



Chapter Title: Conclusions and Recommendations

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The first of our two broad research questions addressed whether it was feasible to require officer candidates to achieve a minimum score of 2/2 or 3/3 on a language proficiency exam. The short answer is no, at least for the near term. Our survey results suggested that very few officer applicants would meet the proposed levels of proficiency simply through college courses. Indeed, the amount of coursework required to meet such levels of proficiency (five semesters being an absolute minimum for category I languages) is likely to far exceed what could fit into a standard college curriculum. Most officers in our survey reported having taken between zero and two semesters of language in college. Given this finding, taking a minimum of five semesters would have meant eliminating other courses or imposing a course load heavier than that required for graduation. Moreover, knowing that some who had actually majored or minored in a language or had majored in foreign-area studies reported scores below 2/2; it seems unlikely that five semesters would produce a 2/2 level for those who had not.

Our second broad research question addressed the potential consequences of implementing a language proficiency requirement for officers, and the answer is complex. First, such a requirement could affect the characteristics of the officer force in many ways, some positive and some negative. Since about one-half of recently commissioned officers reported language skills below 1+, requiring all officers to enter at a 2/2 would distinctly improve overall skills. However, the types of languages spoken, the extent to which they are maintained, and the extent to which the Air Force utilizes the skills all factor into how beneficial this change would be on a practical level.

Second, not all will be able or willing to meet this requirement—even if offered training—so the pool of eligible officers would certainly be smaller. This could affect several other aspects of the officer force. For example, the personality, technical background, and demographics of commissioned officers may change. To the extent that language learning is related to certain personality traits, selecting only people who are proficient at a 2/2 or higher could yield a group of officers with more homogeneous personalities, which could in turn affect other aspects of workplace performance.¹ In addition, engineering majors are one-half as likely to be required to study languages as other majors (only about 20 to 25 percent of engineers reported such a requirement), and a five-semester requirement would thus affect engineers more than other majors. Moreover, such a change would likely force engineers either to take longer to

¹ Given that personality is related to other workplace outcomes, including apparently unrelated aspects of job performance, the relationships between language proficiency and personality need to be better understood to keep a foreign-language proficiency policy from having unintended detrimental effects on other important workplace outcomes.

complete their degree or to carry a heavier course load (which could diminish the engineering skills they could be expected to have on entering the Air Force).

Current demographics suggest that the officer candidates most likely to attain a 2/2 or 3/3 level in a second language are either heritage speakers, nonheritage speakers who are exposed to extensive language curricula in elementary and secondary schools, or those who majored in a language in college.² None of these are in large supply. Heritage speakers constitute less than 20 percent of the U.S. population (Shin and Bruno, 2003). Only a small proportion of U.S. elementary and secondary schools offer foreign-language instruction. And the population of language majors (especially in languages useful for national security) is limited.

Furthermore, elementary and secondary school language instruction is more likely to be available in urban locales and areas with higher socioeconomic status, and the amount of language study undertaken differs by race (see Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009; KewalRamani et al., 2007, Figure 12d; and U.S. Department of Education, 2005, Table 25-3). Changes that affect who is likely to qualify for commissioning could have implications for diversity in the Air Force if none of those conditions changes. Thus, even though some speakers might be more likely than others to attain a 2/2 or 3/3 in a language other than English, none of these groups would provide enough qualified individuals to fulfill the Air Force's personnel needs. Note that efforts to target recruiting toward any one of these groups would be unwise because the likely result would be further unintended changes to demographics and diversity in the officer corps.

Third, dissatisfaction with the policy among candidates and current officers could lead to turnover and reduced organizational commitment. We know from the literature and our survey findings that motivation and attitudes toward language learning affect outcomes. Our survey showed that attitudes toward the mandatory policies were not overwhelmingly positive, and in some cases, the policies might have discouraged individuals from joining the Air Force in the first place. Tying language proficiency to other career milestones could be motivational for those who already possess language skills but could deter some from joining the Air Force who do not already possess such skills and would be forced to acquire them.

Finally, research on language attrition (see Chapter Two) and the substantial differences we found between highest proficiency ever and current proficiency highlight the tendency for proficiency to diminish without maintenance. Therefore, as a consequence of instituting a 2/2 requirement, the Air Force would need to devote resources to maintaining the language skills of those who do not regularly use them at work or socially.

Recommendations

Our survey and review of the literature have yielded a number of key insights and suggested recommendations for building a language-enabled officer force. We explain these in the sec-

² While heritage speakers as a group might appear to be a promising source of second-language proficient individuals, we caution against making them a primary source for the Air Force's need for language skills. First, their levels of proficiency vary significantly, and many may still need extensive additional training for their skills to be of use in a military context (Bermel and Kagan, 2000; Kagan and Dillon, 2008). Second, many heritage language speakers in the United States speak Spanish, a language of low priority for national security. Third, focusing exclusively on this small population as the solution to meeting language proficiency requirements would overlook the potential of many other equally capable non-heritage speakers and may have the unintended consequence of disenfranchising these other language learners from the organization or discouraging their pursuit of increased proficiency.

tions that follow. We also identify the key potential consequences of our recommendations that policymakers should consider.³

Tailor Policies to Desired Outcomes, Including Different Policies for Different Outcomes

In our project planning meetings, Air Force leaders mentioned a number of reasons for the Air Force to develop the language skills of officers and airmen. These reasons included such worthwhile goals as improving their awareness of other cultures, their ability to interact in culturally appropriate ways, the speed with which they could learn new languages, and their ability to communicate in host nations.

These goals for language policy are very different from one another, and requiring all officers to have a second language is unlikely to be an effective or efficient way to meet them all. Furthermore, these forcewide goals are distinct from the need to produce professionals for specific language-intensive career fields. Given that different policies would be needed for each goal, we urge policymakers to keep them distinct.

Each of the following five goals for a second-language requirement was raised in our meetings with Air Force leaders and would best be fulfilled with its own tailored policy:

1. **Develop and maintain language professionals for specific career fields.** Much of existing Air Force language policy aims at developing personnel in specific language-intensive career fields, such as regional affairs specialists, public affairs specialists, and cryptologic linguists. While it was not the focus of this report, this vital component of Air Force language policy confuses discussion of other, forcewide, efforts.⁴

Part of the confusion is due to a misconception that a new policy designed to develop a language-enabled Air Force in general would replace existing efforts to develop personnel for specific language-professional career fields. However, development of these “foreign-language professionals” should be driven by and tailored to the unique needs of the career fields in question. Language professionals are a highly select group of individuals chosen for their high language-learning potential who undergo lengthy, highly intensive, and structured DoD-controlled training. Such training would likely be infeasible or inappropriate for the rest of the Air Force. The typical Air Force officer has neither the time nor the resources for such an intensive program, and it would be impractical for the Air Force to channel the necessary resources to intensively train all officers. Given that the general population’s training would inevitably be spread out over the course of their careers and far less rigorous, it is likely that curriculum requirements would differ. The language proficiency outcomes that foreign-language professionals’ training environments produce are thus also likely to be much higher than those achievable in the general Air Force population with an equivalent amount of training.

³ Many aspects of our recommendations are similar to those in a number of existing documents and articles providing guidance on language policy (for examples, see DoD, 2007b; DoD, 2005; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010; House Armed Services Committee, 2008; Conway, 2005; Conway, 2010). This study’s findings provide empirical support for many of the practices they suggest.

⁴ Efforts to develop language professionals are one of several goals discussed in official statements regarding language development. See, for example, DoD, 2005.

2. **Have a variety of officers in all types of jobs who can speak to and understand host nationals in their native languages.** Fulfilling this goal means developing language-enabled officers who speak the languages of the countries to which they are deployed and can communicate effectively with host nationals, third-country nationals, or coalition partners in their native languages.⁵ Knowing a local language is critical for speaking with or listening to host nationals and for reading in a host-nation's language. Officers may also need to communicate with third-country nationals speaking yet another language. These situations highlight the need for Air Force officers who know the languages that most support U.S. national security. Spanish, French, and German, the most commonly taught languages, are of little use in many deployments.

Any new officer accession language policy must thus address the scarcity of skills in strategically important languages. One way to do this is to make language proficiency a key consideration in deployment assignments. The second way is to build capacity in languages that are not sufficiently represented. For deployments, it is vital for commanders to know who they can call on for the host country language or for the languages of third country nationals and coalition partners.

The Air Force has a long road ahead to build capacity in a variety of languages. Our survey found that many languages of current strategic importance are sorely underrepresented, even at low levels of proficiency. This suggests that the more underrepresented, difficult, and strategically important the language, the greater the reward should be for learning it and using it on the job. This also suggests that the existing Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus is not an adequate incentive for learning underrepresented languages. Possible changes to this bonus are discussed in depth below.

3. **Have a variety of culturally competent personnel in all types of jobs to interact with host nationals.** Cultural competence enables an individual to behave appropriately within a culture's social norms, even when relying on an interpreter to communicate.⁶ Linguistic competence, in contrast, enables the person to communicate with the speakers of a given language in a common tongue. While these two competencies are clearly complementary, they are distinct: Possessing one does not imply possessing the other. Given that cultural competence is an important Air Force development goal, cultural training for that specific purpose should continue rather than give way to the perhaps less effective and certainly less efficient avenue of language training.

That is not to say that language proficiency should not be pursued for other reasons or that cultural skills could not be part of language training. Both cultural skills and language skills are valuable, and policies to build cultural competence could strengthen efforts to develop high levels of proficiency in a given language. Therefore, the policies for linguistic competence and cultural competence should be complementary, but distinct, and should acknowledge that each addresses a separate skill set.

⁵ This is one of the explicitly stated goals in many force development initiatives. See, for example, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010.

⁶ As an example, according to DoD, 2005, The Strategic Planning Guidance (SPG) for fiscal years 2006–2011 listed creating foundational language and cultural expertise among the goals for language transformation. In addition, language development is often pointed to in statements urging development of more cross-cultural skills. See, for example, the DoD June 2007 Summit's section titled "Action: Build A DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan" (DoD, 2007b), which describes language, regional, and cultural skills as being part of the strategic plan to build regional and cultural capabilities.

4. **Make all personnel more culturally sensitive and aware.** Cultural sensitivity and awareness are broader and more general attributes than the cultural competence we described above, even though they are related concepts. A person does not automatically acquire cultural awareness, sensitivity, or understanding through the study of languages. Cultural sensitivity may result from other individual characteristics or experiences, such as interaction with people from other cultures and an innate ability to empathize. It does not necessarily result from learning another language, especially if language learning occurs in a classroom, without interaction with the corresponding culture. Again, training and education specifically focused on interaction with individuals from other cultures, generating empathy, and increasing awareness of what life is like in various places in the world would be far less costly and more effective than language training to address this goal.
5. **Have personnel in all jobs who can learn other languages more easily and quickly.** Some Air Force leaders also cited having a “language-primed” force, one whose officers are able to learn subsequent languages more easily than a second language, as another desirable outcome of a language proficiency requirement. Past research has found that knowing a second language can improve one’s ability to learn a third language, especially when the languages are similar. However, a completely language-primed force—in which all officers possessed at least limited working proficiency in a second language—might mean a substantial reduction in the qualified candidate pool. Moreover, there is no guarantee that someone who knows a second language could learn a new language in just-in-time training and achieve even modest levels of skill, even if the language is similar. Learning the more difficult category IV languages will still require intensive training.

Language aptitude, which includes a range of individual characteristics, is likely to be a better, more practical predictor of language-learning success than priming through second-language learning.⁷ The resource demands of such training suggest that it is more feasible to select, train, and offer maintenance activities to a subset of officers in key languages than it is to do so for all officers, especially given that not all will end up using the languages in their jobs. Our findings on the survey also demonstrate that simply knowing a second language does not make one *much* more likely to fulfill the potential to actually learn a third or fourth, even if there is an increased capability to do so.

It would thus be impractical to suggest preparing for the language needs of the future, which are largely unknown, by allowing students to study any language of their choosing. Those who have studied one of most commonly taught languages—Spanish, French, or German—find little opportunity to use it on the job. These languages offer few linguistic transfer advantages to those trying to learn such languages as Arabic and Chinese.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough that developing language proficiency and creating language-enabled officers would take extensive amounts of time and resources, even with language-primed officers. Just-in-time language training is an effective way to teach individuals a selection of survival phrases and should continue for all personnel

⁷ We were not, however, able to test that relationship in this study.

prior to deployment. However, such training should not lead anyone to be thought of as “language enabled.” Instead, this term should be used only for those who are making a continuous and concerted effort to develop meaningful and measurable skills in one or more languages other than English.

With this in mind, we recommend setting aside the goal of creating a language-primed force of individuals who can quickly learn another language when the need arises. Instead, we recommend focusing on the long-term development of proficiency among a subset of officers in a wide variety of languages so officers who are proficient in a given language will be available when the need arises. Specifically, the Air Force could ensure that large groups of personnel of varying levels of proficiency are available for each strategic language and that small groups of individuals are dedicated to learning other nonstrategic but highly underrepresented languages. Such groups could be engineered to ensure that, regardless of the demands of the future, personnel who speak a given language are already available to meet the need.⁸

Teasing apart the various outcomes helps clarify which ones are best addressed through language commissioning policies and which are better addressed in other ways.

These outcomes differ from one another in the policies likely to be required for success. Also, any given outcome will most likely require multiple supporting policies. Tailoring each policy to the specific outcome also significantly increases the likelihood of success. Each objective will thus also require distinct lines of funding and oversight.

Make Language Requirements for Commissioning Flexible, and Include a Variety of Incentives and Opportunities

The Air Force has some 65,000 officers on many different career tracks, performing a wide variety of jobs. With all these people engaged in different occupations and with varying backgrounds, interests, and aptitudes, the one-size-fits-all policy of having all incoming officers language proficient at a 3/3 or even a 2/2 by 2016 is unrealistic. Our data underscore that a policy to achieve universal competency among all officers in either the near or distant future not only would demand significant investments in resources, time, and effort but would also not yield enough candidates able to meet the requirement. In addition, in light of the demands of the standard four-year college curriculum, a minimum of five semesters of language study would be a substantial additional burden on undergraduates.

Therefore, our second recommendation is that commissioning requirements for language proficiency be flexible enough that most potential candidates could reasonably meet them and should include a variety of minimum requirements and incentives that accommodate and reward multiple levels of capability. This approach would be more effective in the short term because it would encourage language learning in both advanced language learners and beginners and those with competing academic priorities, such as engineers.

The following are examples of multiple approaches that could, in combination, serve as a comprehensive multipronged language commissioning policy:

⁸ One of the most frequent reasons for language attrition is lack of use, generally due to a lack of persons with whom to practice. By intentionally creating and managing language-specific groups, the Air Force can engineer communities in each language that can be tapped for use in practice and maintenance efforts.

1. The Air Force could target and offer scholarships or other incentives to those majoring or minoring in a language to bring in larger numbers of officers highly proficient in a second language. More college students might be encouraged to choose a second or third language as a minor or major if doing so enhanced their opportunities for commissioning or if their tuition were covered.⁹ In these cases, establishing proficiency minimums for commissioning would be appropriate, provided that the expectations for minors were lower than those for majors and that the minimums differed according to language difficulty. For example, requiring a minimum of a 2+/2+ for those majoring in French, a relatively easy language, might be both appropriate and achievable for nearly all French majors; French minors might be expected to score only a 1/1. On the other hand, those majoring in Mandarin, a much more difficult language, might be expected to achieve only a 1/0+ (in listening and reading, respectively), and minors might be safe at a 0+/0.¹⁰
2. Offering commissioning bonuses to anyone entering with skills in certain languages could serve as a powerful incentive for everyone else. The amount should depend on demonstrated proficiency and should be higher for rare (or strategically important) languages. To encourage relative beginners, a bonus program could reward even low levels of proficiency.
3. Providing flexible, online language training courses for ROTC cadets could also be a way to help them fulfill the requirement. Given that many college students might not be able to fit a language minor into their schedules and that courses in strategic languages might not be available at many schools, such a flexible alternative would make second-language learning more feasible. DLI might provide such courses, and as an incentive, participants could receive bonuses as they progressed through the program.
4. Many undergraduates, such as engineering majors, might not be able to dedicate enough time to language learning, even with flexible learning opportunities. The Air Force could address this challenge by providing additional time and resources that did not interfere with or detract from the requirements of four-year degree programs. For example, the goal of a 2/2 might be achievable for students in any major, even engineers, if the Air Force offered an additional year or more of study to be spent entirely on language-intensive coursework and immersion experiences. Although a one-year extension program might not appeal to everyone, our survey found that most officers would have been willing to take a language. They did, however, agree that taking extra language courses might have distracted from their major or other classes. Our survey also found that many officers viewed the option of being able to spend an extra year in college to study a language favorably.
5. The Air Force could require everyone to get at least some language exposure by completing at least two college-level semesters (or the equivalent) in a second language. This would not be expected to result in any appreciable gain in language proficiency, especially since the courses could be completed by freshmen and the skills never practiced again. However, it would lay a foundation for future training efforts and, at a minimum,

⁹ Scholarships for foreign-language majors have been available through ROTC in the recent past.

¹⁰ Note that these levels are presented only to illustrate how they can and should vary. Sources at DLI could better predict what would be reasonable for majors and minors in each language, and the requirements should be revisited after any policy is implemented to see if any goals are too difficult or too easy for college students to meet.

would give everyone some language experience. Students would be offered incentives to take less commonly taught but strategically important languages. One added benefit of this requirement, when combined with bonuses for different proficiency levels, would be that some might decide to take additional semesters or maintain what they already learned to earn a commissioning bonus. The Air Force could also further encourage continued study by covering ROTC cadets' tuition costs for any language courses taken beyond the two semesters.

6. The Air Force could also offer immersion opportunities to those studying a language. Consistent with past research, our data show that those with both classroom and immersion experience reached higher levels of proficiency. Therefore, immersion opportunities should be made available and be accommodated during college. For ROTC, this would mean ensuring that summer immersion is allowable within the ROTC training curriculum. The Air Force would need to modify the program to allow students to leave for extended periods and still be able to meet the other ROTC training demands.
7. Finally, the policy should recognize that some candidates might need to be allowed to enter with no language proficiency and/or no language coursework. It might be a tall order to expect officers earning specialized graduate degrees (such as medical doctors and attorneys) to learn a second language in addition to their other requirements. Similar exceptions might be needed to ensure meeting recruiting needs for certain majors, such as engineers. It would be important to accommodate exceptions for these and other special groups of candidates as needed.

The following are some examples that, when combined, would create a well-balanced and flexible set of language commissioning policies:

- offering scholarships for majoring or minoring in a language
- offering commissioning bonuses for varying levels of proficiency
- providing distance learning courses in strategic languages for ROTC cadets
- paying for some to spend an extra year in college to concentrate on language study
- requiring two college semesters of language for commissioning, then paying tuition for language courses beyond two semesters
- making more immersion programs available to ROTC students
- accommodating waivers and exceptions within the policy for certain groups.

This list is not exhaustive. Implementing a varied menu of such options would provide the flexibility needed to ensure that the Air Force can fulfill its wide variety of other commissioning needs yet would still provide a host of incentives to increase the depth and range of language skills of new officers overall.

This approach would, however, require significant oversight to manage and implement the multiple commissioning policies. Moreover, many of the policies would require dedicated funds and staff (e.g., scholarships, commissioning bonuses, and providing distance learning courses).

Implement Policies for Maintaining and Enhancing Language Skills

Language skills, when left idle, deteriorate quickly (Weltens, 1987). For this reason, any language policy aimed at having certain levels of proficiency at commissioning should be accom-

panied by a plan for maintaining that proficiency after commissioning. Therefore, career-long language development should be a vital component of Air Force language policy.

Many of our recommendations for career-long language development are similar to those for commissioning. For example, we recommend including multiple types and levels of incentives for improvement and making time and opportunities available for training. One incentive would be to link skills to career outcomes. An important finding of our survey was that, while officers considered language skills important, the majority saw them as unrelated to career success. This revealed that officers do not currently see a positive connection between language skills and career outcomes. Currently, second-language skills play no role in performance evaluations. For that reason, if learning a second language takes time away from primary duties, it can actually hinder promotion outcomes. If the Air Force intends to encourage second-language learning and maintenance, it must align career incentives with these goals, encourage officers to pursue training, and make it possible to participate in training without hindering career progress.

Another incentive would be to offer additional pay for higher language proficiency. Pay for proficiency does exist in the Air Force in the form of the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus. In its current form, however, the bonus does not provide optimum incentives for language development; it is currently available only for high levels of proficiency (typically 2/2 or higher) and is higher for in-demand and strategic languages (DoD Instruction 7280.03, 2007). The idea of increasing pay for increasing levels of language proficiency is good; unfortunately, payment starts at such advanced levels of proficiency that someone who is just starting out would not qualify for the bonus for many years. This incentive is thus enticing only to those who already have high levels of proficiency. Adding a series of lower-level bonuses to reward lower-level skills would be more likely to encourage those at more basic levels.

As an alternative to broadening the range of skills supported by the Foreign Language Proficiency Pay program or as a supplement, the Air Force could also consider offering bonuses to individuals participating in a structured language training program. Participants could receive bonuses for demonstrating incremental improvement at predetermined points in the training program. For example, if the Air Force provided language instruction once a week for a three years, the program could establish the proficiency levels that would earn bonuses at set intervals, such as 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, and 36 months. Those performing at high levels at the six-month interval would receive the highest bonus amount (say \$1,000); those at slightly lower levels would receive a lower amount (say \$500), and those at the lowest levels get a still lower amount (say \$250). Another goal tied to varying levels of bonuses (say, \$1,000 and \$500 and \$250) would then be set for the next six-month mark.

Our next suggestion is to provide language training to officers during work hours or when spouses can participate. Many survey respondents found these to be the most attractive options for language learning. While language training along with immersion tours could be voluntary for well-established officers, mandatory training for new officers also makes sense.¹¹ Requiring all officers to attend language training once a week for the first four years of their careers would quickly realize the vision of having them all attain 2/2 proficiency. More important,

¹¹ Note that a voluntary career-long language training program, Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP), is under way in the Air Force (for more information, see McKeen, 2010). However, due to resource constraints, the program can accommodate only a small handful of highly qualified individuals. We would recommend vastly expanding the number of people who are qualified to participate.

instituting mandatory language training would allow the Air Force to control and manage the overall flow and inventory of languages. Combined with an incentive structure for achieving incremental proficiency levels, such a policy, although very expensive to implement, would be a recipe for success.

Officers in our survey also expressed concerns about lack of opportunities to utilize language skills while serving (see, for example, the survey write-in comments in Appendix F). The Air Force does have career fields for which language skills would be pertinent, such as regional affairs specialists and political affairs specialists, but few people are engaged in jobs that can use these skills. If individuals were offered opportunities to take on temporary duty assignments that utilized their language skills, many would likely take advantage of them, particularly if such assignments were viewed favorably in promotions. It is worth noting again that, at present, assignments geared toward foreign-language skills tend to be disadvantageous for career progression in the Air Force or, at best, considered a diversion. Offering foreign-language assignments and making them advantageous to officers will motivate interest in gaining language proficiency and allow the Air Force to actually leverage the language skills of its officers. Such leveraging of existing skills in job assignments will make the needed investments in building language proficiency actually pay off.

A final suggestion is to improve Air Force personnel data system records on current and past language proficiency and use them in making job assignments. At present, only current (not past) DLPT scores are on record, and then only for those who choose to test. Because high levels of proficiency are required for the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus, those who would not be likely to qualify typically do not attempt the test and, therefore, are not recorded in the current personnel data system. In addition, not all personnel are assessed for language aptitude, and language preferences and interests are not on record.¹²

The potential benefits of these policies would include promoting career-long development of language skills and, in turn, enhance the success of language commissioning policies. However, if precommissioning efforts are not linked with such development efforts, language commissioning policies may not yield long-lasting improvements in officer proficiency.

Commissioning policies and career-long development policies are overseen by different Air Force agencies; cooperation among these agencies is vital for the success of this recommendation.

Ensure Buy-In from Air Force Officers at All Levels

Research has shown that what an individual believes about a skill's importance to his or her career can affect whether efforts to develop that skill are effective (for a review, see Yamnill and McLean, 2001, and Burke and Hutchins, 2007). Our survey showed that, while officers tended to agree that language capability is important for the warfighting mission, they tended to see it as much less relevant to their own jobs and careers. This finding suggests that, even if language development were made mandatory, the lack of buy-in for an officer's personal career success may hinder the success of development efforts. The best way to mitigate that possibility would be to launch an Air Force-wide campaign to change officers' views about the relevance of a second language to all jobs and to back that up by tying that skill directly to important career outcomes, including promotions. Using language skills as a positive factor in promotion

¹² It is worth noting that many of our survey respondents voiced a strong desire to participate in language training. There should be an official record of that interest.

decisions would dispel lingering sentiments that these skills are not personally relevant. Until the Air Force makes such changes, these views are likely to continue and to affect language-learning motivation.

Making language training widely available, providing time to attend development courses and immersion programs during the regular workday, and offering incentives and extra pay for continuously developing those skills (even at initially low levels) would send a strong signal to personnel about just how important these skills are to the Air Force. Conversely, failing to provide those incentives, resources, and opportunities sends the opposite message.

Some possible strong positive signals include

- establishing clear rewards for success
- tying language proficiency to performance evaluations and career outcomes
- making language training programs widely available
- providing time to attend development courses
- making immersion programs available during the regular workday
- offering incentives and extra pay for continuous skill development (even at initially low levels).

A clear and consistent message will require coordination, cooperation, and buy-in from many levels of Air Force leadership. However, only minimal resources would be required beyond those discussed in earlier recommendations.

Evaluate the Success of Each New Program, and Adjust the Program Accordingly

Based on our review of the literature and the results of our survey, we recommend that the Air Force use multiple approaches to maximize its success in increasing the language proficiency of its officers. However, many questions about those approaches remain. How should the Air Force decide who is best suited for immersion programs? How much time each week or month should officers be given to practice and maintain their skills? How often should they be tested to ensure that they are not losing the skills they have? How much additional pay is enough to motivate learning and make less-studied, more-difficult languages attractive? In this sense, more research is clearly needed.

However, the most informative research efforts will be those that (1) occur after concerted attempts have been made to begin implementing new language programs and (2) involve a continuous and systematic process of evaluating and informing changes to the new programs. That process should involve the following steps:

- Detail all the desired outcomes or objectives of a given program and prepare an official statement describing them (examples include improved attitudes toward other cultures, improved language proficiency, improved interest in language development).
- Design and implement a program or set of programs to achieve the specified objectives (such as taking classes during work hours, adding a commissioning requirement, or providing incentives for maintenance).
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the program(s). Measure a variety of consequences including those specifically stated to be outcomes of the program (examples include measuring officer reactions to the program, changes in proficiency levels, and rates of participation). Compare the success of the program across participants and modify aspects of

the program to determine which components are most successful at meeting the stated objectives.

- Specify other research questions that need to be addressed (e.g., Who should be given the opportunity to participate in this program? How should they be selected to participate?) and pursue them.
- Modify the program(s) using information gleaned from the research.
- Institutionalize career-long assessments as checks to confirm that the programs are working as intended (e.g., establish mandatory language proficiency testing every few years to measure language maintenance and improvement). Examine the results of the assessments to identify new training needs every few years.
- Identify training needs and use them to establish new programs or to modify the existing programs and repeat the steps described above.

This repeated process of specifying objectives, developing programs, evaluating the outcomes of the programs, and modifying the policies based on that research is the cornerstone of any well-designed performance improvement intervention. As such, it should drive the development of all future Air Force language policies.

Such research efforts would serve to clarify the goals and quantify the success of each program. That information, in turn, would lead to modification or termination of unsuccessful programs. These efforts would also allow continuous assessment of training needs and gaps and could be used to drive policy changes.

These efforts could also help save resources by concentrating them on programs with proven track records, experimental programs aimed at improving success, and new programs intended to fill training gaps.

Next Steps

The following are the key immediate next steps for establishing Air Force policy for ensuring a language-enabled officer force:

- Produce a detailed policy statement clearly defining all the intended outcomes and goals of language policies, taking care to distinguish the aims of developing language professionals from the aims of developing a language-enabled officer force.
- Implement several precommissioning language opportunities. For each, produce an official statement specifying which specific goal(s) or outcome(s) (from those outlined in the policy statement) the opportunity is aimed at achieving.
- Implement postcommissioning language maintenance and development programs aimed directly at continuing and improving development resulting from the precommissioning policies. For each produce an official statement specifying which specific goal(s) or outcome(s) (from those outlined in the policy statement) the opportunity is aimed at achieving.
- Implement new policies tying language outcomes to career success and institute a campaign to gain buy-in at all levels of the Air Force about the importance of language proficiency for each and every Air Force job.

- Conduct research examining the effectiveness of each new precommissioning program and postcommissioning program at achieving its stated goals and evaluating the success of efforts to gain buy-in. Make changes to programs and policies based on the results of that research.

Closing Comment

Many official DoD and Air Force sources describe language skills as a key warfighting competency.¹³ Given the clear consensus that language skills are important, there is little argument that the spirit of our sponsor's vision, establishing a language-proficient officer force, is a worthwhile aim for the Air Force. The results of our study do not diminish the value of that vision. Instead, our results identify the most effective, efficient, and realistic means for achieving that vision and show that there are important trade-offs that would occur in striving to meet it that must be considered. We hope this study will stimulate discussion about those trade-offs and help the Air Force meet its call for a language-enabled force.

¹³ See, for instance, DoD, 2005; U.S. Air Force, 2009; and DoD, 2010.

