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2011 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Groups

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2011 SERVICE ACADEMY GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS

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The lead analysts on this assessment were Paul Cook, SRA International, Inc., and Rachel Lipari, DMDC. Written transcripts of each of the sessions were provided by Niziankiewicz & Miller Reporting Services, LLC; Corbin & Hook Reporting, Inc.; Gail Sherry Court Reporting Associates, Inc.; and Jennifer Windham Court Reporting, Inc. Policy officials contributing to the development of focus group content include: Sharon Cooper, Executive Director, Defense Human Resources Activity; Kaye Whitley, Darlene Sullivan, and Anita Boyd (Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office); Jimmy Love, (Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity); LTC Kay Emerson and MAJ Missy Rosol (U.S. Military Academy); CAPT Diana Cangelosi and LCDR Franklin Lendor (U.S. Naval Academy); Amanda Lords (U.S. Air Force Academy); Mr. Antonio Farias and LT Nic Jarboe (U.S. Coast Guard Academy).

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Executive Summary

The *2011 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Group (2011 SAGR)* study is a focus group assessment conducted per U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. *2011 SAGR* is part of an assessment cycle at the Military Service Academies (MSAs) that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups. Focus groups were conducted at all three MSAs as well as the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. Separate sessions were conducted for male and female students in each of the four class years and a single mixed-gender session of upper classmen was conducted at each academy.

Data from the focus groups were analyzed qualitatively to identify major themes and ideas conveyed across the sessions. For each theme, supporting comments from the focus group participants are included. Analysts used a combination of topical coding and repeated reviews to gather specific comments that supported the emerging themes. Where students differed in their opinions on a topic, both perspectives are presented in separate findings. Although focus group findings cannot be generalized to all students at each of the Academies, findings serve as illustrations of situations and themes for consideration by Academy officials as they review their programs.

Findings are presented in separate chapters for each Academy. Within chapters, the major themes are presented with specific findings and supporting comments from the students. Each comment identifies the gender of the student. Although the topics reported are similar for each Academy, no attempt was made to compare or generalize findings across Academies.

2011 SERVICE ACADEMY GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Service Academies strive to provide a safe educational and leadership development environment for their students. Working with their Service Headquarters and the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), the Academies have implemented programs to reduce sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact/sexual assault, and to provide reporting and victim care procedures. Recurring evaluation of these programs is helpful for developing process improvements aimed at reducing instances of sexual harassment and assault and enhancing victim care.

One source of information for evaluating these programs and for assessing the gender relations environment at the Academies involves quantifiable feedback from students through a representative survey. Another source of information involves qualitative feedback from students through focus groups with a moderator who is trained to facilitate discussion on these topics. This report presents findings from the recent *2011 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Group (2011 SAGR)* study. This introductory chapter provides background on why this study was conducted, a description of the focus group methodology, analysis methods and limits, and a brief overview of subsequent chapters.

U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 codified an assessment cycle at the Academies that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups. The first assessment in this series was conducted in 2004 by the DoD Inspector General (IG). Responsibility for subsequent assessments was transferred to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) beginning in 2005. This requirement applies to the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), and U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). The U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), the only Federal Military Academy within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is not required to participate in the assessments codified by U.S. Code 10. However, USCGA officials requested they be included, beginning in 2008, in order to evaluate and improve their programs addressing sexual harassment and assault.

Focus Group Methodology

Unlike other research methods that employ statistical sampling and extrapolation of findings to the larger population, focus groups follow a qualitative research approach to collect subjective details from participants on a limited number of topics. The design for these focus groups was replicated for each session at each Academy. Although the results cannot be generalized to the population of the Service Academies, they provide insights into issues and ideas for further consideration. Procedures for selecting participants, developing the questions, and analyzing the data are described below.

Selection of Participants

Participation in the 2011 focus groups was voluntary. Participants were selected at random at each Service Academy and offered the opportunity to participate. To select participants, each Service Academy first supplied DMDC a roster of all cadets or midshipmen.[1] DMDC randomized the list of students within clusters defined by gender and class year. The rosters were then returned to each respective Academy and it was the responsibility of each Academy to use their randomized list to identify the first ten students who were available (e.g., did not have a class scheduled during the focus group) to attend the focus group appropriate for their gender and class year. Students were contacted by their Academy and asked if they would voluntarily participate in the focus group. Additional students were selected from the randomized lists as necessary to achieve eight to ten students committed to attending. In some cases, students who agreed to participate did not show up at the scheduled session. For that reason, session sizes varied. For the mixed-gender focus groups, similar procedures were used, selecting an equal number of junior and senior men and women to achieve sessions of approximately 10 students.

Development of Questions

To begin the collaborative effort of developing focus group questions, DMDC analysts drafted potential questions by reviewing comments and findings from the *2010 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey (2010 SAGR).* Analysts looked for follow-up topics that might clarify or expand upon findings from the previous year's survey. A list of preliminary questions was generated and provided to SAPRO, as well as to the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODEMO) and to each Service Academy. A revised set of questions incorporating comments from SAPRO, ODEMO, and the Academies was compiled and then returned to each for final revisions. Six question areas with detailed subquestions (probing questions) were presented to focus group participants. The topics addressed were:

1. Sexual Assault—awareness of the behaviors that comprise unwanted sexual contact, discussion of the incidence rates for men and women from the *2010 SAGR* survey, the role of force and alcohol in sexual assault, and discussion of results of the survey where cadets we asked if sexual assault occurs more or less often at their Academy than in civilian colleges or universities

2. Reporting—understanding from students' perspectives why someone who experienced unwanted sexual contact would report it or not, to whom would one most likely make a restricted or unrestricted report, recommendations on how to encourage more victims of unwanted sexual contact to come forward and make a report, and discussion of the treatment of alleged offenders during an investigation and trial period

3. Factors Affecting Sexual Assault—advice students would give to an incoming student or what advice they would have liked to have received when they were new

[1] The roster excluded foreign national students, as well as exchange students.

4. Sexual Harassment/Sexist Behavior—discussion of the sexual harassment and sexist behaviors incidence rates from the *2010 SAGR* survey, why these behaviors occur, and how their training in sexual harassment awareness and prevention affects the behaviors

5. Leadership Response—opinions on whether leadership at all levels take prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment seriously, examples to illustrate why they believed the way they did, situations that had the most impact (positive or negative) on their opinions, and discussion of how well cadets felt prepared by the Academy to deal with issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment when they are commissioned and have leadership responsibilities of their own

6. Training—discussion of training received and comments on the most and least effective training

7. Bystander Intervention in Sexual Assaults—focus group participants were read a scenario of a party situation and asked to share their opinions of the actions students would most likely take to step in and prevent a potential sexual assault

8. Recommendations—what more the Academy could do to decrease sexual assault and sexual harassment[2]

Conducting the Focus Groups

Nine focus groups were scheduled in 90-minute sessions at each Academy. Separate focus groups were conducted by gender and class year with one additional mixed-gender session. Focus groups were held in conference rooms or classrooms on each Service Academy campus.

DMDC provided focus group facilitators who led the sessions at all four Academies. A male facilitator led the male focus groups and a female facilitator led the female focus groups. Both a male and female facilitator led the mixed-gender sessions. The facilitators conducted the subsequent qualitative analysis of the data. DMDC provided a female recorder who used a stenographic machine to transcribe all comments from students and the facilitator. Transcripts were provided to each Academy after they were cleaned of all identifying comments and names. No audio or video recording was made of any focus group session.

All focus group sessions were governed by a number of ground rules, most notably that they were all non-attribution sessions. Students were advised of the purpose for the recorder, and they were informed that their names were not recorded and their comments would not be attributed back to them. Students were encouraged to provide information generally but not to specify personal experiences, names, or other identifying details. Students were also advised not to share information learned within the focus groups after the session was concluded.

[2] The focus groups concluded with an open invitation to express any other thoughts regarding gender-related issues at the Academy and any additional recommendations for ways the Academy could reduce sexual assault and sexual harassment. These recommendations are not reported separately; rather they are integrated with other discussion points on similar topics.

Analysis Methodology

Data from the focus groups were analyzed qualitatively for major themes and ideas conveyed across the sessions. The order of presentation does not imply that any one theme is more important than any other. For each theme, supporting comments from the focus group participants are included. The supporting comments do not include every comment made on a particular theme; rather they illustrate the theme in the words of the cadets and midshipmen. No attempt was made to quantify the number of comments made on a specific theme.

The results in this study are based on qualitative analysis—findings cannot be generalized to all students at each of the Academies. Findings should be viewed as illustrations of situations and themes for consideration by Academy officials as they review their programs. Findings may also be viewed as a general perspective on students' views of sexual harassment and assault at their Academies, but they do not portray a statistical report on incidence rates or performance of response and prevention programs.

Categorization of Topics

Focus group analysts reviewed transcripts to identify major themes. Although findings tended to cluster around the main questions asked in the sessions, categorization based on the questions was not an *a priori* requirement. Analysts were sensitive to themes that emerged from the discussions. Analysts used a combination of topical coding and repeated reviews to gather specific comments that supported the emerging themes. Where students differed in their opinions on a topic, both perspectives are presented in separate findings.

Organization of Findings

Findings are presented in separate chapters for each Academy. Within chapters, the major themes are presented with specific findings and supporting comments from the students. Each comment identifies the gender of the student. Caution must be exercised in reviewing these findings because comments should not be viewed as representative of all other students. Finally, although many of the themes are similar across the four Academies, each Academy should be viewed separately. No attempt was made to compare or generalize across Academies.