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Delayed Entry Program Attrition: Survey Results

Marion E. Lane, M.S. · Charles W. Johns, B.A.
Michael A. White, Ph.D. · Naina C. Eshwar, M.B.A.
Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology

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Marian E. Lane, M.S.
Charles W. Johns, B.A.
Michael A. White, Ph.D.
Naina C. Eshwar, M.B.A.

Reviewed and Approved by
Jacqueline A. Mottern, Ph.D.
Institute for Selection and Classification

Released by
David L. Alderton, Ph.D.
Director

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Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology Department
Bureau of Naval Personnel
5720 Integrity Drive
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14. ABSTRACT

The Navy's Delayed Entry Program (DEP) allows individuals to delay their entry into the Navy for up to one year after signing an enlistment contract. However, the DEP loses approximately 18 percent of its contracts before they ever reach initial recruit training. In the past, it has been argued that attrition from the DEP is better than attrition from initial training, when more time and money have been invested. The underlying assumption is that individuals who attrite from the DEP would not have been successful in recruit training anyway and are therefore less costly than training losses. This leads to a management policy of allowing DEP attrition to continue at relatively high levels. However, there is no evidence to support the assumption that all DEP attrition is "wanted" attrition of recruits who would fail to be successful in training or, subsequently, in the Fleet. To date, very little knowledge exists concerning the reasons why an individual chooses to leave the DEP. The current project was undertaken to more fully understand the reasons behind DEP attrition, and the factors that might affect the propensity to attrite, which could lead to the development of programs or services to reduce attrition.

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Foreword

A survey of Delayed Entry Program (DEP) attrites and recruiters was conducted in an effort to better understand factors associated with attrition from the DEP. The questions were developed by Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST), in conjunction with Commander, Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC). Six hundred DEP attrites, along with 50 recruiters who had contact with these individuals, were surveyed via telephone regarding their experiences with recruiting, classification, and DEP processes.

Results indicate that individuals who attrite from the DEP do so for a variety of reasons, with the top reasons being a general "change of mind" and the pursuit of education or other civilian employment. Recruiters agree that these reasons are prevalent but cite being in the program too long as the strongest factor contributing to attrition rates. Recruiters also indicate risk factors they perceive to be associated with individual attrition from the program. An additional important finding in this research is that nearly 50% express regret for having dropped out of the DEP.

This research was sponsored by Commander, Navy Recruiting Command.

DAVID L. ALDERTON, Ph.D.
Director

Executive Summary

Problem

In the past 6 years, attrition from the Navy's Delayed Entry Program (DEP) has ranged from a low of 16 percent in 1999 to a high of 23 percent in 2003. It has been argued that attrition from the DEP is better than attrition from initial training, because more time and money would have been invested in the recruit by that point in time. However, a considerable amount of time and money is invested in the recruit when he or she enters the DEP. Further, there is no guarantee that DEP attrition is "wanted" attrition, that is attrition by recruits who would fail in recruit training or, subsequently, in the Fleet. In fact, it may be argued that losses of qualified people in the DEP may ultimately contribute to attrition later on because the Navy must then find replacements for those DEP losses, and those replacements may not be the caliber of those they replace.

To date, we have very little knowledge concerning the reasons why a person chooses to leave the DEP. Although the reason for leaving is recorded in an official Navy database, in its current form it does not provide sufficient information to determine the precise reason or reasons why a person leaves the DEP. Rather, the official record maintains only a general category of separation. This documentation often does not completely capture the true reason for attrition, especially when the individual has multiple reasons behind his or her decision or when the precise reason for leaving is not included in the official list. Furthermore, there is no follow-up for individuals who leave the DEP. Such a follow-up could determine the recruits' thoughts and feelings after their decision to leave, what course they pursued subsequent to leaving, or whether they might want to, or in fact did, return to military service at a later date.

Purpose

The current project was undertaken to more fully understand the reasons behind DEP attrition, to determine the factors that might affect the propensity to attrite, and to provide information that could lead to the development of programs or services to reduce DEP attrition. Such information could be useful in the following ways: (a) discriminating between those who would and would not be successful in the Navy; (b) taking steps for retaining those who would be, and separating those who would not be successful; and (c) training those who have the potential to be successful but require some additional assistance prior to entering the Navy training pipeline. The elimination of those who would not be successful in Navy training and the transformation of potential attrites into successful and productive Sailors would significantly benefit the Navy's personnel readiness.

Method

This study included the development and implementation of two surveys: the DEP Attrite Survey (N = 600) and the Recruiter Survey (N = 50). The questions for both surveys were developed by Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST), in conjunction with personnel at the Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC). Telephone interviews were conducted with DEP attrites who left the DEP from January to August of 2003. All individuals contacted for participation separated from the Navy because they chose to "decline enlistment," not because the Navy chose to separate them. Individuals contacted for participation in the Recruiter Survey had recruiting experience with attrites who agreed to participate in the DEP Attrite Survey.

Results

Average time spent in the DEP was 6.5 months. A substantial percentage of respondents indicated that employment opportunities and educational benefits were influences for them to join the Navy; however, they also indicated that these factors were reasons for them to leave. The majority of respondents reported satisfaction with the recruiting experience overall, and approximately half of the respondents reported that they felt some degree of regret or doubt about their decision to leave the DEP.

Recruiters' top perceived reasons why individuals attrite from the DEP largely corresponded to the reasons reported by attrites. Recruiters cited DEP recruits merely "changing their minds" and civilian employment opportunities as two of the largest reasons, but their most frequently cited reason for DEP recruit attrition was that these individuals simply remain in the DEP too long.

Recruiters were also able to identify several factors that indicated to them that an individual might be at risk of attriting from the program. These included lack of contact with the individual and lack of attendance by the individual at program meetings. However, an overwhelming majority indicated that there was nothing they could have done differently that would have affected the decision to leave.

Conclusions

The finding that employment opportunities and educational benefits were both influences to join the Navy as well as reasons to leave, and that approximately half of the respondents reported that they felt some degree of regret or doubt about their decision to leave the DEP, could be the result of a lack of information on either the front or the back end of the process, as individuals may misunderstand or not be fully aware of the opportunities available to them through the Navy or in the private sector.

Recruiters suggest that shortening the time that individuals spend in the DEP might improve the program and reduce attrition. If discriminations can be made early in the process to identify individuals who come into the DEP possessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be successful in training, then it may be advantageous to ship these individuals as soon as possible. Alternately, those individuals who have less potential to be successful in Navy training might benefit from some "Sailorization" prior to entering the training pipeline, could remain in the DEP for a slightly longer amount of time, reap the benefits of "pre-training" and instruction provided in the DEP, and then ship to training when they have reached appropriate levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for success.

Finally, 49% of respondents expressed some level of regret for having dropped out of DEP. Based on this, when DEP attrition is high and meeting recruiting goals become difficult, it seems plausible that these individuals may be candidates for "re-recruiting" after some modest passage of time after dropping out of DEP.

Contents

Introduction **1**
Background 1
Attrition in the Military 2
Recruiting in the Navy 2
Problem 3
Method **4**
Procedures 4
Respondents 5
Attrite Survey Results **5**
Respondent characteristics 5
Influences to join 7
Recruiting experiences 9
Pre-entry experiences 10
DEP experiences 11
Reasons for leaving 11
Decision to leave 13
Recruiter Survey Results **14**
Conclusions **15**
Future research 16
References **17**
Appendix A: DEP Attrite Survey **A-0**
Appendix B: Recruiter Survey **B-0**

List of Tables

1. Cancellation codes 5
2. Education credential at entry 6
3. Education credential at interview 6
4. Employment status at entry 6
5. Employment status at interview 7
6. Influences to join the Navy 8
7. Top influences to join (including Other responses) 9
8. Recruiting experiences 10
9. Pre-entry experiences 10
10. Reasons for leaving 12
11. Top reasons for leaving (including *Other* responses) 13
12. Regret or doubt about the decision to leave the DEP 14

Introduction

Employee turnover, or "attrition," as it is termed in military settings, is costly to organizations in terms of both time and money invested in these employees. Costs accumulate at every stage of the employment process, from initial advertising to recruiting, through training and the performance of the job, and potentially into replacement costs when the employee leaves the organization in pursuit of an alternative position. This research focuses on the costs associated with the earliest part of this process, specifically the advertising and recruiting phase of military employment. Historically, the Navy's Delayed Entry Program (DEP) has lost approximately 16 to 23 percent of its contracts before they ever reach initial recruit training.[1] In a time when all branches of the service are increasing advertising and recruiting costs yearly (GAO, 2003), they cannot afford to have the individuals on which they expend time, energy, and other resources leave the organization before they have the chance to provide value and repay even part of the initial cost incurred to attract them to the organization in the first place.

Background

In today's world of work, the necessity to attract, hire, and retain the most qualified personnel is an issue faced by all organizations. Sources of competition for the "best and brightest" lurk around every corner, threatening to steal, for its own gains, the talent painstakingly courted by another organization. In a time when all organizations strive to recruit, select, classify, and train new talent, few can afford to have their new hires leave the organization after a relatively short period of employment.

As mentioned, turnover is costly to an organization in terms of both time and money. Monetary costs result from advertising, recruiting, selection, and training, to name just a few. Individual productivity is another issue; employees trained to perform highly technical jobs cannot usually be replaced without the loss of considerable numbers of productive labor hours. Further, when qualified employees leave an organization, whether as the result of an organizational decision or a personal decision, the recruitment-training cycle, along with its inherent costs, is perpetuated as the replacement process begins in an attempt to fill the gap with another qualified individual.

However, the problem with attrition is that it is a double-edged sword. Although turnover is generally viewed as undesirable, not all turnover is bad for the organization, or for the individual; some attrition may, in fact, be desirable. For both the organization and the individual, it may be that the overall costs of a poor fit between the two can be minimized, if the problem can be identified early on. In this case, the organization increases the opportunity of finding and training an individual who meets the demands of the organization. For the individual, he or she has the opportunity of acquiring a position where personal talents may actually fit the demands of the organization, and in so doing maximize his or her own personal benefits as well as the return for the

[1] Data provided by Commander, Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC).

employer. To a certain extent, then, both the individual and the organization can benefit from a judicious program of attrition. However, a distinction must be made between "unwanted" attrition (attrition by those individuals who would be likely to succeed within a given organizational environment and add value to that organization) and "wanted" attrition (attrition by those individuals who would be likely to fail). The problem then becomes the determination of whether or not a given individual will flourish in a given organizational environment, such that those who will are retained and those who will not are released.

Attrition in the Military

The military is no exception to these issues; in fact, problems stemming from attrition are usually even more serious and extensive in military organizations than they are in the private sector. For the military, attrition is a problem not only for the reasons discussed above, but also in terms of readiness if force strength is not maintained at optimal levels.

In its quest to find the most qualified candidates for the job, and then to keep these people once they have been recruited and trained, the military must also face issues that its civilian counterparts do not. For instance, separation from family for extended periods of time and the prospect of injury or actually giving their lives on the job may affect military personnel in ways that civilian employers and employees cannot understand. These factors heighten the necessity for military organizations to closely monitor their levels of attrition and intervene when necessary to alleviate situations that could negatively impact their personnel and increase attrition rates.

From just a financial standpoint, recruit attrition in the military represents a substantial cost to the U.S. taxpayer. In 1996, DOD estimated the cost of attrition of a single recruit from initial training to be approximately $4,700 (GAO, 1998a). This dollar value was based on Navy data and included costs incurred from transporting the recruit to training, pay and provisions (food, housing, medical care, etc.) provided during training, and transporting the separated recruit home, as well as costs associated with the recruiting process that occurred before the recruit ever reached training. In fiscal year 1998, these recruiting costs were estimated at $6,700 per recruit (GAO, 1998b). All these costs can be avoided by reducing recruit attrition. Opportunities for such reductions exist as early as the initial stages of enlistment, during the time in which recruits are first becoming acclimated to the military through interactions with recruiters and with fellow recruits.

Recruiting in the Navy

When an individual considers joining the Navy, he or she meets with a recruiter for initial discussion of the opportunities available upon entering military service. After spending some time with the recruiter and undergoing an initial screening process, if the candidate is still interested in pursuing the Navy as a job option and appears qualified for service, he or she then reports to a Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). At the MEPS the potential recruit takes the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and receives an official medical screening to determine whether he or she is actually physically qualified for military service. If so qualified, and

based on the results of the ASVAB, the individual meets with a Navy classifier to evaluate options and select a rating or job. Once a rating is chosen, the individual signs a contract for military service.

At this point in the pipeline, an individual may follow one of two paths to initial recruit training: (a) he or she may report for training almost immediately (direct shippers), or (b) he or she may wait, for a number of reasons, to report for training by entering the Delayed Entry Program (DEP). Historically, CNRC has allowed approximately 10 percent of new recruits to enter training as direct shippers; the remaining 90 percent enter into and access into training through the DEP (Simpson, 1997). A recruit may remain in the DEP for up to one year while waiting to ship to the Recruit Training Command (RTC), or "boot camp," at Great Lakes, Illinois. During this time, the recruit is expected to attend meetings and maintain at least weekly contact with his or her recruiter. An individual may be exposed to a variety of experiences and information while in the DEP. These pre-training experiences are the focus of this project, since they may factor in the earliest occurrences of attrition from the Navy.

Problem

It has been argued that attrition from the DEP is better than attrition from initial training, when more time and money have been invested. However, a considerable amount of time and money is invested in the recruit when he or she enters the DEP. In the past 6 years, attrition from the DEP has ranged from a low of 16 percent in 1999 to a high of 23 percent in 2003. This represents a total of 71,928 losses from the DEP from 1999 to 2003,[2] each of which had time and money invested in them from the standpoint of recruiting, processing, and classification alone. Further, there is no guarantee that those who attrite from the DEP would have been boot camp or later attrites from the Navy. That is, there is no evidence to indicate that all DEP attrition is "wanted" attrition of recruits who would fail in training or, subsequently, in the Fleet. In fact, it may be argued that losses of qualified people in the DEP may ultimately contribute to attrition later on because the Navy must then find a replacement for those DEP losses and those replacements may or may not be the caliber of those they replace.

To date, we have very little knowledge concerning the reasons why a person chooses to leave the DEP. When an individual leaves the DEP prior to actual accession into the Navy via entry into RTC, he or she does not receive any formalized exit interview or questionnaire that could provide recruiters with reliable information about what factors might have contributed to the decision to leave. Although the reason for leaving is documented, in its current form it does not provide sufficient information to determine the precise reason or reasons for leaving; rather, a general category of separation is recorded for official purposes. This documentation does not always accurately or completely capture the true reason for attrition, especially when the individual has multiple reasons behind his or her decision or when the precise reason for leaving is not included in the official list. Furthermore, there is no follow-up for individuals who leave the DEP in an attempt to determine their thoughts and feelings after their decision to leave, what course they pursued subsequent to leaving, or whether they wanted to or did

[2] Data provided by Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC).

return to military service at a later date. Once the decision is made to leave the DEP, and the recruiter has made all reasonable attempts to dissuade the individual from separating in the DEP, the relationship is generally terminated, with no further effort given to or time spent on the departing recruit; the result is a complete loss in terms of time and dollars for the Navy.

The current project was undertaken to more fully understand the reasons behind DEP attrition, and the factors that might affect the propensity to attrite. Once the reasons for DEP attrition are better understood, programs can be developed to reduce DEP attrition. At the very least, such information could be useful in discriminating between those who would and would not be successful, such that steps could be taken to retain those who would be successful, to separate those who would not be successful, and to train those who have the potential to be successful but require some cultivation prior to entering the training pipeline. The transformation of potential attrites into successful and productive Sailors would significantly benefit the Navy, in terms of the readiness of the force as a whole.

Method

Procedures

This study included the development and implementation of two surveys: the DEP Attrite Survey and the Recruiter Survey. The questions for both surveys were developed by Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST), in conjunction with personnel at the Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC).

The DEP Attrite Survey included items designed to assess work and educational status, influences to join the Navy, reasons for leaving the program, experiences with classification and recruiting, experiences with the program itself, and experiences resulting from the decision to leave the program. The majority of the questions used categorical or 5-point Likert-type response scales. The survey items and response options can be viewed in their entirety in Appendix A.

The Recruiter Survey included eight open-ended response items designed to assess perceptions of the program in general, as well as perceptions of respondent experiences with specific attrites from the program. General questions included perceptions of reasons recruits leave the program, indicators that recruits are at risk for leaving, and possible improvements that could be made to the program. Attrite-specific questions included perceptions of specific reasons for leaving the program, possible interventions to prevent the decision to leave, and any effects that these attrites had on interactions with other recruits in the program. These survey items can be viewed in their entirety in Appendix B.

Additional data was collected for attrites and recruiters from the Personalized Recruiting for Immediate and Delayed Enlistment (PRIDE) database, including demographics and cancellation code (the official reason for termination of contract) recorded by personnel at CNRC.

Respondents

Interviews were conducted with DEP attrites (N = 600) who left the DEP from January to August of 2003. Interviews were conducted by personnel at a private-sector market research firm based in McLean, Virginia. Individuals contacted for participation in the Recruiter Survey (N = 50) had recruiting experience with attrites who agreed to participate in the DEP Attrite Survey. The firm reported a 95 percent response rate among individuals contacted to participate in these surveys. This high response rate is likely due to the proximity of the request for the interview to the time of attrition from the DEP; the average time was approximately two months.[3] The list of potential respondents was provided by CNRC for purposes of this research.

Because recruits are eligible to remain in the DEP for up to one year, these individuals could have entered the DEP as early as January of 2002. The average time spent in the DEP was approximately 6.5 months (201 days). All individuals contacted for participation separated from the Navy because they chose to "decline enlistment," not because the Navy chose to separate them. CNRC codes five reasons for voluntarily declining enlistment. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who declined their enlistment by reason as officially recorded by CNRC.

Table 1
Cancellation codes

	Frequency	Percent
Declined Enlistment—Lack of Motivation	434	72.3%
Declined Enlistment—Education Opportunities	78	13.0%
Declined Enlistment—Doesn't want to leave family/area	67	11.2%
Declined Enlistment—Employment Opportunities	13	2.2%
Declined Enlistment—Hardship	8	1.3%

Attrite Survey Results

Respondent Characteristics

The majority of the respondents to the DEP Attrite Survey were male (62%), White (73%), single (99%), and had no dependents (99%). The average age was 19.57 years. Tables 2 through 5 show the education credentials and employment status of respondents at the time of enrollment in the DEP and at the time of interview, after they left the DEP.

[3] Computed from recorded date of contract cancellation from CNRC and recorded date of interview from research firm. Verified by senior study director from research firm.

Table 2
Education credential at entry

	Frequency	Percent
High School Diploma	362	60.3%
Working toward High School Diploma	222	37.0%
GED	6	1.0%
No Credential	10	1.7%

Table 3
Education credential at interview

	Frequency	Percent
Diploma—Earned from public or private traditional day school	506	84.3%
GED equivalency diploma; college credit turning GED into high school diploma	29	4.8%
Diploma—Home school	2	0.3%
Diploma—Other (e.g., vocational or technical school, correspondence school)	21	3.5%
Certificate for high school attendance or completion	7	1.2%
Does not apply, did not finish high school	33	5.5%

Table 4
Employment status at entry

	Frequency	Percent
Full-time job	203	33.8%
Part-time job	257	42.8%
Full-time student	106	17.7%
Unemployed	30	5.0%

Note. Categories are mutually exclusive.

Table 5
Employment status at interview

	Frequency	Percent
Full-time job	272	45.3%
Part-time job	181	30.2%
Enrolled in college	246	41.0%
Enrolled in school and unemployed	38	6.3%
Unemployed	59	9.8%

Note. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

These results indicate that the majority of respondents (97%) had obtained or were working toward their high school diploma at the time of entry into the DEP. A substantial percentage (41%) reported being enrolled in college after attriting from the DEP. This may indicate a propensity for individuals to change their minds about joining the Navy after they receive their diploma and evaluate other educational opportunities.

Only a small percentage of respondents (5%) indicated that they were unemployed when they entered the DEP, which speaks against the notion that individuals join the military because they cannot find other employment. The finding that 10 percent of the respondents reported being unemployed at the time of interview indicates that although most individuals who left the DEP sought or maintained either alternative employment to the Navy or education opportunities or both, a small percentage of these individuals may have left the program without first securing other employment.

Influences to Join

Individual influences to join the Navy were assessed by providing respondents with a list of potential reasons to join the Navy and asking them to indicate the main reasons that influenced their decision to join. Table 6 lists the influences to join provided by the interviewer and the percent responding to each.

The largest response category for joining the Navy was the *Other* category (37%), which was used when respondents indicated that they had some reason other than the options presented by the interviewer. These responses were recorded as open-ended responses by the interviewer and then subjected to a thematic content analysis. Responses were coded and integrated into existing categories where possible; in cases where no appropriate category existed, new categories were formed. Newly created categories included education (including obtaining money for educational purposes), employment opportunities (general), and the Navy being the best option at the time. After the addition of these responses, both to the newly created categories and existing categories, the top influences to join overall changed somewhat. The results of the combined analyses showing the top five influences to join the Navy are presented in Table 7.

Table 6
Influences to join the Navy

	Percent
Travel and new experiences	17.7%
Pay	13.2%
Military tradition in family	6.2%
Work in specific occupation	6.0%
Get away from hometown	5.2%
Training for civilian employment	5.2%
Friends joined	4.2%
Parents encouraged to join	3.3%
Security and stability of Navy job	3.3%
Always wanted to be in the Navy	3.0%
Desire to serve country	3.0%
Family benefits	3.0%
Get away from family	2.8%
Challenging or interesting work	2.5%
Retirement pay and benefits	2.5%
Medical/dental benefits	2.3%
Time to figure out what wanted to do	2.3%
Personal growth	2.2%
Few or no civilian jobs	0.7%
Aggression against the US	0.2%
Wanted break from school	0.2%
Wanted to test self in demanding situation	0.2%
Other	37.2%

Note. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Table 7
Top influences to join (including Other responses)

	Percent
Travel and new experiences	18.7%
Employment opportunities	16.8%
Education	13.7%
Pay	13.5%
Best option at the time	8.3%

Note. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Recruiting Experiences

The majority of respondents reported satisfaction with the recruiting experience overall; over half (55%) reported the overall recruiting experience as *excellent* or *good*. However, a relatively large percentage (27%) reported a less than satisfactory experience. This finding is evident when examining the various aspects of recruiting evaluated. Figure 1 and Table 8 show percentages of responses to questions concerning the overall recruiting experience and eight individual aspects of the recruiting experience.

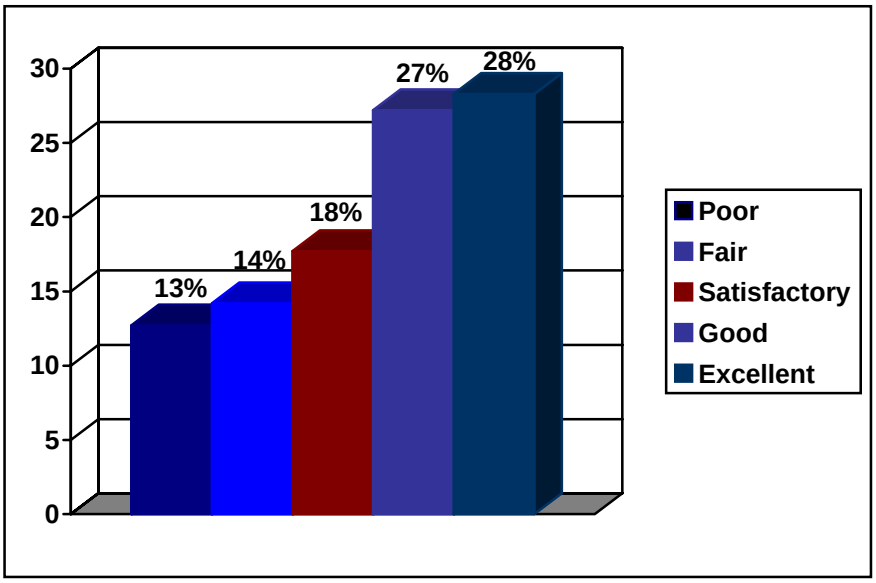

Figure 1. Overall recruiting experience.

Table 8
Recruiting experiences

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Recruiter was thorough in responses to my questions	72.7%	9.8%	17.5%
Recruiter provided me with correct information	67.8%	10.5%	21.5%
All my questions answered by recruiter	73.5%	7.5%	19.0%
Recruiter was honest with me	64.5%	12.8%	22.3%
Recruiter treated me with respect	86.7%	4.8%	8.3%
All my concerns answered by recruiter	70.5%	9.2%	20.2%
Recruiter made me feel comfortable enough to ask questions	84.9%	5.7%	9.5%
I would recommend recruiter to friend/family member	66.3%	8.2%	25.3%

Pre-entry Experiences

Prior to entering the DEP, individuals underwent medical screenings and classification into Navy jobs at various MEPS across the nation. Table 9 shows that although the majority was satisfied with these processes, there may be room for improvement in some areas. This is particularly evident when considering the availability of jobs at classification and the assignment of jobs at classification; over 25 percent of the respondents were dissatisfied with these aspects of the process.

Table 9
Pre-entry experiences

	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Treatment at MEPS	77.2%	11.8%	10.6%
Time spent with classifier	67.2%	12.0%	16.2%
Jobs available at classification	61.1%	9.7%	28.9%
Job assigned at classification	63.7%	10.0%	25.8%

DEP Experiences

Respondents were asked a series of questions to examine their experiences with the DEP. Items included amount of time spent in the program, number and length of program meetings, frequency of meetings, and contact with recruiter. Results indicate that a large percentage of respondents were in the program for longer than six months prior to attriting. During this time, 47 percent of respondents met with their recruiter once per month or less. The majority of respondents (61%) reported that the amount of contact that they had with their recruiter during their time in the program was *about right*; however, 26 percent reported that they had *too little* contact with their recruiter before leaving the DEP.

Approximately half of respondents reported attending three or fewer meetings during their time in the DEP. However, the majority reported that both the frequency (61%) and the length (67%) of meetings were *about right*. The length of these meetings ranged from less than 15 minutes to longer than 90 minutes.

Reasons for Leaving

Individual reasons for leaving the Navy were assessed by providing respondents with a list of potential reasons and asking them to indicate the main reasons that influenced their decision to leave. Table 10 lists the reasons provided by the interviewer for leaving the Navy and the responses to each.

Again, the largest response category for this item was the *Other* category (57%). When respondents indicated that some reason other than the options presented by the interviewer was an important influence in their decision to leave, they were asked to specify the reason. These responses were recorded by the interviewer and subjected to a thematic content analysis. Responses were coded and integrated into existing categories where possible; in cases where no appropriate category existed, new categories were formed. Newly created categories included change of mind (including losing interest, being unsure of what he or she wanted to do, and simply having a change of mind or heart), physical and/or mental health issues, and recruiter influence in the decision. Some categories were merged under more general topics to reflect a larger view of the reason; these categories included education (including getting a scholarship or other financing and deciding to go to school), employment opportunities (including thinking they could find or actually finding a better civilian job or having other opportunities arise), and family issues (including having too many family problems to leave, family influencing not to join, and family being concerned for safety). After the addition of these responses, both to the newly created categories and existing categories, the top reasons for leaving overall changed somewhat. The results of the combined analyses showing the top reasons for leaving the Navy are shown in Table 11.

Table 10
Reasons for leaving

	Percent
Decided to go to school	14.5%
Too many family problems to leave now	7.0%
Didn't get Navy job wanted	4.3%
Got college scholarship or financing	4.3%
Found better civilian job	4.2%
Concerned about being away from home	2.8%
Got married	2.7%
Family influenced not to join	2.3%
Didn't get enlistment package wanted	2.2%
Thought could find better civilian job	1.8%
Girlfriend/boyfriend influenced not to join	1.0%
Got pregnant	1.0%
Family concerned for my safety	0.8%
Didn't graduate from high school	0.7%
Concerned about how I would be treated in boot camp	0.3%
Concerned about getting through basic training	0.2%
Current legal problems	0.2%
Past legal problems unknown to recruiter	0.2%
Couldn't drink in boot camp	0.0%
Couldn't smoke in boot camp	0.0%
Other	57.2%

Note. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Table 11
Top reasons for leaving (including *Other* responses)

	Percent
Education	22.8%
Changed mind	20.5%
Family	13.5%
Employment opportunities	8.3%
Physical/mental health	7.3%
Didn't get Navy job wanted	6.5%
Recruiter influenced decision	5.3%

Note. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Decision to Leave

When evaluating the decision to leave, 17 percent of respondents indicated that the people most important to them were disappointed with their decision to leave the Navy. Of these, 35 percent were *slightly disappointed*, 35 percent were *disappointed*, and 30 percent were *very disappointed*. Additionally, nearly half of respondents (49%) indicated that they had experienced at least some degree of regret or doubt about the decision to leave. These feelings may be affected by the perception of the recruiting process prior to entering the program. Results indicate a significant, moderate relationship between this overall perception and the amount of regret or doubt experienced after leaving (r = .27), such that more positive perceptions of the recruiting experience are related to higher levels of regret or doubt about the decision to leave. Perceptions of individual aspects of the recruiting experience are also significantly related to the level of regret or doubt about the decision to leave (see Table 12), but less so than the overall perception.

Table 12
Regret or doubt about the decision to leave the DEP

	Amount of regret or doubt about decision to leave
Recruiter was thorough in responses to my questions	.13**
Recruiter provided me with correct information	.18**
All my questions answered by recruiter	.16**
Recruiter was honest with me	.19**
Recruiter treated me with respect	.17**
All my concerns answered by recruiter	.17**
Recruiter made me feel comfortable enough to ask questions	.07
I would recommend recruiter to friend/family member	.27**
Overall, my recruiting experience was...	.27**

**$p \leq .01$.

Recruiter Survey Results

Responses from the Recruiter Survey indicate that recruiters' top perceived reasons that individuals attrite from the DEP largely correspond to the reasons reported by the attrites themselves. Recruiters cited changing their mind (30%, versus 21% of attrites) and civilian employment opportunities (12%, versus 8% of attrites) as two of the largest reasons, but their most frequently cited response was that individuals remain in the DEP too long (32%). This reason was cited by a much smaller percentage of attrites (3%, reported in *Other* responses) but may be related to the reasons behind the change of mind and deciding to pursue educational and other civilian employment opportunities.

Recruiters were also able to identify several factors that indicated to them that an individual might be at risk of attriting from the program. The most frequently cited reasons included a lack of contact with the individual (66%) and a lack of attendance by the individual at program meetings (58%). These indicators make some intuitive sense in light of the previous finding that a sizeable percentage of the attrite population surveyed indicated that they did not have frequent meetings with their recruiter and that they attended relatively few program meetings.

When asked what could be done to improve the program in general, the most frequent response corresponded to the most frequently cited reason for attrition, namely that individuals should spend less time in the program prior to shipping to RTC (38%). However, 40 percent stated that they "don't know" what improvements could be made to the program or that they believe the program is doing well as it is.

Recruiters were asked what, if anything, they believed they could have done differently with specific individuals to affect the decision to leave and retain the individual. An overwhelming majority (84%) indicated that there was nothing they could have done differently that would have affected the decision. Additionally, 82 percent reported that their experience with the specific individual in question did not subsequently affect their interactions with other applicants, who may exhibit similar risk factors and eventually leave the program for the same reasons.

Conclusions

Although a substantial percentage of respondents indicated that employment opportunities (17%) and educational benefits (14%) were influences for them to join the Navy, they also indicated that these factors were reasons for them to leave (8% and 23%, respectively). Additionally, approximately half (49%) of the respondents reported that they felt some degree of regret or doubt about their decision to leave the DEP. This could be the result of a lack of information on either the front or the back end of the process, as individuals may misunderstand or not be fully aware of the opportunities available to them through the Navy or in the private sector. In the worst case scenario, it is possible that individuals initially join the Navy with the best of intentions, enter the DEP, remain there for up to one year, lose contact with their recruiter, fail to attend DEP meetings, and ultimately change their minds about pursuing the Navy as an option after seeing other opportunities in the private sector. It appears that many of these individuals subsequently regret this decision, perhaps as a result of the realization that they did not have adequate information to make a truly informed choice. Further research aimed at uncovering the rationale behind influences to join, influences to remain until shipping date, and reasons for leaving, for both DEP members and attrites, should be useful in determining the most important factors in their respective decisions to stay in or to leave the Navy.

Recruiters reported that indicators for individuals who are at risk of attriting from the program include lack of contact and lack of attendance at program meetings. One possible intervention in an attempt to reduce attrition would be for recruiters to take action on the signs that they perceive to be risk factors, such as increasing efforts to maintain contact with those in the DEP and encouraging attendance at program meetings. This, however, may not be easy for recruiters, since the schedules and tasks performed by recruiters are already strenuous, but such steps may prove effective in the retention of recruits who have the potential to have successful Navy careers. Approximately half of attrites surveyed reported that they attended relatively few meetings during their time in the DEP. According to the CNRC Recruiter DEP Training Aid (2002, p. 2):

> "A DEP Meeting is the primary method for training and motivating DEP Recruits. A well-trained and highly motivated DEP Recruit is less likely to attrite."

DEP meetings are designed to and have the potential to be of great benefit to individuals as they await their ship dates, and maximum utilization of this time through effective and efficient training, instruction, and "pre-Sailorization" could serve to reduce both "wanted" and "unwanted" attrition from the program. Therefore, to begin with it may be advantageous to evaluate the current structure and content of the meetings to determine what changes, if any, could be implemented to make the time spent in the DEP more productive and beneficial to individuals and to the Navy.

Along these same lines, recruiters suggest that shortening the time that individuals spend in the DEP might improve the program and reduce attrition. If discriminations can be made early in the process to identify individuals who come into the DEP possessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be successful in training, then it may be advantageous to ship these individuals as soon as possible, since being in the DEP may not prepare them better than they already were coming into the program. These may also be the individuals who have the best and broadest range of alternative options in the private sector, such that they may tire of waiting to ship to training and choose another of these other options, simply because it was more immediately available to them. Alternately, those individuals who have the potential to be successful but might benefit from some cultivation prior to entering the training pipeline could remain in the DEP for a slightly longer amount of time, reap the benefits of "pre-training" and instruction provided through DEP involvement, and then ship to training when they have reached appropriate levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for success.

Future Research

In order to address some of the issues raised here, future research directions may include an evaluation of the outcomes that DEP is designed to produce, to determine individuals' needs from the DEP and whether those needs are being met under the current procedures and what could be done to improve the program as a whole. This research should include interviews with recruits currently in training, recruits who recently exited from training, individuals currently enrolled in the DEP, recent DEP attrites, and current DEP managers. Based on the findings of such research, changes could be implemented in an attempt to optimize the time spent in the DEP, reduce unwanted attrition, and better prepare recruits for successful Navy careers.

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Appendix A:
DEP Attrite Survey

Final

Intro

Hello, I'm _____ calling on behalf of the Navy Personnel Research Studies and Technologies Laboratory. May I please speak with _____? We are conducting a survey concerning the DEP contract completion and attrition. The information will be used to analyze how the DEP program is administered and possibly develop changes that will increase successful completion of DEP contracts. Participation in this survey is voluntary and your individual responses will be kept confidential.

1. In the 6 months before entering the DEP, did you hold a part- or full-time job? (DO NOT READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE) (IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT ANSWER A OR B, THEN ASK THEM IF THEY WERE FULL TIME OR UNEMPLOYED)

a) Yes, a full-time job
b) Yes, a part-time job
c) Full-time student
d) Unemployed
e) Don't know

2. Since dropping out of the DEP how has your employment status changed? Are you (READ LIST. MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

a) Working full time
b) Working part time
c) Enrolled in a junior college/college
d) Enrolled in school and unemployed
e) Unemployed
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

3. If you graduated from high school, what credential(s) did you earn when you finished high school? (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Diploma – earned from a public or private traditional day school
b) Diploma – earned from an adult (continuation) school
c) Diploma – issued by parents or tutors for home schooling
d) Diploma – issued by an association, school, or state for home schooling
e) Diploma – issued by a vocational or technical school
f) Diploma – issued by a correspondence school
g) GED equivalency diploma
h) College credit turning GED into high school diploma
i) Certificate for high school attendance or completion
j) Does not apply, did not finish high school
k) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

4. What were the main reasons that influenced your decision to join the Navy? (DO NOT READ LIST. MULTIPLE RESPONSE)

a) Get away from family or personal situation
b) Get away from hometown
c) Time to figure out what I want to do
d) Wanted a break from school
e) Wanted to test myself in a demanding situation
f) Challenging or interesting work
g) Travel and new experiences
h) Training in skills useful for civilian employment
i) Personal growth
j) Always wanted to be in the Navy
k) Military tradition in my family
l) Parents encouraged me to join
m) My friend(s) joined the Navy
n) Few or no civilian jobs I wanted were available
o) Pay
p) Medical/Dental benefits
q) Family benefits
r) Retirement pay and benefits
s) Security and stability of a Navy job
t) Opportunity to work in a specific occupation of interest
u) Desire to serve my country
v) Aggression against the United States
w) Other (Specify_____)

5. What were your reasons for leaving the DEP Program? (DO NOT READ LIST. MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

a) Decided to go to school.
b) Thought I could find a better civilian job.
c) Found a better civilian job.
d) Didn't get the Navy job I wanted.
e) Concerned about being away from home.
f) Didn't get the enlistment package I wanted.
g) Got a college scholarship or financing.
h) Family influenced me not to join.
i) Family was concerned for my safety.
j) Girlfriend/boyfriend influenced me not to join.
k) Concerned about getting through basic training.
l) Concerned about how I would be treated in boot camp.
m) Got married.
n) Didn't graduate from high school.
o) Current legal problems.

p) Past legal problems unknown to recruiter.
q) Couldn't smoke in boot camp.
r) Couldn't drink alcohol in boot camp.
s) Got pregnant.
t) Too many family problems to leave now.
u) Other (Specify _____)

6. Were the people most important to you disappointed with your decision to drop out of the DEP program? (SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Yes
b) No (SKIP TO Q8)
c) Don't know (SKIP TO Q8)

7. How disappointed were they with your decision? (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Slightly disappointed
b) Disappointed
c) Very disappointed
d) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

8. How satisfied were you with the treatment you received at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS)? Would you say you were (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Very satisfied
b) Satisfied
c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
d) Dissatisfied
e) Very dissatisfied
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

9. How satisfied were you with the amount of time you spent with your classifier? Would you say you were (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Very satisfied
b) Satisfied
c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
d) Dissatisfied
e) Very dissatisfied
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

10. To what extent was the importance of the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) test in qualifying you for Navy jobs explained to you? (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) To a very great extent.
b) To a great extent.
c) To some extent.
d) To a little extent.
e) To a very little extent.

11. How satisfied were you with the number of different job available to you at classification? (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Very satisfied
b) Satisfied
c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
d) Dissatisfied
e) Very dissatisfied

12. How satisfied were you with the job you were assigned at classification?

a) Very satisfied
b) Satisfied
c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
d) Dissatisfied
e) Very dissatisfied

13. How long were you in the DEP? (DO NOT READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) 0-1 month
b) 2-3 months
c) 4-6 months
d) 7-9 months
e) 10 or more months
f) Don't know

14. On average, how many times did you meet with your recruiter while in DEP? Would you say (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Less than once per month
b) Once a month
c) Twice a month
d) Three times a month
e) Four or more times a month
f) Not applicable, you were only in DEP a few days (DO NOT READ) (SKIP TO Q20)
g) Don't know (DO NOT READ) (SKIP TO Q20)

15. Approximately how many DEP meetings did you attend? (DO NOT READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) 0 (SKIP TO Q19)
b) 1-3
c) 4-6
d) 7-9
e) 10 or more
f) Don't know (SKIP TO Q19)

16. On average, how long were your DEP meetings? Would you say (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Less than 15 minutes
b) 15 to 30 minutes
c) More than 30 minutes but less than 60
d) 60 to 90 minutes
e) More than 90 minutes
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

17. Was the length of DEP meetings (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Too long
b) About right
c) Too short
d) Not applicable, you did not attend any DEP meetings (DO NOT READ)
e) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

18. Was the frequency (number) of DEP meetings (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Too few
b) About right
c) Too many
d) Not applicable, you did not attend any DEP meetings (DO NOT READ)
e) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

19. Was the amount of contact with your recruiter before leaving DEP (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Too little
b) About right
c) Too long
d) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

20. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements. (REPEAT THE SCALE FOR THE FIRST THREE STATEMENTS AND THEN REPEAT AS NECESSARY) (RANDOMIZE ITEMS)

My recruiter was thorough in his/her responses to my questions
My recruiter provided me with correct information
All my questions were answered by my recruiter
My recruiter was honest with me
My recruiter treated me with respect
All my concerns were answered by my recruiter
My recruiter made me feel comfortable enough to ask questions
I would recommend the Navy to a friend/Family member
I would recommend my recruiter to a friend/family member

21. Overall would you say your recruiting experience was (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) Excellent
b) Good
c) Satisfactory
d) Fair
e) Poor
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

22. To what extent have you experienced any regrets or doubts about your decision to leave the DEP program? Would you say (READ LIST. SINGLE RESPONSE)

a) To a very great extent
b) To a great extent
c) To some extent
d) To a little extent
e) To a very little extent
f) Don't know (DO NOT READ)

23. Next, I will be reading a series of statements. Please tell me whatever these statements are always true for you, usually true for you, mostly true, seldom true, or never true for you. (REPEAT THE SCALE FOR THE FIRST THREE STATEMENTS AND THEN REPEAT AS NECESSARY) (RANDOMIZE ITEMS)

I try to do jobs carefully, so they won't have to be done again
I strive for excellence in everything I do
I pay close attention to details when I am working
I am very resourceful in getting a job done
I try to finish all the tasks assigned to me
I work hard to accomplish my goals
I try to get the job done
Once I start a project, I almost always finish it

I have a clear set of goals
I am tolerant of other people
I take a personal interest in the people I work with
I like most people I meet
I try to help people who are less fortunate than me
I try to be considerate of others
I keep my belongings neat and clean
I like to keep a neat appearance
I try to stay out of trouble
I try to set a good example
I like to play sports
I try to follow my conscience
I try to do what I think is right
I consider the consequences before I take action
When I make a commitment, I can be counted on to follow through
When I'm under a lot of stress, sometimes I feel like I'm going to pieces
When things are falling apart, I still make good decisions
When I have a problem, I stop and think about it before taking the next step
I usually keep a cool head in emergencies
I enjoy being part of a team
I get along well with others
A team is more important than the individual on it
I have often been a leader of groups I have belonged to
I encourage others to do their best

Thank you very much for your opinion and for your time.

Appendix B:
Recruiter Survey

RECRUITERS SURVEY

INTRO

Hello, I'm _____ calling on behalf of the Navy Personnel Research Studies and Technologies Laboratory as part of a customer service study. May I please speak with _____?
We're doing a survey to help us evaluate the DEP Program that could possibly result in policy changes to improve the administration of the DEP.

(IF NECESSARY: Your participation is strictly voluntary and responses will be held in strict confidence by NPRST and will not be revealed to any other Navy entity)

First, let's focus on the reasons people drop from the DEP program.

1. In general, do you have a good sense of why people drop from the DEP? (IF RESPONDENT SAYS 'YES' ASK RESPONDENT TO ELABORATE)

2. What information, or signals, do you look for to determine if a person is at risk of dropping from the DEP?

3. What improvements could be made to the DEP to make it better?

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about _____ (INSERT NAME OF ATTRITE).

4. Why do you think this person dropped from DEP?

5. What were your feelings about the probability of this applicant completing his/her DEP commitment?

6. What characteristics did this application possess or exhibit that made you feel this way?

7. Do you believe that there is nothing you could have done differently that would have changed the applicant's decision to not enlist?

8. Has this applicant's decision to drop from the DEP changed the way you interact with other applicants in any way?

That's all the questions that I had. Thank you very much for your opinion and for your time.

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