



New Analytic Methods Can Improve the Development of Air Force Space and Missile Officers

U.S. Air Force leaders recently wondered whether officers in the space and missile career field (Air Force Specialty 13S) were being adequately prepared for their work within that field. The leaders were also concerned that too little is known about the range of competencies that people in the field need at each grade to perform the jobs they fill effectively. The Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) had issued inconsistent career guidance to 13S officers, sometimes recommending broad experience in multiple mission areas within the field (missile combat crew, satellite command and control, launch, surveillance, and warning) and at other times recommending depth of expertise in only one or two areas. Individual officers were understandably confused about what training and experience they needed and what their career options were.

To help address these concerns and the adequacy of the overall assignment and development of 13S officers, a RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) study identified the backgrounds—the specific education, training, and work experience—that are important for performing different groups of 13S jobs satisfactorily and compared them with the backgrounds that officers had actually acquired by certain stages in their careers.

PAF found that, in 2001, many 13S officers lacked the backgrounds needed for their jobs, and many were in jobs that did not make good use of their backgrounds. However, the match between job requirements and officer backgrounds could be improved substantially. The Air Force needed to increase its emphasis on the professional development of 13S officers—particularly on the development of certain combinations of qualifications—and utilize the officers’ backgrounds more effectively. In particular, PAF recommended the following actions:

- Officers’ depth of experience could be increased in most areas. Specifically, career tracks could be established that would allow personnel to concentrate on acquisition or on missile or space operations.
- AFSPC leaders and the 13S career-field management staff should develop more-precise plans for the career field and more-definitive career guidance for space and missile officers. Leaders should work with the Air Force Personnel Center and the relevant commanders and supervisors to coordinate the officer assignment system in pursuit of established goals, publish revised career-field guidance, and expand the planning and analysis to include enlisted and civilian space professionals.
- The Air Force personnel community and functional managers should expand the scope of the analysis to include jobs that are closely related to the 13S career field and to other career fields as well. This approach would be consistent with emerging concepts for developing future leaders with expertise in multiple operational and/or functional areas.
- The Air Force should consider extending and improving PAF’s analytic methods to reflect more detail about individuals’ backgrounds and their potential qualifications to fill job openings, thus increasing flexibility in making assignments.

Stable Air Force policies and proper development and utilization of officers could ensure that the 13S career field is sustainable and staffed with highly qualified personnel.

Since this research was completed, the AFSPC has taken important steps consistent with these recommendations. ■

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