements for the Reserve Components have increased during the current long war associated with the GWOT.²⁷

Additionally, the Army Reserve has not relied upon the OCS program to fill shortages in ROTC accessions to any great extent. However, the OCS program has expanded to help meet the demand, can accommodate the available qualified candidates, but is not a large enough source of USAR officer accessions to fill requirements.²⁸

Uniquely, the Army Reserve does utilize a fourth commissioning source for their officers: direct commissions.²⁹ While all components utilize direct commissions for professionals like doctors and lawyers, the Army Reserve utilizes direct commissions for non-commissioned officers who have Baccalaureate degrees and demonstrate leadership potential. However, this practice constitutes a zero-sum increase in the overall end-strength of the Army Reserve and degrades the quality and strength of an already shorthanded NCO corps by making the best performers into junior officers.

Instituting a policy change to require cadets with four-year ROTC scholarships and Academy graduates to complete their remaining service obligation in a TPU rather than in the IRR would significantly increase the pool of available officers and a good proportion would likely continue beyond their obligation and serve at mid-grade to senior levels in the USAR. Correspondingly, to help stimulate these lateral transfers, the Army instituted a 2-year exemption from mobilization for any AC officer who joins a TPU. Insuring that AC officers are aware of these policies as well as providing additional incentives for joining a TPU would increase this source of lateral accessions and could go a long way towards resolving the mid-career officer shortage created by the years of under-accessions of USAR lieutenants.³⁰

Retention

Closely related to problems in recruiting and accessions is the challenge of retaining highly qualified officers who join the USAR in TPUs. The good news is that policy initiatives that improve retention also act as enticements for recruits and help comparative cross-component accessions. Notwithstanding, retention is a problem affecting all components: the Active Army itself is projecting a shortage of 3000 officers annually through FY 2013.³¹ This problem is greater in the Army Reserve, which is currently short 5708 captains and 3746 majors.³² The Selected Reserve is authorized approximately 44,000 officers and as of September 2008, has only 33,184 officers.³³

In response, the Army is implementing several initiatives to address the retention problem, however; these initiatives are largely uncoordinated and are limited to short-term measures. For instance, to entice mid-career officers to stay, the Army is offering a \$35,000 retention bonus to captains. The problem with offering bonuses is there is no way to ensure the money actually goes to those who are contemplating departure since it must be offered to all captains. Moreover, even after offering bonuses to all captains, attrition rates for captains remain at about 14% annually indicating that this type of solution is likely insufficient to resolve even the current attrition challenge.³⁴ Although likely affecting a certain portion of those choosing to remain in the USAR, additional measures of this sort will probably have a decreasing rate of return. First, because monetary compensation is only one of many factors influencing the departure of junior officers and second because the amount of monetary compensation will likely have to increase in a non-linear rate with every incremental increase in retention numbers.

As previously indicated, it takes a lifetime of developmental assignments and education to produce senior leaders competent at the tactical through strategic levels.

Consequently, the shortages in junior and mid-grade officers will pose a serious challenge for the development of the number and quality of leaders at the higher levels. Low numbers of mid-career officers have already caused promotion selection rates to be higher than normal. The shortage is so severe that USAR promotion boards have had to resort to promoting all fully qualified officers rather than selectively promoting the best-qualified candidates. This threatens major problems for the future Army and has an immediate negative impact on the officer corps. Currently, there is only an educational requirement for USAR promotions from lieutenant through lieutenant colonel. The variety and density of potential qualifying positional assignments prevents using key developmental or branch qualifying positions as a prerequisite for promotion. Additionally, RC officers generally are limited to available positions within their geographical area and would have to forfeit their civilian employment and move at their own expense to take USAR positions outside of commuting distance.³⁵ Nonetheless, in a fully manned and competitive environment, those officers aspiring to be 'best qualified' would likely seek the challenging and difficult jobs as a competitive edge over those who relied only on educational qualification. Conversely, in the current environment with all 'fully qualified' officers being selected for promotion there is no incentive to take on the challenging, high-demand jobs, seek opportunities to deploy on high visibility operational missions, or otherwise accept risk. In fact, the system actually penalizes officers who do choose these options. Many officers who take positions that are more challenging, such as primary staff or command, also struggle to complete schooling, as well as remain competitive in their civilian careers. In the meantime, other officers who take less time-consuming positions, attend the minimum amount of unit training, and

limit their participation to accomplishing just the required schooling receive promotions at the same if not higher rates.

This pervasive impact of officer shortages has emerged in promotion board actions. For instance, on a recent board, 800 officers failed to meet educational requirements for their grade. Seven hundred of these officers were currently deployed or had previously deployed and some were in command.³⁶ Passing over deployed officers or those who have successfully commanded while deployed is not a retention inducement and definitely does not reward those who are carrying the GWOT deployment load for the USAR.

Similarly, the Army Promotion List (APL) for Reserve Component Majors over the last eight years reflects this disturbing trend. Figure 4 shows two significant issues affecting the promotion of majors and its negative affect on the management of the officer corps. The first mismanagement indicator listed in the table is the failure to meet the non-AGR Major's select objective (SO) for each year since 2001. This indicates a failure to meet the officer strength requirements for each year group. The second indicator is the large number of officers eligible that were not educationally qualified and not selected for promotion. Additionally, from 2003 through 2006 the board selected for promotion all fully qualified officers (which means educationally qualified) thus undermining any competitive advantage to those who were 'best qualified.'

The key aspect of this promotion approach is that every board since 2001 has had to exclude significant numbers of otherwise eligible officers from promotion for failing to meet the educational requirements. Many reasons exist for officers failing to meet these prerequisites. Common reasons include not enough training seats to meet

demand, conflicts due to civilian careers, and commanders, who are already short of officers, not mandating attendance or deciding to postpone requisite schooling to meet operational and training requirements.

MAJ APL (2001 thru 2008)

Bd Year	Considered	# Selected	Educ Q	Not EQ	Select Objective (SO)	Difference SO vs # Sel
2001	5532	1859	2498	3034	2850	991
2002	6523	2033	2884	3639	3243	1210
2003	4814	2191	2720	2094	Fully Qualified	N/A
2004	2964	1623	1955	1009	Fully Qualified	N/A
2005 (AGR)	157	154	156	1	Fully Qualified	N/A
2005 (Non-AGR)	1970	1082	1239	731	Fully Qualified	N/A
2005 (ARNGUS)	842	702	717	125	Fully Qualified	N/A
2006 (AGR)	127	123	127	0	Fully Qualified	N/A
2006 (Non-AGR)	2235	925	1134	1101	Fully Qualified	N/A
2006 (ARNGUS)	761	598	629	132	Fully Qualified	N/A
*2007 (AGR)	139	130	130	0	130	0
*2007 (Non-AGR)	1314	704	814	500	1040	336
2007 (ARNGUS)	721	549	569	152	672	123
*FY 2008 (AGR)	154	143	154	0	169	26
*FY 2008 (Non-AGR)	1122	535	564	468	901	366
FY 2008 (ARNGUS)	576	420	440	136	612	192
TOTALS	29951	13771	16730	13122	9617	3244

Figure 4.³⁷

This promotion dichotomy is having an immediate insidious impact on unit moral, officer retention and unit performance; it is no longer a hypothetical problem. For instance, one recent battalion command board with 18 open commands had only three packets submitted for the command board.³⁸ While shortages of qualified lieutenant colonels are one possible reason for this phenomenon, it is nonetheless illustrative of

the toxic effects that officer shortages are having on the underlying fabric of the officer corps and the overall health of the USAR.

The problems identified above are symptomatic of a failing officer management system that has inadequately responded to the new operational demands of the GWOT. Combining pre-GWOT antiquated promotion policies and post 9/11 expedient makeshift 'cross leveling' with the poor management of TPU officer assignments has resulted in a progressive cannibalization of the force that further undermines the morale of the officer corps and the readiness of the USAR. The numbers of officers failing to complete mandatory schooling is a clear indicator that the current management approach is not meeting the needs of the institution or the officer corps. In a more competitive environment, selective promotions would ensure quality officers; however, to have a competitive promotion environment requires a near fully manned, schooled, and experienced officer corps. Again, recruitment, education, and training are unsynchronized and in need of a unified effort managed by one overarching plan and a central authority able to establish policies and priorities across heretofore stove-piped organizations and bureaucracies.

Balancing Civilian Employment with Reserve Duties

The traditional reservist is a fulltime civilian and a part-time soldier. Thus, a drilling reservist must necessarily orchestrate a carefully balanced commitment to meeting his civilian employment requirements with those of his part-time Reserve obligations. While employers have generally supported employees reserve duty and historical rare mobilizations, they are becoming less inclined to do so...even when confronted with legal actions and civil suits. Again, the Army Reserve failed to take the

necessary preventative actions to confront these issues and is only now attempting to address the civil employment challenges created by the RC transformation into an operational reserve.³⁹

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a DoD organization that deals with employment complaints and investigates violations of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). Significantly, the ESGR reports that complaints have greatly increased in recent years. Over 13,000 inquiries occurred in 2008 requiring 2,664 referrals to an ombudsman. This is an increase of 300 cases from the previous year.⁴⁰ Of course, complaints capture only those overt violations of the act but do not address more subtle employer discretionary measures that can discriminate against reservists when major downsizing of the workforce takes place or when selecting employees for promotion or advancement. Nonetheless, the increasing number of complaints is a clear indicator that multiple mobilizations are now extensively affecting employers and upsetting that fragile balance between civilian employment and reserve duty.

Correspondingly, in some cases employers are forced overtly to discriminate against reservists. While the law may protect soldier's rights to reemployment, the expense of employing a reservist is not sustainable for many small business owners. In many cases, it is a matter of business survival. Despite appeals to patriotism and threats of legal action, many employers simply cannot afford to leave jobs unfilled or repeatedly train and employ part-time replacements for the increasing absences of their reservist employees. Another population disproportionately affected is first responders.⁴¹ Generally, the same skills and propensities that motivate citizens to join the military are

the same that motivate them to seek public service in emergency response organizations. Thus, when small police and fire departments lose several highly skilled reservists (many times in key leadership and management positions), the consequences on the emergency response capability can be severe for both the agency and the public. This again creates additional pressure on the citizen-soldier to choose between his responsibilities to the local public and his continued service to the Nation in the USAR. Added to this pressure is the impact of increasing OPTEMPO.

The modern reservist can now expect multiple activations during a twenty-year career in the USAR operational reserve. While this new reality may be the current standard, the average reservist did not anticipate this requirement when they joined the organization. Hence, the effects on retention and accessions caused by the transformation into an operational reserve, as opposed to a less demanding strategic reserve, may not be sustainable without significant incentives and benefits especially in health care and employer subsidies. Although the Employer Partnership Program capitalizes on the needs of industry and the training proficiencies of select reservists, it is probably limited to select occupational specialties with little application to officer-like management or leader executive positions.⁴² As LTG Stultz, Chief of the Army Reserve, recently stated, "I think the success to sustain an all volunteer force in the reserve components is going to have to be that the Reserve Soldier looks and says being in the Army Reserve is going to enable me to have a career in my community."⁴³ Yet no overarching strategic plan exists to comprehensively deal with these issues.⁴⁴

Recommendations

Resolving the junior and mid-grade officer shortage requires a comprehensive cross-functional strategy addressing measures related to education, direct commissioning, increasing the proportion of AGR officers, establishing a continuum of service, improved benefits, employer incentives, TPU officer development, and cross component officer management. Reform measures in any one of these areas will likely influence every area and impact recruiting, accessions, retention, and overall USAR readiness. Improved management of officer education is a primary example.

As previously noted, officer education is an important aspect of USAR officer development, promotion and retention. Educational opportunities can be increased with modern information technology (IT) enabled methods and multi-media forums so that officers have multiple means to accomplish educational requirements. Distance education programs can complement schooling offered in resident programs, help reduce the demand on the generating force and still meet the professional development requirements of the force. Also holding commanders accountable for failing to ensure their officers meet educational standards will help to energize officer participation and help ensure compliance. This heightened priority coupled with improved management attention on officer educational requirements that also allows deferrals, constructive credit and exemptions when operational demands dictate their justification, should reduce the current backlog of schooling and otherwise increase retention.

Better utilization of the direct commissioning program for selected specialties would also help fill gaps; especially in areas that do not necessarily require troop-leading skills. Increased direct commissioning of captains and majors is a possible short-term solution. However, direct commission should be limited to officers in fields

and positions not requiring intensive troop leading skills. Direct commissioning of mainstream officers into positions routinely immersed in troop leading activities simply omits the essential leadership experience acquired as a lieutenant and would seriously impair the effectiveness of the newly commissioned mid-grade officer. Reserving this option for Military Occupational Skills like Foreign Area Officers and restricting their duty assignments through the rank of LTC may be a suitable workaround.

Increasing the number of Active Guard and Reserve fulltime Officers, especially those serving at the company and battalion levels, would likely improve readiness and officer retention. However, there needs to be caution in replacing these fulltime soldiers with Active Component soldiers as recommended by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve. A thorough review of what second and third order effects this action may have on part-time citizen soldiers needs to occur before implementing this plan. Although all components are part of the Total Army, each of the components has unique cultures, management frameworks, and policies. For instance, the unique constraints associated with being a citizen-soldier are oftentimes lost on those in the active components who mostly view these constraints as weaknesses or lack of commitment.

A comprehensive change in the management of officers across all components may help retention and reduce the permanent attrition of officers based many times on short-term situational factors. In this regard, the idea of a 'continuum of service' as defined by the Department of Defense would go a long way in allowing officers to move from status to status as life and mission requirements presented themselves. DOD defines the 'continuum of service' as,

Management policies supported by appropriate statutes, benefit and compensation options, and agreements that facilitate transparent movement, to the extent possible, of individuals between active military, reserve military and civilian service. These management policies provide viable and flexible service options and levels of participation, and are consistent with DOD manpower requirements and each individual's ability to serve over the course of a lifetime of service.⁴⁵

Clearly, the continuum of service concept is a revolutionary and innovative officer management approach that requires more study. It may be feasible only for small numbers of officers in selected specialties or only at the most senior levels. The average reservist has yet to have a mechanism to move back and forth between active, reserve, and inactive statuses. The major impediment to continuum of service implementation is the AGR program. By design, permanent AGR officers already occupy these AGR positions. Thus, there are normally limited vacancies. However, the Director of the Army Reserve Senior Leadership Management Office has stated that assignment to IMA positions would probably be the way to accommodate those seeking transitions into active status. He also sees this as a possible solution to the idea of rotating joint billets for reservists.⁴⁶ Obviously, the IMA program would need increased billets to accommodate the demands expected under the continuum of service program and/or the AGR program would likely have to be completely revised to allow for these transitions.

As previously mentioned recruiting, accessions, and retention all depend upon the cost-benefit analysis of potential candidates and serving officers. Thus, in the interconnected calculus that officers use to examine their service options, overall pay, benefits and career opportunities plays a major role. Particularly discouraging is the comparative limited retirement and medical benefits afforded the TPU soldier. These areas are primary candidates for improvements that could dramatically affect officer

strength levels. Again, helping partner with industry on employee incentives and benefits could also prove to be efficient and provide affordable solutions. The Chief of Army Reserve, LTG Stultz has publically discussed these ideas that need additional resourcing such as better healthcare options and greater collaboration with employers.⁴⁷ To this extent, a review of the impact of increased deployments on RC employers needs to occur. While compensating employers may prove cost prohibitive when taking an employee for the second time in three or four years, perhaps other ideas like cost sharing of healthcare might provide a financial incentive that would entice many companies to retain those USAR employees. A comprehensive examination and cost effective adjustment of pay, benefits, and employer incentives could help increase volunteers, decrease attrition, entice more officers into AC to RC inter-component transfers, and reduce the risk of USAR service for both the civilian employer and the USAR employee.

Establishing standard career tracks for Troop Program Unit Officers that specifies mandatory key developmental duty positions could also aid in the management of USAR officers and reward those who take on difficult and challenging assignments. This could preclude the damaging effects of the current policy of promoting fully qualified officers based only upon their educational level and not on their positional assignments. The Army Reserve needs better management of Troop Program Unit Officer's careers to ensure equitable treatment and career incentives for taking on the difficult jobs and participating in challenging deployments. Likewise, there needs to be a personnel management framework established that does not rely solely on USAR TPU officers searching for and finding their own suitable positions within the USAR.

Possibly the USAR could develop a dual system where both the organization and the individual combine to find suitable and available positions that enable career progression and continued service. Management of all officers within a given command could occur either in the Operational and Functional Commands or in the newly established Regional Sustainment Commands.

Perhaps the most important and far-reaching and promising reform addresses the overall management organization. The USAR must take a comprehensive, cross-functional, 'top-down' management approach to resolving this multi-faceted officer manning challenge. In a related observation, a GAO report found that the Army's accession programs were decentralized and uncoordinated.⁴⁸ "There is not a strategic integrated plan for overall annual accessions, or anyway to manage and allocate resources to the three components in a coordinated fashion. Without a strategic accessions plan the Army may be unable to meet future goals and mission requirements."⁴⁹

The Department of the Army re-organization can serve as a useful example for what is required to integrate reform measures across the RC. The Army Enterprise initiative brings Accessions Command, Recruiting Command, as well as the Retention Command under the TRADOC Commander. This centralization of authority and responsibility helps establish accountability for achieving cross-functional results. Similarly, the Army Reserve should consider aligning all personnel functions under a major commander. The advantage is to have one commander developing and implementing one overarching and synchronized plan that will take a recruit from the recruiter through MOS qualification to unit membership in a coordinated and systemic

manner. It requires a 'Personnel Czar' committed to bringing all of these resources together. Placing a General Officer in charge of a strategic plan to access and retain officers is essential to ensure that the program receives adequate attention and the authority for dealing with the issue as a whole and not its separate parts.

Conclusions

The viability of the officer corps is at a serious crossroads. This is neither a new problem nor one that the Army or its Reserve Components can correct anytime soon. There are many challenges facing the operational Army Reserve, as well as the Army as a whole. The Operational Reserve is no longer a concept...it is a reality. How and 'if' this challenge can be met with the current personnel management policies and programs is still in question. Clearly, an imminent and growing problem of junior and mid-level officer shortages threatens the ability of the USAR to transform into an operational reserve. Across the recruiting, accessions and retention functional areas exists a broad array of possible reform measures that could help reverse the reduced accessions and increased officer attrition. However, the most promising measures require an integrated and comprehensive approach that cuts across functional areas and even components. Any remedy or policy that promotes competition between components for the limited number of potential officers needs eliminating. Alternatively, a unified personnel policy that attracts officers to meet all three components requirements is necessary. The USAR, and indeed the Army, should adopt a comprehensive cross-functional strategy that: improves opportunities for required education; increases opportunities for selected direct commissioning; better manages TPU officer careers; establishes a continuum of service; increases benefits; offers

employer incentives; and improves TPU officer development plans and cross component officer management.

That a serious officer accession and retention problem exists is not in doubt, whether there is any institutional momentum to aggressively confront and fix the problem for the long-term is the real question. In a constrained resource environment, priorities will have to be set; but the resolution of current officer shortages should be at the top of that list.

Endnotes

¹ Hal Bernton, "Officer Crisis Hits Army Reserve," *Seattle Times*, 9 December 2004, 1, quoted from Richard Howe, *Mid-Grade Army Reserve Officers-In Short Supply of a Critical Component of a Strategic Means*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks Pa: U.S. Army War College, March 18, 2005), 4.

² U.S. Department of Defense, SUBJECT: *Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force*, DoD Directive 1200.17, (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Defense, October 29, 2008).

³ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Campaign Plan, Change 4, Annex F, the ARFORGEN Implementation Plan* (Washington DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, July 27, 2006), F3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, F2

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, SUBJECT: *Activation, Mobilization, and Demobilization of the Ready Reserve*, DoD Directive 1235.10 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, November 26, 2008), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-9. DoD Directive 1235.10 requires that: "The train-mobilize-deploy model shall be used to provide ready and available forces. It goes on to direct that: "Mobilization of ground combat, ground combat support, and ground combat service support shall be managed on a unit basis. Also that: "Cross-leveling of personnel shall be minimized. Alternate methods shall be used such as task-organizing at the unit level; the use of volunteers, the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and Inactive National Guard (ING); or cross-leveling personnel out of non-deployable units." The operative word in these provisions is "shall" not "should."

⁷ LTG Jack Stultz, "The Army Reserves," briefing slides, Washington DC, Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, March 14, 2008.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, 4th Qtr Briefing* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2008) linked from <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/> (accessed December 15, 2008).

⁹ See, Jonathan J. Pontius, *Projecting Officer Strength of the United States Army Reserve From 2008-2012* (Monterrey CA: Naval Post Graduate School, 2008), Richard Howe, *Mid-Grade Army Reserve Officers-In Short Supply of a Critical Component of a Strategic Means*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 18, 2005), and U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, GAO-07-224 (Washington DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, January 2007).

¹⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, 11.

¹¹ Arnold Punaro, Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force, Final Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense* (Arlington VA: Commission on National Guard and Reserves, January 31, 2008) 77.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 114-118.

¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶ Ibid., 80.

¹⁷ Charles Henning, *Army Officer Shortages: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, July 2006) 5.

¹⁸ Andrew Tilghman, "The Army's Other Crisis" *Washington Monthly*, December 2007, <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2007/0712.tilghman.html> (accessed December 15, 2008).

¹⁹ Pontius, *Projecting Officer Strength of the United States Army Reserve From 2008-2012*, 11.

²⁰ Reserve Officers Association, *Report on the Junior Officer Shortage Program* (Reserve Officers Association: December 11, 2008), 16, http://www.roa.org/site/DocServer/_JOshortage_rpt.pdf?docID=11621. 16 (accessed January 7, 2009).

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid., 8.

²³ Ibid., 13.

²⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, "Army Structure Memorandum 09-13, Grow the Army," Washington DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, October 4, 2008, 13.

²⁵ Reserve Officer Association, *Report on the Junior Officer Shortage Program*, 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Joseph E. Whitlock, *Can the Army Reserve Overcome its Growing Company Grade Officer Shortage?*, (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, AY 01-02) 19.

²⁹ Andreas Thum, "Direct Commissioning: Are You an Ideal Candidate?" *Army Reserve Magazine*, Winter 2001, 16-17.

³⁰ Reserve Officer Association, *Report on the Junior Officer Shortage Program*, 7.

³¹ Henning, *Army Officer Shortages: Background and Issues for Congress*, 1.

³² Col. Larry Meder, "Army Reserve Senior Leader Development," briefing slides, Washington DC, Army Reserve Senior Development Office, January 24, 2008.

³³ Col. Joe Charsagua, USAWC, email message to author with attachment from AR G1 LTC Whitehurst Army Reserve Officer Strength, September 30, 2008.

³⁴ Reserve Officer Association, *Report on the Junior Officer Shortage Program*, 7.

³⁵ Though certain programs are being initiated such as IDT lodging and IDT travel pay to attempt to provide greater flexibility to where soldiers drill.

³⁶ Reserve Officer Association, *Report on the Junior Officer Shortage Program*, 8.

³⁷ James Baynham, HRC, email message to author, with attachment on 2001-2008 officer promotion board results, January 12, 2009.

³⁸ BG Greg Couch, 316th ESC Commander's email to Brigade Commanders, 15 September 2008, urging them to encourage LTC and Major (P) to apply for the LTCCAB (the deadline was extended and 11 packets were received in total for 18 commands).

³⁹ U.S. Army Reserve, "Employer Partnership" linked from U.S. Army Reserve home page at http://www.armyreserve.army.mil/ARWEB/NEWS/WORD/Employer_Partnership.htm.

⁴⁰ Brandy Parks ESGR, email message to author with attachment, "ESGR talking point's memorandum" FY2009, November 13, 2008.

⁴¹ Lawrence J. Korb, "How to Update the Army Reserves" *Center for American Progress*, February 24, 2004, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2004/02/b34798.html> (accessed January 15, 2009).

⁴² The employer partnership program is a cost-effective solution that may apply to certain high-density skill soldiers, however, whether this program will be effective in the long term at the

officer level is open to question. The basic premise of the program is that some industries such as trucking companies are finding it hard to hire qualified employees. The Army Reserve screens, trains, and provides experience to truck drivers, and thus has a ready pool of qualified persons who can pass drug screenings and have their licenses and in many cases have combat leadership experience. Thus, certain businesses have a need for and are willing to hire these personnel even in the face of multiple RC generated absences. From the business perspective, intermittent employment by highly qualified and trained employees is better than having no employees. The Army Reserve has many of the type of individuals some of these candidate industries require. This program, while still in its infancy, has General Officer involvement, and has companies from airlines seeking mechanics to metropolitan police departments looking for police officers ready to participate.

⁴³ Col. Joe Charsagua email message to author with attachment Chief Army Reserve, talking points memorandum for December 2008, December 3, 2008.

⁴⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, 43.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force*, DOD Directive 1200.17, October 2008, 8

⁴⁶ Col. John Donovan Army Reserve Senior Leader Development Office, email to author December 5, 2008.

⁴⁷ LTG Jack Stultz, "Chief Army Reserve Seminar" Association of U.S. Army Annual Meeting, Washington DC, October 7, 2008.

⁴⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges*, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

