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*Office of Inspector General*

*Audit Report*

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**Postgraduate Training Program**

**U.S. Coast Guard**

Report Number MA-1998-148

Date Issued: May 26, 1998





**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
Of Transportation

Office of Inspector General

# Memorandum

Subject: INFORMATION: Report on Postgraduate  
Training Program, U.S. Coast Guard  
Report Number: MA-1998-148

Date: May 26, 1998

From:   
*for* **Lawrence H. Weintrob**  
**Assistant Inspector General for Auditing**

Reply to  
Attn. of: JA-40

To: Chief of Staff  
U.S. Coast Guard

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

This report presents the results of our audit of the Postgraduate Training Program (Program), now called the Coast Guard Advanced Education Program. The Program provides full-time postgraduate training for selected Coast Guard officers. The audit objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Program. We conducted the audit at Coast Guard Headquarters in accordance with Government Auditing Standards prescribed by the Comptroller General of the United States.

The Coast Guard budgeted \$2.3 million for tuition cost for Fiscal Year 1998. Tuition cost is about 10 percent of the Program's costs, with personnel compensation, including allowances, accounting for the remaining 90 percent. Based on information provided by the Coast Guard, we calculated that, in FY 1997, the total cost of the Program was about \$18 million for salaries, benefits, tuition, and permanent change of station.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To determine the effectiveness of the Program, we reviewed a judgmental sample of 95 of 195 Program participants who graduated from the law and dental programs in 1992, and the masters degree program in 1994. The sample was selected based on the time required for participants to complete obligated service (usually 5 and 3 years, respectively), be assigned to a "payback" tour of duty, and serve in the Coast Guard after meeting their service obligations. We also reviewed four graduates who requested relief from completing their service obligations.

As of April 1, 1998, the Coast Guard had not established performance measurements for the Program under the Government Performance and Results Act. However, the Chief, Office of Training and Performance Consulting, stated performance measures for the Program will be incorporated in the Coast Guard's Standard External Evaluation Program, which has been developed and is awaiting review and signature by the Director of the Reserve and Training Directorate. The performance measures will require program participants to complete questionnaires regarding the training received.

## RESULTS

The Program provided advanced degrees to officers who subsequently served at least one payback tour of duty in the specialty associated with their training, fulfilled their service obligations, and remained in the Coast Guard after completing their service obligations. The Coast Guard also took appropriate action for the four graduates who requested relief from their service obligations. Of the four requests, Coast Guard denied two, granted a waiver to one due to illness, and allowed one graduate to fulfill his service obligation by applying leave for time owed.

Except for law and medical billets, postgraduate degrees were desirable, but not mandatory. We identified the need for Coast Guard to better justify officers' participation in the Program. A breakdown of the five most common courses of study for advanced degrees: information systems, law, electronics engineering, civil engineering, and financial management, is included in the exhibit to this report. Advanced degrees were required for the law and medical billets. In FYs 1995 through 1997, the Coast Guard provided advanced degrees for 77 officers in law and medical billets.

The Coast Guard Training and Education Manual (Manual) outlines the Program's policies and procedures. The Manual describes "General Detail" as training allowance and support allowance billets. General Detail billets are provided in addition to the Coast Guard's authorized operating strength. The Chief, Training and Performance Consulting stated Congress provided 283 training allowance billets in FY 1997, under the Coast Guard's General Detail. In FYs 1995 through 1997, the Coast Guard maintained about 260 training allowance billets annually, which were above operational requirements.

At the time of our audit, the Coast Guard could not provide supporting justification for the number of officers assigned to each course in the Program. The Chief, Training and Performance Consulting explained that previous justifications for each training allowance billet was developed during the last 30 years. For example, the Program Manager for the Law program stated the Coast Guard currently had 130 law billets for officers, but had 164 officers with legal degrees. During FY 1997, the

Coast Guard had 26 officers attending law school on a full-time basis. The 26 training allowance billets were not supported by specific future needs, but were based on the number of training billets traditionally allotted. The Chief, Training and Performance Consulting, acknowledged improvement was needed in justifying advanced degrees, stating the Coast Guard would develop justification for each training billet as part of an expanded review process.

The Coast Guard has subsequently taken several actions to address our audit concerns. The Coast Guard established requirements to validate training billets and implemented a Peer Review Group process. The Peer Review Group has reviewed more than 1,000 requests for billets to be filled by officers with advanced degrees, but validated only 691. The Peer Review Group then ranked the validated billets, recommending allocations for advanced education to support the highest priority needs. The Coast Guard also has performed a cross check to ensure that no one is sent for advanced education for a military billet that may be converted to a civilian position. Furthermore, in January 1998, the Secretary issued a "Learning and Development Framework" to provide the Department's workforce with the best possible education and training. This initiative, which includes advanced education such as that provided by the Program, is intended to improve individual and organizational performance within the Department.

#### ACTION REQUIRED

Since the Coast Guard has initiated actions to address our concerns, we are making no recommendations, and no response to this report is necessary. We appreciate the cooperation and assistance of Coast Guard representatives. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-1992, or Michael E. Goldstein at (212) 264-8701.

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**Postgraduate Training Courses**  
 Fiscal Years 1995 through 1997

COURSE OF STUDY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS			TOTAL
	FY 97	FY 96	FY 95	
INFORMATION SYSTEMS/TECH MANAGEMENT	28	26	24	78
LAW	25	26	25	76
ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	26	24	25	75
CIVIL ENGINEERING	23	24	25	72
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	17	20	22	59
Total students enrolled in these courses	119	120	121	360
Total students enrolled in the Program	255	260	273	788
% of students enrolled in these courses Compared to total Program	47%	46%	44%	46%