

Evolution Of The Marine Corps Officer Promotion System: A re-evaluation of the current
Marine Corps Officer Promotion System

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Subject Area Manpower

**EVOLUTION OF THE MARINE CORPS
OFFICER PROMOTION SYSTEM**
A re-evaluation of the current Marine Corps
Officer Promotion System

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Preface

After gaining four years of experience as an Action Officer with the Officer Promotion Section within manpower at HQMC, I felt there was a higher purpose for my tour of duty. This purpose became solidified once I began attending Command and Staff College and found that a review of the Officer Promotion System was one of the top three interests on the Commandant's FY05 Studies System.

Having the insight, the constant interaction with boardmembers, and a long list of points of contact within DoD, I felt compelled to review our current officer promotion system and determine if there was a better way to alleviate skill shortages. After countless hours of research and multiple interviews, the result uncovered that the best remedy was to model the restricted and enlisted promotion boards.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance from my military brothers of the other services in conference group 5, as well as, the servicemembers from their respective promotion branches. In addition, I would like to thank Major Joe Newcomb, Officer Promotion Planner, HQMC, for his assistance and for providing an understanding of statistical information. Finally, this paper would not be possible without the help from Mrs. Gracie Vansteenbergen, Officer Promotion Specialist, HQMC. Her wealth of knowledge and dedication in assistance was greatly appreciated.

Executive Summary

Title: Evolution of the Marine Corps officer promotion system.

Author: Major Michael S. Holt, United States Marine Corps Reserve

Thesis: Skill shortages are inherent to the current officer promotion system, which selects unrestricted officers regardless of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). A system that would select either by functional areas or by MOS would be more successful in providing the best well-balanced force, while still maintaining Marine Corps ethos.

Discussion: In an attempt to alleviate skill shortages, manpower planners have cycled through various force-structuring tools over the years to provide a “quick-fix” to skills that have become critically short, while others exceeded their limits. Yet, these tools have not been very successful in sustaining a well-balanced force. In addition, skill guidance became part of the precept as another attempt that fell short of remedy.

The biggest concern in changing the current system is loss of Marine ethos and the production of a “techno-geek” Marine Corps. This belief is simply not accurate. The Marine Corps is unlike any other service, in that all training, exercises, and formal schooling is designed to instill the Marine ethos and the core values of being a Marine. The restricted and enlisted Marines, selected by MOS specific boards, do not identify themselves through competitive categories, but being a rifleman first.

Conclusion: Skill shortages and a perceived career path will exist as long as there are promotion boards selecting officers from each grade, regardless of their MOS. Selection by MOS or by functional areas are the best options to alleviate critical skill shortages.

EVOLUTION OF THE MARINE CORPS OFFICER PROMOTION SYSTEM

We must think and act anew. This is what transformation is ultimately about -- new values, new attitudes, and new beliefs and how those are expressed in the behavior of people and institutions. While we have made very significant progress, there are clear indications that these are only the 'first steps.' Much more must be done, and the pace is not ours to set. The war in Iraq, the larger global war on terrorism and globalization are compelling not only the pace and the intensity of transformation, but also its very character.

-Arthur K. Cebrowski, Dir, Force Transformation

I. Introduction

Entering into the twenty-first century fighting a different style of warfare against an unknown foe and trying to stay abreast of ever-changing technology, the United States Marine Corps manpower system has the responsibility to provide commanders a well-balanced force of various skills that can adapt to these changes and be successful. Historically, manpower planners have cycled through various force-structuring tools over the years to provide a “quick-fix” to skills that have become critically short, while others exceeded their limits. Yet, these tools have not been very successful in sustaining a well-balanced force. Re-evaluating the current officer promotion system of selecting unrestricted officers, regardless of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), to a system that would either select by the competitive categories of functional areas or MOS would be more successful in providing the optimal well-balanced force, while still maintaining Marine Corps ethos.¹

This paper will discuss possible courses of action within the officer promotion selection system to resolve these manpower issues of critically short MOSs of the unrestricted field grade officer corps.² Specifically, this paper will provide a historical review of the Marine Corps officer promotion system, the process of the current officer promotion system, and a better understanding of how skill shortages develop and protract. It will also provide some

¹ Every Marine is first a rifleman.

² The field grade officers consist of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel (lieutenant commander, commander, and captain for the Navy).

background on force-structuring tools and address why they are inadequate in solving skill shortages. Following an analysis of the Marine Corps restricted officer boards, enlisted boards and the officer promotion systems of the sister services, recommendations will be made and discussed in order based on importance determined by the author.

When comparing and contrasting the other promotion systems of the Marine Corps and sister services, the reader should keep in mind that the officer corps of the Marine Corps is comparatively smaller and should be easier to manage. As the best practices from the aforementioned promotion systems are uncovered throughout this paper, the reader should discover that there are better options than the current system and the change, considering the size of the officer corps, will not be that difficult to implement.

II. Marine Corps Officer Promotion History

Prior to 1930, Marine Corps promotions varied from promotion by seniority, which created a stagnation of senior officers causing infrequent vacancies, to the creation of examination boards of senior officers to either promote or retire each rank below the rank of Commandant. Prior to World War I, the Marine Corps also experienced periodic brevet promotions to newly created ranks and the abolishment of these new ranks, depending on U.S. involvement in war at the time.³ The early 1900's also brought about formal education for the officer corps, yet there was still nothing in place to provide a structured promotion flow. This became alleviated by supplemental congressional acts in the 1930's, as noted below.

The 1930's brought about regulation of the distribution, promotion, retirement, and discharge of commissioned officers; it also set the standards throughout the Department of the

³ Nalty B.C., Strobbridge T.R., Turnbladh E.T., Gill R.P., *Marine Corps Historical Reference Pamphlet: United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades 1775-1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970), 2-6.

Navy (DON) on selection and board procedures. In a 1934 lobbying effort in support of House Resolution Bill 6803, Representative Clark W. Thompson of Texas stated:

Under the present laws the average rate of promotion is so slow that a junior officer must spend most of his[her] service in the lower grades, and can reach the higher grades only a short time before retirement for age. Last year there were so few promotions that, in future years at the same rate, it would require 55 years to pass through the grade of captain, and 25 years to pass through the grade of major. This bill will correct the present stagnation of promotion and over-age of commissioned officers in the Marine Corps, and will result in average service in each grade of about seven years, which is what it should be.⁴

Though the bill still provided promotion to major by seniority, the grades above major were changed to promotion by selection and also provided the retirement of non-selected colonels after 35 years of active service vice 56 years of age.

After the initial promotion flow was enacted, the Act of 23 June 1938, commonly known as “The Selection Law,” fine tuned promotions, set end strengths, and provided guidelines for board conduct within both the Navy and Marine Corps. The act stated that the Secretary of the Navy must provide the board with the number of vacancies to be filled, the names of the eligible officers placed in the promotion zone, the records of those officers, and the content required in the board report. It also required that boards consist of at least nine members senior to the grade being considered and that no officer was to be a member of two consecutive boards. These members would swear an oath of allegiance, select officers under the criteria of “best fitted” for promotion, recommend for continuation those eligible officers who are twice passed over, and the proceedings of the board would be considered secret.⁵

Aside from the addition of board conduct and membership requirements, the 1938 act also changed the previous acts stating that all promotions to captain and above must be upon recommendation of a selection board and that a minimum of four years of service in these grades is required to be eligible for consideration. These eligible officers would be permitted to

⁴ Anonymous, “Legislation: Personnel Situation,” Marine Corps Gazette (May 1934): 18.

⁵ The actual Act number was researched and could not be identified; Anonymous, “The Selection Law,” Marine Corps Gazette (March 1939): 34-35.

communicate to the board anything they deemed important in their record that needed particular attention.⁶ These significant changes provided the foundation for future enhancement and guided each service with consistent career opportunities.

Although legislation of the 1930's set the stage for force management, there are three important acts that still affect current practice of force management today. These acts are the Officer Personnel Act (OPA) of 1947, the Officer Grade Limitation Act (OGLA) of 1954, and the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) of 1980. OPA was the first military-wide personnel legislation that eventually merged with DOPMA. It was meant to alleviate the officer management problems that surfaced between the transitions of a small force during peacetime to a large wartime force. OPA began the movement toward uniformity in career management and mandated the use of an "up or out"⁷ policy with a goal of achieving youth and vigor in the officer corps in all the military services. It also brought about "officer distribution," which controlled the number of officers allowed in certain grades.⁸

OGLA refined officer distribution by creating grade tables, which provided the maximum grade authority for the entire officer corps. This provided more visual control, which helped speed up the promotion flow and stabilized the equality of promotion opportunity. To alleviate any drastic changes in promotion opportunity from year to year, OGLA also established a five-year plan that would forecast promotion opportunity over at least five years. The plan would compare anticipated vacancies in a particular grade with the number of officers coming into promotion zones during that period. In order for it to work, the promotion opportunity given to

⁶ The Selection Law, 35.

⁷ "Up or Out" meant that if you were not selected after a second opportunity, you must either be discharged or retired if eligible.

⁸ Reform of the Military Officer Career Management System, Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives 103rd Congress, September 27, 1994 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 1.

each year's promotion zone was to be kept similar by varying the number of officers in the zone and maintaining the same numerical relationship with vacancies.⁹

Although OPA and OGLA tried to control or reduce the amount of senior officers, no major changes in personnel legislation occurred until DOPMA. "The new code further consolidated rules and regulations governing the careers of military officers and also updated constraints on the number of officers in the grades of O-4 (major, or lieutenant commander for the Navy) to O-6 (colonel, or captain for the Navy) that each service might have as a percentage of its officer corps."¹⁰ DOPMA also provided new guidelines and procedures for promotion boards, such as the creation of promotion zones¹¹ and guidelines for board composition. More importantly, for the focus of this paper, it gave authority to the service Secretaries to establish competitive categories for promotion in each service, provided the categories were consistent with guidance from the Secretary of Defense.¹² Basically, DOPMA incorporated the main tenets of the previous Acts, still providing uniformity across the services, continuing the "up or out" policy structure with the additional goal of increasing promotions, refining the promotion board procedures, and, in addition, mandated an all regular career force through augmentation of reserve officers into regular status.

Additionally, DOPMA provided the necessary guidelines and changes to make Title 10, U.S. Code (Title 10 USC) more complete and overcome its previous shortcomings from earlier acts. The authority for convening promotion selection boards and effecting promotions for commissioned officers of today and tomorrow is Title 10 USC.

⁹ Anonymous, "Text of Promotion Act," *Army and Navy Journal* (August 2, 1947), 1280.

¹⁰ Thie H.J., Brown R.A., *Future Career Management Systems for U.S. Military Officers: A National Defense Research Institute Study* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 3.

¹¹ Promotion zones will be discussed later in this paper.

¹² H203-24 Report to accompany S. 1918. Defense Officer Personnel Management Act. Nov 13, 1980.

III. The Current Officer Promotion Selection Process

A. Planning

As stated in the Marine Corps Promotion Manual (MARCORPROMMAN), the purpose of the officer promotion process is to select the officers who have potential to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the next higher grade.¹³ The selection is not a reward for previous performance, but rather an incentive to excel based on previous performance. Before being able to select officers for promotion, a precept from the Secretary of the Navy must be obtained to authorize the convening of a board and a plan must be drawn to produce the precept. This plan is forecasted over a period of five years, which gives it the name Five-Year Officer Promotion Plan, and is approved by the Secretary.

The five-year plan, updated annually for the Secretary, is generated for all competitive categories that the Commandant of the Marine Corps has established. These categories, approved by the Secretary, consist of the following: unrestricted officers, restricted officers (includes limited duty officers and warrant/chief warrant officers), active reserve officers, and specialist officers. Unrestricted officers compete among all other unrestricted officers of the same grade for promotions to captain through major general, regardless of military occupational specialty (MOS).¹⁴ Within these categories, officers are considered for promotion on either the active-duty list (ADL) or the reserve active-status list (RASL), where applicable.¹⁵ To produce the five-year plan some planning factors must be taken into consideration, and they are as follows:

- a. The number of positions needed to meet the needs of the Marine Corps.

¹³ Marine Corps Promotion Manual, Volume 1, Officer Promotions. MCO P1400.31B (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2000).

¹⁴ LDOs, like CWOs, compete within their MOS among other LDOs of the same grade for promotions to major and lieutenant colonel.

¹⁵ MCO P1400.31B, 1-4 to 1-6.

b. The estimated number of officers needed to fill vacancies during the period in which it is anticipated that the officers selected for promotion will be promoted and the number of officers authorized by the Secretary of the Navy to serve in the grade and competitive category under consideration.

c. Based on such determination the Secretary of the Navy shall determine the authorized number to be selected among officers, which the selection board may recommend for promotion.

d. The impact of zone size and selection opportunity on time in service promotion flow points to the next higher grade.¹⁶

These factors help the Secretary, per Title 10 USC, to determine the number of officers a board may promote over a five-year period and to provide equity and balance among year-groups.

The plan serves as a planning tool for the development of each selection board and contains four main parts; selection opportunities, zone sizes, numbers authorized to select, and any skill guidance for each grade and competitive category. The selection opportunity is a percentage and is derived from the numbers of “authorized to select” divided by the number of “in-zone” (promotion zone) officers. At no time is the board permitted to exceed the “authorized to select” number identified in the precept. The total number authorized to select may be derived from the population in any of the three zones, the above-zone (AZ), the in-zone (IZ), and the below-zone (BZ).¹⁷ Not more than 10 percent of the “authorized to select” can be selected from the below-zone. Selections from the above and/or below-zones will count against the in-zone’s total authorized to select number.¹⁸

One important item for this paper that the plan provides is the skill guidance for each grade or competitive category. Section 615 of Title 10 USC states that the Secretary shall furnish each board information concerning the need for officers having particular skills. This skill guidance is

¹⁶ MCO P1400.31B, 1-5.

¹⁷ The above-zone officers are those officers that have failed of selection previously from the in-zone, the in-zone refers to those officers who have not previously failed and who are the primary population for consideration, and the below-zone officers are eligible for consideration and will not incur a failure of selection if not selected.

¹⁸ GS-11 Gracie VanSteenbergen, Officer Promotion Specialist, HQMC. Interview by author 6 January 2005, Quantico, VA.

not only listed in the plan, but the precept as well and depicts those MOSs that are critically short. These critical shortages are typically reflected for the O-4 through O-6 active-duty unrestricted boards. For each of these grades, an MOS that is 85 percent or less of its requirement is considered a critical skill shortage.¹⁹ Although skill guidance is present in these documents, the guidance is not always helpful as perceived; this will be discussed later in this paper.

B. Selection Board Direction

Aside from presenting the guidance set forth in the plan, the precept, as mentioned earlier, is a letter from the Secretary to the president of the board that provides authorization to convene a board, establishes the membership, and provides detailed instructions governing the proceedings of the board.²⁰ Overall, the precept presents the Secretary's guidance to select the "best and fully qualified," which is derived from Title 10 USC.²¹ A copy of the precept is also delivered to each boardmember, contained in his or her notification package.

Prior to the member notification, the establishment of board membership is developed through the policies provided by Secretary of the Navy Instruction (SecNavInst) 1401.3. SecNavInst 1401.3 requires that the board membership, at a minimum, hold a grade higher than the grade of the officers under consideration and reflect the eligible population, meaning that if there are competitive categories, women and racial or ethnic minorities, then the board shall reflect the same.²²

Once the board is in session, the president and members of the board are briefed again of the guidance in the precept and other guidance deemed appropriate by the Secretary. Along with

¹⁹ Vansteenbergen.

²⁰ MCO P1400.31B, 2-4.

²¹ Title 10, United States Code, Armed Forces (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2001), 203-204.

²² Selection Board Membership, SECNAVINST 1401.3 (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1989), 3-4.

the recommendation that the board shall give equal weight to quality of performance in joint duty assignments and acquisition specialists as is given to quality of performance in primary specialties, including operational and command assignments, the board also is reminded to give due consideration to identified skill shortages.²³ Specifically the guidance says:

Within this board’s charter to select those officers who are “best and fully qualified,” the board shall give due consideration to the needs of the Marine Corps for officers with particular skills. At this time the needs of the Marine Corps reflect a critical shortage (below 85%) of officers in the grade of lieutenant colonel in the following skill areas:

<u>MOS</u>	<u>SKILL</u>	<u>NUMBER SHORT</u>	<u>% SHORT</u>
0180	Adjutant	14	34%
02XX	Intelligence	49	46%
1302	Engineer	23	31%
3404	Financial Management	09	23%
4302	Public Affairs	11	58%
7543	Pilot VMAQ EA-6B	13	62%
7557	KC-130 Aircraft Commander	25	58%

Because the Marine Corps promotes unrestricted officers within a single competitive category and not military occupational specialty, there is no quota established for the selection of officers in these military occupational specialties; however, the board will make every effort to consider the needs of the Marine Corps for officers with these particular skills when determining those officers who are best and fully qualified for promotion.²⁴

The above language also gives the reader an idea of how large the percentages can be for any given grade during any fiscal year. These shortages can derive from a variety of factors such as resignation and forced retirement, due to two non-selections for promotion, and as patients, prisoners, transients, and trainees (P2T2).

Additional guidance from the precept that is briefed to the board contains equal opportunity guidance, professional military education guidance, consideration of former limited duty officers (LDO), innovation and efficiency guidance, and, most importantly, career patterns. The latter two state that board members should consider that eligible officers might reflect a variety of

²³ Department of the Navy, precept to Major General Huck, subject: “Precept Convening a Selection Board to Recommend Officers of the Marine Corps on the Active-Duty List for Promotion to the Grade of Lieutenant Colonel,” 26 August 2003; Title 10, 203 and 736.

²⁴ Department of the Navy, precept to Major General Huck. (Numbers and percentages listed here are only an example of a particular rank in FY 2004).

backgrounds or possess a broad spectrum of experiences. Specifically for career patterns, it states that there is not an expected or preferred career pattern and that assignments are made in the best interests of the Marine Corps, rarely with influence from the officer. Further, it states that in determining qualification for promotion of any officer who has been affected by such practices, performance in duty should be given same weight as that given to duty equally performed by those who were not affected by such practices.²⁵ The perception of a career path will be further discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

C. Selection Board Execution

Once boardmembers have been briefed about their duties, provided guidelines, and affirmed their oath, the first step of the process is a thorough preparation of each eligible officer's record. These records have been randomly distributed and organized in each member's desk by lineal precedence prior to the board members arrival. Lineal precedence is a number assigned to each officer to track seniority and is first established from "The Basic School." The president of the board is assigned half the amount of cases that a single member is assigned.

To provide the board members a solid sense of the competitiveness of the in-zone population, board members will first prepare the in-zone cases. Once completed, board members will review all above-zone cases, then below-zone cases. When preparing above-zone and below-zone cases, the member will determine if the officer's record is competitive or comparable to those officers in the in-zone population.²⁶

Once all cases have been prepared, the board members are ready to enter the "executive session" to brief all above-zone cases. (Executive session is the term used when entering the briefing or voting of cases.) In this "In-Out" session, where the above-zone cases are briefed and

²⁵ Department of the Navy, precept to Major General Huck.

²⁶ MCO P1400.31B, 3-7.

voted upon by lineal precedence, board members determine if an eligible officer's record is competitive enough to merit being a premier case. (A premier case is an above or below-zone officer whose case will be briefed and voted with the in-zone officers' cases.) Only one affirmative vote is required to become a premier case. This same procedure will be followed for the below-zone cases as well. Once the In-Out session has been completed, time is allotted to thoroughly prepare each case as necessary.²⁷

Upon completion of all case preparation, the final executive session begins. During this stage, each eligible officer receives a full brief in lineal order from the member assigned his or her case. Following, each board member will be provided an opportunity to comment as necessary. When all cases have been briefed, each member determines which officers they desire to vote for selection. The number of "yes" votes a board member can cast is based on the authorized to select number. Multiple iterations of voting occur until board members select to allocation.²⁸ During these iterations, the board president is afforded the opportunity to view statistical information on the special considerations that the Secretary deemed important. These considerations are usually joint, acquisition, and skill guidance.

D. The Unintended End State

1. Skill Shortages

Though the Secretary of the Navy's skill guidance is in both the plan and precept, and is briefed to the board before commencing, board results have shown that not every board adheres to the guidance for skill shortages as compared to the guidance for joint duty and acquisitions. This could be due to the fact that skill guidance does not have any requirements attached, like the requirements for joint duty and acquisitions. Both joint duty and acquisitions have to meet

²⁷ MCO P1400.31B, 3-7 and 3-8.

²⁸ MCO P1400.31B, 3-8.

certain comparison rates that are comparable to the board average selection rate.²⁹ These comparison rates are made part of the board report and forwarded to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).

As an example, Table (1) reflects the reported promotion selection rates for joint duty and acquisitions, as well as selected MOSs, for lieutenant colonels from fiscal year 2002 to 2006. For each fiscal year, the sub-column “Result” depicts each skill’s percentage of officers selected against its total eligible in-zone population of that particular skill. The sub-column “Board” is the board average that the skill is compared against; this percentage is the total number of officers selected compared against the total eligible population of the in-zone. The first two rows are the skills that require reporting to OSD and the last seven rows are examples of five critically short MOSs and two over MOSs for comparison, respectively.

Skill	MOS	FY02		FY03		FY04		FY05		FY06	
		Result	Board	Result	Board	Result	Board	Result	Board	Result	Board
Joint Duty	n/a	77.6	65.7	78.3	68.3	80.7	64.7	67.6	61.8	81.5	67.2
Acquisition	9658/9	70.0		80.0		75.0		84.6			
Intelligence	0202	44.4		75.0		47.1		77.8			
Comm Info Systems	0602	48.3		71.4		73.9		42.1			
Combat Engineer	1302	50.0		68.2		50.0		83.3			
Financial Management	3404	72.7		37.5		100		80.0			
Public Affairs	4302	0		50.0		75.0		0 ^a			
Infantry	0302	77.8		64.9		69.0		75.0			
Artillery	0802	77.4		58.5		61.5		50.0			

Table 1. Joint Duty and Acquisition selection rates compared to board average selection rates for lieutenant colonel.

Source: GS-11 Gracie VanSteenbergen, Officer Promotion Specialist, HQMC, 10 Feb 2005, Quantico, VA.

^aNo eligible in-zone population existed.

²⁹ By law, joint duty requires a promotion selection rate either comparable to the overall board average or at a rate not less than the rate for officers who are serving on or who have served on the staff of the Secretary at Headquarters of the Marine Corps; by law, acquisitions requires a promotion selection rate not less than the rate for all non-acquisition officers.

At a glance, the statistics above reflect why many officers believe that the promotion selection system is unequivocally fair and that the skill guidance in the precept is effective. Although the board results from many of the short MOSs (0202, 0602, 1302, 3404, 4302), minus a few fiscal year instances, are equal to or greater than the board average, those MOSs actually remained short. For each MOS, these percentages can present a fallacy that short MOSs are doing well and some over MOSs are not. A closer look into the statistics reveals the truth.

For instance, under the column FY03 in Table 1, the MOS 0202 at 75 percent seems to have better selection results than MOS 0802 at 58.5 percent. A closer look into the statistics uncovers that prior to convening the selection board, MOS 0202 was critically short 36 officers and the board only selected 12, with 20 above-zone eligibles not selected. Meanwhile, MOS 0802 is 60 officers over its end-strength prior to convening the board and selects 31 more officers upon completion.

A more equitable way to measure these shortages is to compare actual numbers of the requirements and results from promotion selection boards. The following tables reflect both “short” and “over” MOSs for field grade officers from fiscal years 2002 to 2006. As noted for each fiscal year column, the sub-column “Plan” depicts the number short that was presented to a promotion board as skill guidance and the sub-column “Board” depicts the actual number selected from a promotion board. The last three rows in Tables 2 and 3 depict MOSs that were over its assignable inventory during planning, yet were still receiving high selection numbers from promotion boards.

Skill	MOS	FY02		FY03		FY04		FY05		FY06	
		Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board
Adjutant	0180	28	8	37	14*	27	13	40	10	40	17 ^a
Intelligence	0202	100	30 ^a	102	37*	92	37*	82	32*	81	42 ^a
Logistics	0402	(50)	49	(50)	59	(38)	51	(8)	43	(7)	54
Comm Info Systems	0602	86	42	77	38	77	37 ^a	52	28 ^a	42	24
Ground Supply	3002	31	21	26	26*	28	24*	n/a	20	n/a	25
Financial Management	3404	24	12	25	12*	18	15 ^a	n/a	9	n/a	12
Aviation supply	6602	15	5*	21	5*	20	6*	14	6*	12	5
Air Command and Control	7202	n/a	28 ^a	n/a	25 ^a	42	11 ^a	35	11	40	19
MOS's not reported in the plan, but were above 100% of the assignable inventory.											
Infantry	0302	+69	92 ^a	+74	94	+78	74 ^a	+52	71	+58	83 ^a
Artillery	0802	+38	40 ^a	+47	32	+36	31 ^a	+33	27*	+37	25*
Tanks/Tracks	18xx	0	12*	+4	18	+4	10*	+7	12*	+9	8

Table 2. Critically short MOSs comparison to over MOSs for promotion to major.

Source: GS-11 Gracie Vansteenbergen, Officer Promotion specialist and Major Joseph Newcomb, Officer Promotion Planner, HQMC, 10 Feb 2005, Quantico, VA.

*No above-zone population existed to select.

^aAbove-zone officers were selected.

For the promotion boards to major (Table 2), in most cases, each short MOS not only had numerous remaining in-zone officers to select, but also had a few above-zone officers leftover to select, where either none were selected or one or two were selected. Understandably, there were some cases where no above-zone population existed and nearly all in-zone officers were selected that were fully qualified. This is evidenced within MOSs such as 0202 and 6602, where no above-zone existed within a group of consecutive fiscal years. This can be attributed to attrition, where officers exit the Marine Corps while they are still young in order to achieve enough time for a civilian retirement.

For the promotion boards to lieutenant colonel (Table 3) the opposite is revealed, meaning the above-zone was larger than the in-zone population. There were a few occasions where above-zone officers were selected or a large above-zone population existed but was not selected for promotion (there were only two cases where an above-zone population did not exist, MOS 7543 during FY02 and FY06). This can be attributed to majors that are retirement eligible, thus

receiving multiple above-zone considerations until 20 years of commissioned service. Yet, even though a large population existed for a particular short MOS, the combat arms MOSs still prevailed with high selection numbers.

Skill	MOS	FY02		FY03		FY04		FY05		FY06	
		Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board
Adjutant	0180	n/a	7 ^a	n/a	1	13	4 ^a	14	8 ^a	14	5 ^a
Intelligence	0202	20	9 ^a	36	12	38	10 ^a	49	16 ^a	48	10
Logistics	0402	7	18	(7)	22	(23)	33 ^a	(12)	25 ^a	(16)	25 ^a
Comm Info Systems	0602	33	17 ^a	24	21 ^a	17	18 ^a	n/a	8	25	26 ^a
Combat Engineer	1302	18	5	26	15	20	8 ^a	23	7 ^a	21	15 ^a
Financial Management	3404	13	9 ^a	18	3	22	8 ^a	9	4	13	6
Public Affairs	4302	10	0	12	3	13	4 ^a	11	1 ⁿ	10	2
Aircraft Maintenance	6002	n/a	5	10	5	11	5 ^a	n/a	3	10	5
Pilot EA-6B	7543	9	2 [*]	6	1	6	1	13	4	12	1 [*]
KC-130 Commander	7557	23	3	16	1	19	3	25	7 ^a	24	11
MOS's not reported in the plan, but were above 100% of the assignable inventory.											
Infantry	0302	+43	58 ^a	+37	63 ^a	+51	63 ^a	+52	46 ^a	+42	50 ^a
Artillery	0802	+32	24	+35	34 ^a	+51	26 ^a	+60	10	+46	23 ^a
Tanks/Tracks	18xx	+13	8 ^a	+10	12	+10	10	+11	4	+9	8 ^a

Table 3. Critically short MOSs comparison to over MOSs for promotion to lieutenant colonel.
Source: GS-11 Gracie Vansteenbergen, Officer Promotion specialist and Major Joseph Newcomb, Officer Promotion Planner, HQMC, 10 Feb 2005, Quantico, VA.

*No above-zone population existed to select.

^aAbove-zone officers were selected.

ⁿNo eligible in-zone population existed.

The ongoing theme among both the lieutenant colonel's and major's promotion selection boards over the past five years is that even though the combat arms MOSs, particularly 0302 and 0802, were well above their assignable inventory, the promotion selection resulted in selecting an average nearly the same as its overage. This caused some critical MOSs to remain constantly short, while others either crept slowly higher or lower of their total shortage number. Although combat arms MOSs contribute largely to skill shortages and are used here as an example, there

are other MOSs, not shown because the numbers were minimal, that were over their inventory and were still selected by promotion boards.

Another problem noted from both Tables 3 and 4 that exists is having MOSs that are short, but are not precepted because they are above the 85 percent requirement to be considered a critically short MOS. For example, MOS 0402 has been consistently short for the past five years, but on average somehow manages to achieve or surpass its shortfall. There are other MOSs not shown that have this same issue, but do not achieve a consistently equal or higher select number to overcome their shortfall.

Skill	MOS	FY02		FY03		FY04		FY05		FY06	
		Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board	Plan	Board
Financial Management	3404	CS	3 ^a	3	1	2	0	4	1	10	4
Public Affairs	4302	CS	1*	1	1	n/a	0	n/a	0*	2	1*
Judge Advocate	4402	CS	3	13	8 ^a	7	5	n/a	4	5	5 ^a
MOS's not reported in the plan, but were above 85% of the assignable inventory.											
Infantry	0302	unk	19	unk	25 ^a	unk	26 ^a	unk	18 ^a	unk	20
Logistics	0402	unk	8	unk	13 ^a	unk	8	unk	14	unk	12
Artillery	0802	unk	8	unk	9	unk	6	unk	8	unk	7
Tanks/Tracks	18xx	unk	6	unk	8	unk	4	unk	3	unk	3

Table 4. Critically short (CS) MOSs comparison to over MOSs for promotion to colonel.

Source: GS-11 Gracie VanSteenbergen, Officer Promotion Specialist, HQMC, 6 Jan 2005, Quantico, VA.

*No above-zone population existed to select.

^aAbove-zone officers were selected.

unk – the number is unknown.

Probably the hardest skill shortages to dissect are inherent with the rank of colonel (Table 4). Since colonels are assigned a new MOS designator upon promotion, a determination of over MOSs could not be provided. The only numbers that could be provided were the critical short MOS numbers from the plan and precepts from fiscal years 2003 to 2006; prior to FY03, only the MOSs were listed as critically short and the amount was not provided. Given the trends and the ratios between critical MOSs and over MOSs in the previous tables, one can deduce from Table 4 that the same trends exist. In some instances, a critically short MOS can be traced from

major through lieutenant colonel, up to the rank of colonel over a given period. A prime example is evidenced within the MOS 3404, which has remained critical throughout and, once reaching colonel, a small population exists to select from within.

With the current selection policies, there are no guarantees that a selection board will select critically short MOSs, when placed in competition against the “perceived typical career pattern” that coincides with combat arms MOSs. Overall, having a promotion selection system that places its warfighters and operations officers against its support and technical officers will always have critical skill shortages. Since there is no quota to fill skill shortages, this precepted skill guidance is set forth to try to meet the needs of the Marine Corps by unsuccessfully attempting to use the selection board as a “force structuring” tool for manning imbalances. Until the system is changed to select officers by other means, as will be discussed later, precepted skill guidance is here to stay.

2. Force-Structuring Tools

Force-structuring tools are the by-products of the officer promotion system and attrition, and are temporary solutions to attempt to fix a chronic problem. These tools have been used for the past two decades during the fluctuation of military buildup and cutbacks, dependent upon the economy and current events. Although the structure tools, sometimes called “shaping tools,” were well intentioned, some of them had negative consequences on MOS management or were just ineffective.³⁰ Of the various force structuring tools used, this section will discuss the primary: Lateral Movement, Career Broadening Tour, Additional Primary MOS, Forced Lateral Move, and Secondary MOS programs.

³⁰ MOS management means keeping officers at optimal strength within an MOS by ensuring a flow in the MOS from the grade of second lieutenant through lieutenant colonel.

In the early 1980's, relief from critical shortages within certain MOSs was attempted through the development of the "Lateral Movement Program" and the "Career Broadening Tour Program." Lateral movement was a voluntary move from an 'over' or 'balanced' MOS to a 'short' MOS; a new primary MOS would be assigned to the officer upon completion of training.³¹ Career Broadening was a voluntary tour for an officer to take time from his/her primary MOS and serve in a short MOS of choice; the end result would acquire an additional MOS for the officer. In order to apply to these programs, the officer had to be in an over or balanced MOS.³²

For both of these programs, the focus was to relieve skill shortages and have officers from combat related MOSs experience other fields or gain new technical skills. Unfortunately, the programs failed because resistance from the combat arms fields was overwhelming. The general consensus was to avoid these programs because of the fear that if an individual missed the "good" assignments, he or she would be left behind by their peers and that the non-traditional fields would hinder breaking into the leadership elite.³³ This brought about other creative tools such as the Additional Primary MOS (APMOS) program.

The APMOS program was created to provide captains and above an additional primary MOS in a field that was usually short of officers. This program was intended to provide a supply of officers to be available for not only MOSs that were currently short, but for MOSs predicted to be short in the future.³⁴ The APMOS program was not successful because timing conflicted

³¹ An "Over MOS" is any MOS with an onboard inventory greater than 105% of the total manpower requirement. A "Balanced MOS" is an MOS with an onboard inventory that is neither over nor short. A "Short MOS" is any MOS with an onboard inventory less than 105%, but greater than 85% of the total manpower requirement. A "Critical Short MOS" is any MOS with an onboard inventory less than 85% of the total manpower requirement.

³² Lateral Move and Career Broadening Tour Programs for Marine Officers, MCO 1210.8A, (Washington, DC: HQMC, 1982).

³³ Major Roger Jacobs, "Coping with Creeping Careerism," *Marine Corps Gazette* (January 1983): 42.

³⁴ Major Mark Noblit, *Issue Paper on the Officer Career Transition Program*, General Officer Symposium, 24 August 1994.

with assignments against B-billets (a tour of duty outside of ones MOS, such as recruiting). This program was soon replaced with the “Forced Lateral Move” program.

The Forced Lateral Move program, formally known as the “Career Transition” program, was a tool that tried to balance the structure by requiring reserve officers in over MOSs to identify three MOS choices upon application to the augmentation board. The result from the board, upon selection to augmentation, would designate those officers required to attend school for training in transition to a short MOS.³⁵ Though at the time it seemed like a great idea, the program was very unsuccessful. This program caused many officers to either not apply for augmentation or, after applying, would not accept augmentation upon the results of the board.

After more than a decade of experimenting with different programs, as stated in an Issue Paper for the General Officer Symposium, progress was unsuccessful in achieving the correct number of officers in each grade and MOS.³⁶ The high retention rates of ground combat arms during that time, just like today, had an adverse effect on the overall skill balance of the force structure. For many officers in over MOSs, such programs were seen as unfair and provided negative consequences towards promotion.

In hearing the concerned voices throughout the Corps, All Marine Message (ALMAR) 210-98 directed the Force Lateral Move program to be replaced by the “Supplementary MOS” (SMOS) program. This program, somewhat like the Force Lateral Move program, was voluntary and intended to allow combat arms officers to receive training and serve a tour in a short MOS. This would happen during the same time their peers were filling a B-billet assignment. Upon completion of a three-year tour, those SMOS officers would then return to their primary MOS

³⁵ Noblit.

³⁶ Noblit.

roughly at the same time as those officers returning from B-billets. The program was also intended to afford officers in short MOSs the opportunity to be considered for B-billets.³⁷

This program was not only to be career broadening, but career enhancing as well. Many of the officers in over MOSs, remembering or hearing of the effects of past structure tools, avoided the program. The outcome of the SMOS program was minimal, meaning that the majority of the officers that applied were from short MOSs. Since officers from short MOSs make up most applicants, its existence may cease.

In another attempt to reduce skill imbalances, the Forced Lateral Move program was brought back under the name “Directed Lateral Moves” during fiscal years 2003 and 2004. Concurrent with the augmentation board, this program directed reserve company grade applicants in over-strength MOSs to select three choices from the under-strength MOSs for a possible lateral move.³⁸ Therefore, augmentation for selected officers was “contingent upon their acceptance of a lateral move” into a short MOS.³⁹

Since neither the Directed Lateral Move or Voluntary Lateral Move programs proved to be effective, both were removed from the fiscal year 2005 Officer Retention Board.

One last force structure tool that was, and still is, believed to alleviate skill shortages was increasing the “end strength” of the Marine Corps table of organization. Once again, this is a quick fix to a long-term issue. Creating more billets and assessing more officers into the Corps will only amplify the numbers of the current shortages as long as the same promotion system is in place. End strength should only be thought of as the size of a required force and not a skill shortage remedy.

³⁷ All Marine Message (ALMAR) 210-98, End of Forced Lateral Moves, 27 May 1998.

³⁸ Augmentation is a process that considers reserve officers for retention on active duty.

³⁹ Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) 673/02, Fiscal Year 03 Officer Retention Board (ORB), 23 December 2002; MARADMIN 438/03, Fiscal Year 04 Officer Retention Board (ORB), 22 September 2003.

Overall, using force-structuring tools is an immediate fix without providing solutions for the long-term effects. No matter what tool is used, the current promotion system, with its perceived career path, will prevent the selection of officers in fulfilling the shortages in critical MOSs. Until the promotion system is changed, force structure tools will remain inadequate, officers in over MOSs will avoid these short MOS programs, and MOS proficiency and expertise in short MOSs will dwindle.

E. Restricted Officer Boards and Enlisted Boards

Although a well-balanced force requires Marines with specific skills, all Marines are first trained to be a rifleman. “A Marine is first a rifleman” has always been an important part of Marine Corps heritage. Some officers believe that selecting officers by their skill for promotion will cause the Marine ethos to fade away and produce a “techno-geek” Marine Corps. Others have added that the selection of officers will become more efficiency-based vice equity-based, meaning officers would be selected based on their skill, which provides an efficient means to meet the needs of the Marine Corps, and not to select by performance, which provides a fair and equitable system. If Marine ethos is perceived to dissipate by using skill, either alone or grouped into functional areas, as a competitive category for unrestricted promotion boards, does it not exist within restricted officers and enlisted Marines? How are unrestricted officers any different from restricted officers or enlisted Marines?

1. Restricted Officer

The restricted officer promotion selection boards, otherwise known as limited duty officer (LDO) or chief warrant officer (CWO) boards, have the same mechanics as the unrestricted boards and are guided by similar laws and regulations with some minor differences. The

restricted boards actually consist of multiple sub-boards, each being MOS specific and its selection opportunity dependent upon how many vacancies are within the MOS. Most of these sub-boards have a selection opportunity of 100 percent, which is quite higher than the five-year plan of 90 percent for LDO major and 70 percent for LDO lieutenant colonel.⁴⁰

For the few exceptional boards that are lower than 100 percent, there are certain factors that skew the selection opportunity. For instance, the statistics from the fiscal year 2005 major LDO selection board depict that MOS 6502 (aviation ordinance officer) did not select to allocation.⁴¹ Specifically, this board was authorized to select 3 officers from a population of 3 in-zone officers and 4 below-zone officers. The results of the board selected 1 in-zone officer and 1 below-zone officer, with a selection opportunity of 67 percent. Changes of this nature can result from not having an officer to select who is “best and fully qualified” or from an officer who decided to retire and communicated his or her intentions to the board.⁴²

Aside from a skewed selection opportunity, promotion flow points for each skill could vary when considering restricted boards as a model for unrestricted boards. For instance, if two lieutenant colonel-selects, one infantry officer and one intelligence officer, were both commissioned on the same date and numerous vacancies existed throughout the intelligence officer’s career, he could wear the rank by 15 years 9 months of commissioned service, while the infantry officer may have to wait another year.

Different flow points are not the only way that an officer can fall behind his peers; as seen with LDO boards, there are years when a board for a particular skill was not held because a vacancy did not exist. This could cause an officer with one pass-over to wait 2 to 3 years until a

⁴⁰ Vansteenbergen.

⁴¹ FY05 Major LDO Selection Board results, <https://lnweb1.manpower.usmc.mil/manpower/mi/mra_ofct.nsf/MMPR/Officer+Promotion+Home>, 10 January 2005.

⁴² Vansteenbergen.

second look for selection in the above-zone.⁴³ Such a disparity could either benefit an officer who is not performing well, by providing more time on active duty before a second pass-over, or provide a system that may be viewed as inequitable because of the flow points.

If the Marine Corps is willing to accept the various flow points that would develop for each MOS, it could maintain a well-balanced unrestricted officer force and still embrace the Marine ethos.

2. Enlisted Boards

Enlisted promotion selection boards are very similar to the restricted officer selection boards, in that they are very effective in selecting to allocation for each MOS to provide a well-balanced enlisted force. Each board, regardless of enlisted rank, provides a fair and equitable process, and seldom lacks a Marine to fill a vacancy. The process is very competitive, due to the high caliber of the eligible Marines, which may cause some “best and fully qualified” Marines to become non-selects.⁴⁴ The resulting selection opportunity from each enlisted board consistently reflects the planned selection opportunity provided in the five-year plan for each MOS.

For each enlisted MOS, the general consensus among board members is that Marine ethos is prominent and there is no standard career path for all MOSs.⁴⁵ Although some MOSs may not be provided the option to attend advanced schools or cross-train into other fields because of being stove-piped in their MOS, each Marine understands that he or she is first a rifleman. This provides proof that no matter what MOS or no matter what promotion selection system is used, Marines identify themselves as Marines first vice their field because of their training. It also

⁴³ Vansteenbergen.

⁴⁴ Major James McLaughlin, Section Head Enlisted Promotion (MMPR-2), HQMC. Interview by author 3 March 2005, Quantico, VA.

⁴⁵ McLaughlin; Command and Staff College Student Survey, *Officer Promotions*, 10 February 2005.

proves that Marine ethos can exist on unrestricted boards if the system was changed to selection by functional area or MOS.

F. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the Marine Corps ethos “every Marine is first a rifleman” is a very important and valued characteristic to each Marine. Being a Marine “first” exists throughout the restricted and enlisted promotion boards. Yet, there is the belief that if unrestricted promotion boards were to change their competitive categories to either functional areas or MOS specific, Marines would identify themselves through these categories, or their job, vice being a Marine “first.”

This belief is far from the truth. The Marine Corps is unlike any other service, in that all training, such as initial training, exercises, and formal schooling, is designed to instill the Marine ethos and the core values of being a Marine. Young enlisted Marines, as well as young officers, are required to complete annual battle skills training (BST) until promoted to a certain rank. As stated in MCDP 1-0, “Staff non-commissioned officers [SNCO] and non-commissioned officers [NCO] attend academies designed to promote Marine leadership skills regardless of military occupational specialty. This collective training is critical in ensuring all Marines embrace the Marine Corps ethos.”⁴⁶ These tenets remain inherent regardless of how many enlisted promotion selection boards a SNCO or a NCO will go before in his or her lifetime. Keep in mind, enlisted and restricted officer promotion selection boards are conducted by competitive categories that are MOS specific.

Before moving on to discuss the best practices of the sister services, there is one perception that needs to be eliminated and an understanding that needs to be addressed before any new promotion selection model can work in the Corps. Although each promotion board’s precept

⁴⁶ Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, September 27, 2001), 1-23 to 1-24.

states that there is not a set career pattern, promotion board members still rely on the career path based on the Infantry Model. This career path, or something similar, is thought to be the model of success for ground officers: operating forces as a lieutenant, a second tour in a “B” billet such as recruit depot, attend career-level school, a second tour in the operating forces as a company commander, attend intermediate-level school, and then return for a third tour in the operating forces as the S-3 or the executive officer of a battalion.⁴⁷ This perceived path is not conducive to all MOSs and is nearly impossible for some officers to follow because of their limited billets and the need to keep them within their MOS or on-station, not being able to gain broad experiences.

This perception is not only on the promotion boards, but also exists among officers in the fleet. After computing the results of a poll among the Marine students and staff of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, whom represent many commands within the Marine Corps, 84 percent of the Marines believe there is such a perception. One response states, “[Promotion] boards believe you should spend as much time in the operating forces as possible..., promotion boards extend this philosophy even into MOSs which do not have such a path.”⁴⁸ This example provides an understanding why all precept language is not effective, or followed by board members.

Aside from the above perception, the reader, as well as Marine Corps officers, should understand that not all Marine officers will become generals. Changing the current system could impact aspiring general officer selection in each functional area differently; one area may never produce a general officer, while another area’s chances are greatly enhanced. Selection to Commandant will not be affected, since this leadership position has been consistently filled with combat arms MOSs.

⁴⁷ Major Joseph Grant, “Promoting unrestricted officers by MOS: Blasphemy, heresy, or an inevitable reality?”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, (October 2002): 26-29.

⁴⁸ Survey conducted by author titled “Officer Promotion Survey,” (Command & Staff College, 10 February 2005).

IV. Sister Service's Officer Promotion Selection Process

Since all of the Armed Service's officer promotion boards are held accountable to Title 10 USC, there are inherent similarities in board conduct and purpose. The purpose of the officer promotion selection board is to select those best-qualified officers that the majority of the board members find fully qualified to meet the needs of the Armed Force concerned.⁴⁹ Just like the Marine Corps, the other services must provide a five-year plan to ensure that a relatively similar opportunity exists year to year.

Board conduct, as directed in Department of Defense Instruction DODINST 1320.14 and Department of Defense Directive 1320.12, must follow certain guidelines no matter which service conducts a board. These guidelines consist of tracking joint service officers (JSO), identifying particular skills with needs, providing guidance on the authorized to select number, and providing the board members direction in board conduct.

Aside from the process similarities mentioned above, a further discussion of each system will be addressed below along with their differences of organic processes. Though all branches establish competitive categories, the other services use them quite differently than the Marine Corps.

A. United States Air Force

1. Planning

The purpose of the Air Force officer promotion selection system is to “select enough officers of the desired quality to carry out the mission and to provide reasonable progression to

⁴⁹ Department of Defense Instruction, Commissioned Officer Promotion Program Procedures, DODI 1320.14, (Washington, DC: USD(P&R), 1996), 10.

retain a highly qualified and motivated officer force.”⁵⁰ In achieving this purpose, the Air Force has the following objectives: provide a reasonably stable, consistent, and visible progression pattern for all competitive categories; ensure the best-qualified officers are selected; and provide for accelerated promotion opportunities for officers with exceptional potential.⁵¹ Beginning with stability, the five-year plan is the first step in planning to enhance stability by providing a consistent promotion opportunity year after year. This is consistent with the requirements set by the Department of Defense.

Before discussing promotion opportunity, the structure of the officer community should be explained to provide a better understanding when comparing systems. The Air Force has a total of eight competitive categories: Line of the Air Force (LAF), Judge Advocate General (JAG), Chaplain (CHAP), Medical Corps (MC), Medical Service Corps (MSC), Biomedical Service Corps (BSC), Dental Corps (DC), and the Nurse Corps (NC).⁵² The LAF, which is the Air Force’s largest category, making up 80 percent of the force, resembles a mix of MOSs that is comparable to the Corps’ unrestricted competitive category. The rest of the categories are functional in nature and are comparable to the Corps’ restricted competitive category, except that these officers have the opportunity to achieve multiple grades higher than O5.

For the purpose of this paper, this section will focus more on the LAF competitive category because of its similarities to the unrestricted category of the Corps. The LAF category, consisting of about 40 different MOSs, has five sub-categories consisting of pilot, navigator, air battle manager, non-rated operations, and mission support.⁵³ The pilot and navigator

⁵⁰ *You and Your Promotions - The Air Force Officer Promotion Program*, Air Force Pamphlet 36-2506 (Secretary of the Air Force, 1997), 1.

⁵¹ Air Force Pamphlet 36-2506, 1.

⁵² Air Force Pamphlet 36-2506, 2.

⁵³ Air Force Personnel website, <www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/offprom/>, 13 March 2005.

communities are considered the Air Force's warfighters, much like the combat arms MOSs of the Marine Corps, while the three other communities are comparable to the Corps support MOSs. Although the construct is quite similar, there lies a huge difference in loyalty and identifying oneself.

Unlike the Marine Corps, the LAF communities, as well as communities in other categories, have been described more like "tribes" because officers tend to identify themselves with their technical specialty vice being an Air force officer.⁵⁴ The Marine Corps officer identifies himself as a Marine vice his or her occupation. As mentioned earlier, this can be attributed to the connection of Marine training engraving the ethos of "every Marine is a rifleman." Marines do have a common bond and are loyal to the Corps, yet the Marine Corps is hesitant to change to a different system.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, a concern shared by some Marines was that Marines would identify themselves with their occupation vice being a Marine, if a selection by MOS system replaced the current system. To invalidate this argument, Tables 5 and 6 will provide a 5-year snapshot of two different selection systems within one service, using the rank of major. Both Table 5 (depicting a category like the Corps' unrestricted category) and Table 6 (depicting a functional and MOS system) consist of very similar selection rates. Based on the available data, there were no drastic differences between the percentages of the various fields or communities.

⁵⁴ John T. Correll, Developing Aerospace Leaders, Air Force Magazine (December 2001): 1.

Line of the Air Force (LAF)	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03
Pilot	84.7	86.7	87.4	90.9	95.9
Navigator	87.5	89.0	93.7	90.9	93.4
Air Battle Manager	n/a	90.3	92.1	93.8	88.9
Non-Rated Operations	89.3	88.7	89.2	93.2	93.0
Mission Support	86.0	89.2	87.7	89.7	91.3

Table 5. Selection opportunity percentages to the grade of major from LAF competitive category. Source: Air Force Personnel Center webpage, <www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/offprom/>, 13 March 2005. n/a - specialty area did not exist.

Competitive Category	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03
Line of the Air Force	86.5	88.3	88.3	90.6	92.8
Judge Advocate General	88.2	83.0	86.3	89.7	93.6
Medical Corps	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dental Corps	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chaplain	78.3	84.0	83.9	80.0	76.9
Medical Services Corps	81.4	84.8	87.5	89.9	91.6
Biomedical Sciences Corps	85.5	86.9	86.9	87.2	86.4
Nurse Corps	84.5	74.9	76.2	71.8	70.8

Table 6. Selection opportunity percentages to the grade of major from fiscal year 1999 to 2003. Source: Air Force Personnel Center webpage, 13 March 2005. n/a - a selection board was not convened.

From these tables, one can deduce that no matter which promotion selection system is being used, albeit functional, MOS driven, or by one competitive category containing multiple MOSs, identifying oneself through occupation or by service is not inherent to any particular system. Identifying oneself to their service can also exist within any system and is dependent upon heritage and training that consists of the same values and beliefs.

2. Selection Board Execution

The Air Force officer promotion selection system is quite different from the Marine Corps and can be very confusing. From the board announcement to promotion selection, the Air Force

provides a different approach to shape their force in an objective manner. The first noticeable difference is the use of “senior raters.”⁵⁵ Prior to the convening of the board, a message is released to notify the commanders of the eligible population and of their requirement to complete promotion recommendation forms (PRF). This commander, or senior rater, must be the eligible officer’s reviewer on officer performance reports (OPR), much like the Corps’ performance evaluation review system (PES).⁵⁶

The PRF provides a selection board a recommendation of “definitely promote” (DP), “promote,” or “not promote” based on an overall picture of an eligible’s record. Each senior rater is allocated a certain amount of “definitely promote” quotas, which most boards weigh heavily. Although this recommendation is stated on the Air Force promotion website as “not a guarantee for promotion,” a 2001 RAND study expressed that the promotion opportunity for these officers averaged 98 percent.⁵⁷ The PRF should only be used to help define the well-rounded individual that surfaces for promotion selection and not as “the” selection tool.

Prior to the member’s arrival, the recorders will arrive months in advance to scrub the eligible’s records. Unlike the Marine Corps’ scrub to confirm that the update material log is complete and accurate, the Air Force recorders will look for gaps in performance records, request for missing material, as well as, check for other items that make up a selection folder. The mission of the recorder is to provide a seamless board that saves time for the boardmembers and provides less of a necessity for manpower on permanent administrative support staff.⁵⁸

Once the recorders have finished preparing the boardroom, the boardmembers will arrive on a specified date to receive an administrative brief and break up into six panels. Each panel is

⁵⁵ A senior rater must be at least a colonel for majors and below, or the first general officer in a chain of command for lieutenant colonels.

⁵⁶ Air Force Pamphlet 36-2506, 4.

⁵⁷ Susan D. Hosek, et al., *Minority and Gender Differences in Officer Career Progression* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001.), 114.

⁵⁸ Boardmembers, although a mirror image of the eligible population, do not represent or sponsor any particular officer group, interest, or command.

randomly distributed an even amount of records, which should reflect a balance of PRF ratings (i.e., definitely promote, promote, not promote).⁵⁹ For field grade officer selection boards, these panels consist of one general and four colonels, who will score each record based on the selection criteria of “the best and fully qualified.” This scoring system is based on a scale of 6 to 10 in .5 increments, with 10 being the highest scoring.

Before moving any further in the process, it is important to understand “quota computation” and “adjusted panel quota” for promotion selection. Just like the Corps’ “authorized to select” number, quota computation is defining the “Max Board Quota” based on multiplying the “in-the-promotion zone” (IPZ) population to the selection opportunity. The only difference in computing this number between the services is that the Air Force will set aside 10 percent of the “Max Board Quota” for the “below-the-promotion zone” (BPZ), which is called “Max BPZ Quota.”⁶⁰ Unlike the Marine Corps’ selection to allocation, which is normally fulfilled, the Air Force usually does not select to allocation because of the allotted numbers set aside for the BPZ.

The other quota tool, adjusted panel quota, is used to create a gray area to help ensure the board does not over select and helps define the select and non-select line. For instance, if each of the six panels had an initial cut line of 180 to select, approximately 5 percent would be desired for wiggle room in selecting to this number. The new initial cut line would become 175 and the gray area would be between this line and a second cut line, which could be 180. These gray areas from each panel would then be consolidated into an aggregate gray for resolution by the

⁵⁹ *Officer Promotions and Selective Continuation*, Air Force Instruction 36-2501 (Secretary of the Air Force, 2004), 19.

⁶⁰ Air Force Personnel Center webpage, <www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/offprom/>, 13 March 2005.

entire board.⁶¹ The total of these gray areas should be 5 percent of the Max Board Quota, if not, the board will move the second cut lower until reached.

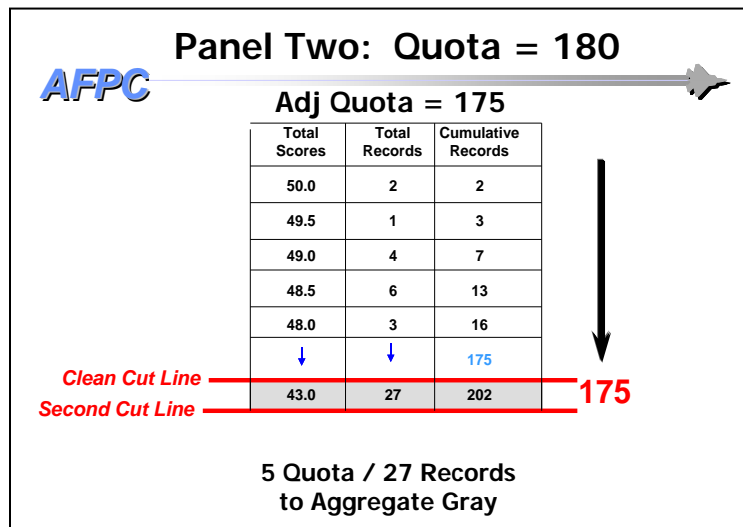
Now that quotas are explained, the purpose of scoring can be understood through its integration into selecting quotas. Scoring is by secret ballot, much like the voting phase of the Corps, and does not involve the briefing of packages to provide an objective process. The only time a brief may occur is when a significant disagreement (a “split”) presents itself in the scores on a particular record.⁶² If a split occurs a second time, the president of the board, who usually is not a voting member, will decide on

the case. If a split does not occur, the record will receive the combined score of the members on the panel.

Once all IPZ/APZ records have been scored, they are aligned in relative order of merit and, as mentioned earlier, are integrated into

the adjusted quota.⁶³ With the example

used earlier, Example 1 depicts the total possible scores in the first column, and the middle column depicts how many records have a particular score from panel two. As seen in the last column, 175 officers can be easily selected, but the 5 more to make 180 cannot. The next line beneath 175, which is the “gray area,” has 27 records tied to its total score. These 27 records have to be added to an aggregate gray and redistributed among the panels for further review and scoring.



Example 1. Adjusted Quota
Source: Air Force Personnel Center Webpage

⁶¹ Air Force Instruction 36-2501, 21.

⁶² A split is a difference in a score of 2 or more points between any panel members; Air Force Instruction 36-2501, 20.

⁶³ Air Force Instruction 36-2501, 19.

After the selects and non-selects have been figured out for the IPZ/APZ, a scoring and comparison will commence with the BPZ. Much like the Corps' Special Selection Boards, the process will compare the least competitive record of the BPZ selects to the best record of the IPZ non-selects. If the record is not better than the non-select, the process will continue up the BPZ list until one record is better. Once this happens, the remaining BPZ records will then be compared to the IPZ/APZ selects.⁶⁴ These last comparisons will be a one on one basis until the list is exhausted.

3. Conclusion

No matter what promotion selection system is in place for a particular service, loss of service identity is not inherent to any one system; it is dependent upon the service culture itself. The Air Force and the Marine Corps, having both unrestricted and restricted like systems, are prime examples for both ends of the spectrum. In as much, the Air Force is looking for change by searching for a better philosophy and developing its own core values, which could entail changing the promotion system. It is striving to build an ethos, like that of the Corps, stating "every airman a wingman."⁶⁵

Although the Air Force has an interesting selection process, the author does not recommend using this process due to its complexity and due to some of the practices that are not acceptable in the Marine Corps. For example, moving the "Clean Cut Line" after the eligibles were voted for selection would seem inequitable with the Marine Corps Staff Judge Advocate (SJA). The one aspect that the Marine Corps should consider is the objectivity in the Air Force system. By not briefing records, a board will be more objective in its selections, meaning a record could stand for itself without the influence of a briefer. For example, there are usually

⁶⁴ Air Force Personnel Center webpage.

⁶⁵ Anonymous General, brief given at Command and Staff College, February 2005.

two kinds of briefers: the car salesman, who is an extrovert; and the technical type, who is typically an introvert. The introvert, who may be representing a short MOS, may not be able to present a stellar record for selection, while the extrovert persuades the board to select a record that is less competitive.

B. United States Navy

1. Planning

Prior to discussing the promotion system of the Navy, the structure of the current officer community should be explained. The Navy manages its officer force into four competitive categories, which could actually be defined as functional areas; they are as follows: unrestricted line, restricted line, limited duty officer, and staff. The unrestricted line consists of areas such as aviation, surface warfare, submarines, fleet support, special warfare, and special operations.⁶⁶ The unrestricted line is the fighting force that makes up most of the Navy's manpower and is functionally comparable to the combat arms specialties of the Marine Corps. Each specialty within this line competes against each other for promotion selection.

The restricted and limited duty officers, each consisting of line and staff, are grouped by related skills and education. The restricted line consists of nine special duties such as engineering, human resources, cryptology, and oceanography, just to name a few, while the staff consists of eight corps such as the civil engineer corps, chaplain corps, judge advocate general corps, medical corps, dental corps, et al.⁶⁷ Each of these groups make up separate promotion selection boards, competing for promotion among their related skill. These boards are used in

⁶⁶ Department of the Navy, *Navy Officer Manpower and Personnel Classifications Manual, Vol. 1*, NAVPERS 158391, April 1999.

⁶⁷ NAVPERS 158391.

the same manner as the limited duty officer/ chief warrant officer and enlisted boards of the Marine Corps.

The authorized number to select for each of these boards, which is derived much the same as the Marine Corps, is dependent upon vacancies, naval end strength requirements, and the legal limitations set forth in DOPMA.⁶⁸ As mentioned previously, the five-year plan is required to ensure an equitable promotion selection opportunity exists from year to year, in relation to the authorized number to select. Secretary of the Navy Instruction (SECNAVINST) 1420.1A provides more detail about promotion opportunity and promotion flow points, which both the Navy and Marine Corps use for guidance. The instruction defines, for example, promotion opportunity for O5 can be from 60 to 80 percent, while the promotion flow point can be 15 to 17 years of active commissioned service.⁶⁹

This promotion opportunity, in conjunction with the authorized number to select, is a function of the promotion zone size. For instance, if 70 percent is the selection opportunity for the grade of commander and the current year vacancies are 100, the in-zone size will be 143 eligibles. If the vacancies the following year remained the same and the selection opportunity was permitted to 80 percent, the zone size would be smaller, i.e. 125 eligibles. When this is applied to the various competitive categories of the Navy, flow points in promotion and promotion opportunity will display little variance between most restricted and unrestricted categories, and still adhere to Department of Defense guidance.

As evidenced in Table 7, a comparison of the unrestricted selection opportunity to the restricted selection opportunity for the rank of commander, with the exception of the dental and

⁶⁸ *Active Officer Promotions (PERS-80) brief*, <www.npc.navy.mil/AboutUs/NPC/Training/ManpowerTutorial/PersonnelPlanning.htm>, accessed on 12 March 2005.

⁶⁹ Flow points are the number of years of commissioned service experienced before promotion to the next rank; *Promotion and Selective Early Retirement of Commissioned Officers on the Active-Duty Lists of the Navy and Marine Corps*, SECNAVINST 1420.1A (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1991)

medical corps, still maintains an equitable selection opportunity. Over a five-year period, the unrestricted selection opportunity was higher than, on average, six restricted/staff categories and even with five restricted/staff categories per year. In addition, this same period depicts there was only an average of three categories per year that had a higher selection opportunity than the unrestricted line. This somewhat balanced selection opportunity, when comparing the current Marine Corps system, would not exist if the unrestricted line was placed in the same category with the restricted line/staff. The result would more likely create critical skill shortages, which would not be equitable or efficient for the Navy.

Competitive Category	FY98	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02
Unrestricted Line	70	70	75	70	75
Engineering Duty Officer	70	70	70	70	75
Aerospace Engineering Duty Officer (Engineering)	83	80	80	80	80
Aerospace Engineering Duty Officer (Maintenance)	70	70	70	70	70
Special Duty Officer (Cryptology)	70	70	70	70	70
Special Duty Officer (Intelligence)	70	70	70	70	77
Special Duty Officer (Public Affairs)	85	84	89	80	78
Special Duty Officer (Oceanography)	70	65	65	70	65
Limited Duty Officer (Line)	50	50	50	60	65
Civil Engineer Corps	70	65	70	70	80
Chaplain Corps	50	50	50	55	60
Judge Advocate General Corps	80	80	75	70	70
Dental Corps	BFQ	85	80	80	80
Medical Corps	BFQ	85	80	80	90
Medical Services Corps	70	70	70	70	70
Nurse Corps	70	70	70	70	70
Supply Corps	70	70	70	75	80
Limited Duty Officer (Staff)	50	40	40	40	50

Table 7. Selection opportunity percentages from promotion boards to the grade of Commander. Source: Vasquez S., Williams M.B., *Reengineering the Marine Corps Officer Promotion Process for Unrestricted Officers*, Naval Post Graduate School, March 2001.

2. Selection Board Execution

The Navy's promotion selection system is quite similar to the Marine Corps, in that they both have the same concept of preparing cases, ranking cases, briefing and then voting on

selection. The difference lies with the order of voting the zones and how the scoring is completed when voting to select. Unlike the Marine Corps' initial preparation and in/out voting of above-zone and below-zone cases, the Navy begins by placing all of the in-zone and above-zone cases together for a full case preparation and then vote to tentatively select.

Once the first round has been completed, the board will use an upper bar to tentatively select the top records and a lower bar to tentatively drop records from further consideration. Whatever records fall in between, based on their score, will be re-assigned randomly to a new member for preparation and briefing during what is called the "Crunch."⁷⁰ Prior to entering the Crunch, members will vote on which below-zone records are strong enough to join the Crunch of the in-zone and above-zone records. In order for a below-zone record to enter the Crunch, the votes must be unanimous.

After comparable below-zone cases have been voted into the Crunch and fully prepared to brief, the Crunch will commence to select for promotion. Multiple iterations of voting will occur until the board has selected to allocation.

3. Conclusion

The Navy's promotion selection system has been quite successful in providing a well-balanced force. Although there are those who believe that the Navy is an efficiency-based system vice an equity-based system, it actually is a balanced system of both.⁷¹ The system provides the necessary skills to vacancies within each competitive category, while also maintaining an equitable process to its servicemembers in those categories. Just like the Marine

⁷⁰ Crunch is a term used to denote the population that is left over to select from after the top selects and non selects have been removed from further voting; *Active Officer Promotions (PERS-80) brief*, <www.npc.navy.mil/AboutUs/NPC/Training/ManpowerTutorial/PersonnelPlanning.htm>, accessed on 12 March 2005.

⁷¹ Efficiency-based means officers would be selected based on their skill, which provides an efficient means to meet the needs of the Navy. Equity-based means to select by performance, which provides a fair and equitable system.

Corps, the Navy strives to provide the “best and fully qualified” in conjunction to meeting the needs of the service. So, could a functional/MOS system like the Navy’s work for the Marine Corps? This will be discussed at the conclusion of this paper.

C. United States Army

The Army’s system will be discussed in more detail because its system, which is only eight years old, was created to alleviate many career issues that are similar to the issues of today for the Marine Corps. Some of the Army’s problems were loss of experience in certain MOSs, skill shortages, and forcing some officers into a secondary MOS that would curb their branch-qualifying time, and eventually resulting in no command time.⁷² Until the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI, a study conducted to help understand and try to alleviate these issues, the Army could not maintain a well-balanced force nor increase its warfighting capabilities.

1. Planning

The object of the Army promotion selection process is “to ensure advancement of those best qualified officers to the higher grades, to meet Army branch/functional area and grade requirements, to provide career incentive, and to promote officers based on the whole person concept and on the potential to serve in the next higher grade.”⁷³ In addition, “it reinforces all other personnel management programs to acquire and retain the right number of officers, with

⁷² Branch-qualifying is the same as being MOS proficient in the Marine Corps, getting your checks in the boxes. U.S. Army, *Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI: Final Report* (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army, July 1997), 4-5 to 4-10.

⁷³ Commissioned Officer Development and Career Management, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1998), 20.

the proper skills, to meet the Army's needs."⁷⁴ Of the Army's six competitive categories, most were meeting these objectives except one, the Army Competitive Category.⁷⁵

The Army Competitive Category was much like the Marine Corps' unrestricted category, which places warfighting and operational officers against technical and specialty officers. The effects were a diminished technical and specialty force as remnants from a healthy combat arms build-up. In order to overcome the diminished warfighting effectiveness of the Army and provide a force to compliment Army Vision 2010, a change was needed for a well-balanced force.⁷⁶ To achieve the proper mix of skills for a well-balanced force, the Army re-engineered the Army competitive category for its field-grade officers.⁷⁷ In essence, the Army developed four fields within the Army Competitive Category, making a total of nine competitive categories. The Army Competitive Category will be the focus for this paper.

This system that the Army developed in 1997, called the Career-Field-Based Management System, combines the branch and functional areas into four career fields: Operations, Information Operations, Institutional Support, and Operations Support. For example (Table 8), the header "Operations" contains Sixteen Basic Branches, which are the warfighters, and two inherent functional areas, Multifunctional Logistician and Psychological Operations & Civil Affairs. Once a captain is selected for major, he or she will be selected for a functional area in one of the below career-fields. The officers in these similar functional areas will compete for promotion within the career-fields.

⁷⁴ Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, 22.

⁷⁵ The six competitive categories were: Army Competitive Category, Chaplain, Judge Advocate, Medical Corps, Dental Corps, and a category for all other Medical Department branches. Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, 22.

⁷⁶ Army Vision 2010 is the future expeditionary warfare concept for the Army. OPMS XXI, 5-2.

⁷⁷ Company grade officers are still promoted the old way of a one competitive category containing all branches of the Army.

Operations	Operations Support
Sixteen Basic Branches Psychological Operations & Civil Affairs Multifunctional Logistician	Foreign Area Officer Army Acquisition Corps
Institutional Support	Information Operations
Human Resource Management Comptroller U.S. Military Academy Permanent Faculty Operations Research/Systems Analyst Strategy and Force Deployment Nuclear Research and Operations	Information Systems Engineer Strategic Intelligence Space Operations Public Affairs Information Systems Management Simulations Operations

Table 8. Army Competitive Category career-fields.
Source: OPMS XXI, 1997, 5-2.

The selection opportunity within these four categories can vary, but still remain within the guidelines set forth in Department of Defense Directive 1320.12. The Career-Field-Based management system is “very effective” in eliminating skill shortages within a category. Aside from attrition, the only skill shortages that could exist would come from not having a fully-qualified officer to select.⁷⁸ Although career-field areas are more effective in providing certain skills based on its own selection opportunity, the construct itself does not minimize the skill shortages alone. The board process plays a huge factor when eliminating skill shortages; further details will be discussed in the next section and an analysis will be provided in the conclusion.

2. Selection Board Execution

The Army’s officer selection boards are executed much the same as the Air Force, in that the in-zone and above-zone (IAZ) are combined to tentatively select officers as fully-qualified based on their aggregate score, then the below-zone (BZ) is scored and compared to the IAZ’s fully-qualified. Eventually, a best-qualified list will be produced to select officers in an objective manner, meaning that no briefing will occur, unless there is a tie on two scores at any given time.

⁷⁸ Major Brian Zarchin, former Action Officer, Promotions Branch (TAPC-MSP), U.S. Army, Interview by author 27 January 2005, Quantico, VA.

The scale for scoring ranges from 1 to 6, with 6 being the superior performer or has superior potential.⁷⁹

Once board members have arrived and began Phase I (the scoring of eligible records), their first objective is to establish an Order of Merits List (OML) based on the aggregate scoring, which will also identify the fully-qualified (FQ) and non fully-qualified line. Upon completion, Phase II commences, which establishes the identification of potential BZ selects. Members will screen vote the BZ cases, with a simple yes or no, to determine which cases to hard-vote for further comparison with the IAZ cases and must not exceed 10 percent of the IAZ authorized to select number.⁸⁰ The hard-vote scoring uses the same scale as the IAZ in Phase I.⁸¹

Prior to comparing the BZ cases, the best-qualified officers must be tentatively identified (Phase III) and, if necessary, break any ties on the OML. This may entail the briefing of cases, which is the only time subjectivity can enter the process. Once the tentatively best-qualified (TBQ) officers have been identified on the OML, the BZ cases will be compared on a one to one basis. For example, if there were four BZ cases to compare, the least competitive case of the BZ's would be compared to the fourth IAZ case from the bottom of the TBQ list. If the BZ is better than the IAZ record, all four BZ cases will replace the bottom four IAZ's. If not, the process of elimination will commence until the BZ list is exhausted.⁸²

⁷⁹ Zarchin.

⁸⁰ The 10 percent BZ selection is not like the Air Force, where the select number of BZ is already set aside and can be lost if not used.

⁸¹ Zarchin.

⁸² Zarchin.

After the final OML has been established, containing all zones, the board will pull from the top of the list the requirements (skill shortages) identified by the Secretary of the Army.⁸³ As

shown in Example 2, a total of eight select numbers are available to begin fulfilling the requirements, with one designated for the BZ. The requirements in the example, pertaining to the skills, are A (2), B (1), C (1), and D (1). As the skills are selected down the list and the gaps are filled with the remaining number to

Officer	Skill	Vote Total	OML Number	MOI Requirements:
P Janson	A (BZ)			Max select = 7 Max BZ select = 1
P Brown	A	36-2	1	
P Jones	B	35+4	2	Tentative Best Qualified Line
P Allen	B	35	3	
P Smith	C	34+3	4	Requirements: A = 2 B = 1 C = 1 D = 1
P Hoffman	B	34	5	
P Shepard	A	34-1	6	Fully Qualified Line
Rogers	C	33	7	
Stoval	A	32+2	8	
Hayes	B	31	9	
Barkley	A	30+4	10	
Lewis	B	28	11	
P Hughes	D	26+3	12	
Wilson	B	26	13	
Roberts	B	26-3	14	
Clark	B	25	15	
Vest	C	24-3	16	
Cofin	A	23	17	
Harvey	A	18	18	
Branch	A	11-3	19	
Jenkins	C	10-5	20	

Example 2. Order of Merit List (OML)
Source: Army Officer Promotions Webpage

select, the reader can notice that there are some instances where a skill will select an officer that is fully-qualified, but not best-qualified. In addition, the last best-qualified officer (Rogers) becomes a non-select because the skill guidance selected below him or her.

Although the Army selection system provides a tool to ensure short skills are selected, which are typically associated to attrition, some boardmembers are in disagreement when results have selected a fully-qualified officer in a skill requirement over a best-qualified officer.⁸⁴ Such practices with these results would not be accepted in the Marine Corps. A system that passes best-qualified officers on the same list for a lesser-qualified officer would not permeate equity throughout the Corps.

⁸³ Zarchin.

⁸⁴ Zarchin.

3. Conclusion

The Army experienced many of the Marine Corps' current skill shortage issues and knew it had to provide outstanding officers across the full range of skills, not just for today, but also in the future. Its current system is both efficient and equitable for the Army, providing a well-balanced force for the future and providing a fair solution with the soldier in mind. The Army system is both a functional area selection system and a MOS selection system, providing a fail-safe selection mechanism in maintaining selection numbers. For instance, with stand-alone MOS selection systems, an authorized to select number may be lost if there are no eligible officers to fill the position. Having an MOS system within a functional system lets the select number fall back into the pot for selection among the functional area.

The Army's system, or a variation, should definitely be considered, as well as the objective approach in board mechanics. Once again, the Army experienced problems in the past with some briefers being overbearing, while others were not very good briefers, and this drove the Army to change to a non-briefing system. As mentioned earlier in the Air Force section, objectivity may be beneficial for Marine Corps selection boards. It could quite possibly help the critical skill shortages, concomitant to a system with a designated number of functional areas. By not briefing records, it can also save time for both functional and MOS systems. Further discussion on the functional area system will be discussed in the conclusion.

V. Conclusion

As articulated above, the other services have a similarity that the Marine Corps does not possess, competitive categories relating to, in one way or another, MOSs. Should the Marine Corps join the bandwagon and select their active duty unrestricted officers through some

functional MOS system? In doing so, the Marine Corps would be more prepared for the 21st century and provide a force with more technical skills as compared to today.

Adopting a functional area system, as discussed within the sister services sections, would not eliminate skill shortages but greatly reduce skill shortages and provide a better-defined career path for each area. If selection by MOS becomes the best practice of choice, as discussed in the enlisted and restricted officer boards sections, career paths would be greatly enhanced and skill shortages would cease to exist. Both of these systems are functional and provide the results the Marine Corps is searching for. Implementing either system would not affect the Marine ethos negatively, but enhance it by providing more time for previously over-worked Marines to complete the required yearly training in battle skills and prepare for future concepts.

To embrace future concepts such as expeditionary maneuver warfare and meet the demands of sustained missions within military operations other than war (MOOTW), as always, success will reign from the ethos, values and traditions of the Marine Corps. In addition, an optimal well-balanced force will enhance the success of the Marine Corps with a more experienced, specialized force. The difficulties in obtaining this force, meaning skill shortages and a perceived career path, will exist as long as there are promotion boards selecting officers from each grade, regardless of their MOS. Therefore, what may be perceived to many as a system that is doing what it is supposed to do is to fall short of looking into the future to meet the transformation of the military environment.

A. Recommendations

Aside from recommending changes to the officer promotion system, there are multiple alternatives in how the system could be executed, to include changes in, or replacing, policy. For simplicity's sake, the author recommends selection from one of the following three COAs,

remaining under the “up or out” policy. Any of the below COAs will correct the skill shortage problem to some extent, as long as the Marine Corps is willing to accept its associated ramifications.

1. COA (1): Selection by MOS

The one promotion system that would make the most sense, as long as one keeps in mind that Marine ethos is here to stay, is selection by MOS. Just like the enlisted and LDO promotion selection boards, this system would eliminate the perceived career path and provide an ideal career path for each MOS, thus providing a more fair comparison among officers in the same field. It would also eliminate the use of most force structure tools, as some may still be required due to surges in attrition because of a great economy or the attractive salaries for specific skills in the civilian workforce.

The overarching factor to this COA is the improved ability to meet skill requirements for each grade and the ability to meet all warfighting requirements defined by the table of organization.⁸⁵ Officers would be able to focus more on their MOS credentials, while an improved well-balanced force is developed for a time of need. Aside from meeting future MOS requirements, board members will find selection of officers easier because the comparison of fitness reports will come from officers of the same career path.

Although this COA seems easy to establish, there are some concerns and difficulties to overcome. Some of the major concerns of such a system are that some MOSs will move faster in promotion timing than others. For example, one MOS may promote to major within 9 years and 8 months while another MOS may promote to major within 11 years and 5 months. This could result from diminished vacancies due to officers remaining on active duty longer in some

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MOSs.⁸⁶ Another concern is the loss of more competitive officers in over MOSs to less competitive officers in short MOSs for selection to promotion. Although a concern, competitiveness relates to what is valued within a particular MOS, not by comparing an officer in one MOS to another officer in a different MOS. The Marine Corps would still select, within that particular MOS, the best and fully qualified.

The difficulties that lay within establishing this system would be the manpower and management of the promotion selection system itself. The manpower required to convene and adjourn a board session would have to increase, mainly due to the increase in man-hours in documentation. As an example, for the time it takes to complete a LDO lieutenant colonel selection board, a lieutenant colonel promotion by MOS board would be ten-fold. Although it may seem difficult, manpower has always adjusted to the changes in board scheduling and the nuances of new board operating systems. Changing to another system, one that the promotion staff is currently familiar, will not hinder their performance.

The last difficulty is related to having board members that reflect the competitive categories to be considered for promotion. As stated in Title 10 USC, the composition of board membership should reflect the competitive categories being considered unless there are no officers in the competitive category available to serve.⁸⁷

2. COA (2): Selection by Functional Areas

If selection by MOS is not desirable because of a variance in promotion flow points or because animosity among the ranks may develop, then selection by functional area should be the next choice to alleviate skill shortages. Of the functional area systems in the military, the Army's system of four competitive categories should be studied closely as a possible model, or

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⁸⁷ Title 10, 200.

at least some variant. Dividing the Marine Corps unrestricted category into at least 4 or more competitive categories would limit competition across fewer MOSs and ensure consistent competition across similar duties and career progression. Such a system would not only provide a greater chance to select short skills, but would also fulfill the “authorized to select” number.

Unlike the MOS selection system, any vacancy from a particular MOS in a functional area system that could not be filled with an officer of that same MOS would be used by another MOS. The MOS selection system would have to adjourn the board with any remaining vacancies as unfulfilled, which means a loss of leadership. Although loss of fulfillment can happen, it rarely does on the MOS selection systems, such as the enlisted and LDO boards, and would never happen on a functional area system board in this manner.

The proposed Marine Corps functional area system could have four functional areas consisting of ground operations, air operations, service support, and information operations. For a five functional area system, service support could be broken down into operations support and institutional support, if necessary. The table below (Table 9) provides an example of how the specialty fields could be grouped within the five functional area system.

Unrestricted Competitive Categories				
Ground Operations	Air Operations	Operational Support	Institutional Support	Information Operations
0302 Infantry 0802 Artillery 1302 Engineer 18xx Tank/Tracks	72xx Air Control 75xx Aviation	0402 Logistics 3002 Supply 3500 Motor Trans 6002 A/C Maint 66xx Aviation Supply	0180 Adjutant 3400 Finance 4302 Public Affairs 4402 Judge Advocate 5803 Military Police	0107 Civil Affairs 02xx Intelligence 0602 Data/ Comm xxxx Psychological Ops

Table 9. Proposed unrestricted functional area system.

Under the column “Information Operations,” civil affairs and psychological operations are listed because of the direction of future warfare as discussed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps.⁸⁸ More civil affairs officers (0107) will be added to the active duty component, as well as

⁸⁸ Christian Lowe, “A more flexible force,” Marine Corps Times (14 February 2005), 14-15.

the creation of a psychological operations MOS. Military police (5803) is listed under “Institutional Support,” but could be listed under “Operational Support” as well, depending on how the Marine Corps views the function of that MOS. Some other changes that must be taken into consideration in the future are; the role of artillery (0802) in civil affairs and would it fall under a different category above; and with the acquisitions MOS (9958/9) becoming a primary MOS, which category would it fall under?

A system of this construct would still have the similar problems of the current Marine Corps system, but on a smaller scale and with better results. Skill shortages could still exist within the smaller categories, but with minimal numbers compared to today’s system. In addition, the perceived career path of today’s system would not exist, because each competitive category would be more focused on its functional area and use its appropriate career path. Yet on the other side, the perception of “Marines loyal to their MOS vice the Corps” would not exist either because the functional area system is not focused enough to create such a perception and, as mentioned earlier, Marine training and core values enhance ethos.

The functional area system can be set up in many different ways. Table 9 is only a proposed distribution of MOSs among the competitive categories and could be distributed differently or each category could be named differently, which would require further study. By taking into consideration the various mixtures of MOSs that could be placed under a category of similar duties or some other similarity, further research would provide an understanding of the effects on certain MOSs within its group and pinpoint the best arrangement for the functional area system.

No matter which arrangement is selected as a functional area selection system, the benefits outweigh the consequences, and the consequences are minimal. Aside from the similar consequences it has with today’s promotion system, the only other issues deal with the

opportunity for advanced education and leadership development. By using a functional area system, a possible tendency may surface that would select the warfighting categories for the advance schooling or even commands. Manpower planners may not see a reason to select officers from the other categories because of its functional nature. This may cause a feeling of inequity among the officer ranks. These issues, plus any scrutiny, may or may not be overcome as the new system would evolve.

3. COA (3): Re-designating Short MOSs to Restricted

The recommendation of re-designating unrestricted MOSs to restricted has been juggled around since skill shortages existed. Re-designating short MOSs is a COA that is directed towards those MOSs that have been consistently short for a long period of time, such as adjutant (0180), intelligence (0202), communication information systems (0602), finance management (3404), and public affairs (4302). Since most of these officers cannot experience the career broadening tours and are restricted to their MOS anyhow, why not re-designate?

This COA does not alleviate the skill shortage issue, but only remedies those MOSs mentioned above. The only drawback to this option is that these officers cannot advance past the rank of lieutenant colonel due to the limit of rank for LDOs, which limits future command and personal goals.⁸⁹ If used, this COA should be carefully implemented over a period of time to provide those commissioned prior to the change, the ability to advance.

This COA, if not used alone, could be used in conjunction to COA (2) to create a fourth option. Those MOSs mentioned above would fall in with LDOs under the five functional area model. Though re-designating MOSs is not attractive, it provides an efficient option to meet

⁸⁹ Vansteenbergen.

warfighting requirements for those MOSs that will always be short if the status quo is here to stay.

B. Bottom Line

Since Marines are adaptable and able to manage multiple tasks and/or duties at once, the Marine Corps will survive and portray, as usual, a well-balanced force. The only issue with the well-balanced force is experience. Lack of experience, meaning over-worked Marines from healthy MOSs performing the additional duties from short MOSs, will hinder the progress to achieving an optimal well-balanced force.

While the Marine Corps is functionally balanced, changes in the promotion system will result in a “better” balanced Marine Corps; thus, allowing the Marine Corps to gain a force of experts in various skills. If the status quo remains, skill imbalances will not achieve relief and the warfighting requirements defined by the Corps table of organization will not be addressed. So the question remains, what is the next officer promotion system?

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