

Study of Civilian Licensure and Certification for Veterans

Executive Summary

The education, training and experience that are obtained during an individual's military service provide tangible benefits for the nation's defense, but can also contribute significantly to a skilled civilian workforce. The military invests a significant amount of money in the training of its uniformed personnel, providing a broad base of knowledge and experiences that can carry over to civilian occupations. In fact, civilians are often recruited into the military on the basis of, among other things, their improved prospects for civilian employment once they leave the military. However, the inability to meet civilian credentialing standards can preclude transitioning military personnel from realizing the benefits of their military training and experience. To determine what barriers might be confronted by transitioning military personnel attempting to obtain civilian credentials, the Study of Civilian Licensure and Certification for Veterans was undertaken.

Background

In the course of pursuing the basic mission of national defense, our nation's military services also produce significant coincidental benefits to the economy: support of scientific research, infrastructure development, and investment in human capital through extensive personnel training activities. As of the end of Fiscal Year 1994, there were approximately 1.6 million members of the military services on active duty. Further, there were almost one million members in the Selected Reserves. Even with the defense drawdown complete, over 200,000 members of the active component leave the military each year. Clearly, these exiting servicemembers offer excellent skills and experience to the civilian sector.

The military is a selective employer and represents an unparalleled educational and training institution. The majority of jobs to which today's soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen are assigned have civilian counterparts. The health care field is an especially important occupational category in the military services. In 1994 over 21 percent of officers and 6 percent of enlisted personnel were engaged in health-related specialties. Equipment repair and maintenance specialties, including aircraft maintenance, were also large categories, accounting for 20 percent of enlisted personnel and 10-percent of officers. -Servicemembers in this group of occupations maintain and repair aircraft, trucks, automobiles, specialized vehicles, wire communications, missiles, precision equipment, power generators, and other engines and equipment. Only one in six enlisted members serve in purely combat jobs, whereas one in four serve in high-tech jobs in fields like electronic equipment repair, communications, or other allied specialties.

Because most military personnel eventually leave and enter the civilian labor market, the benefits of military training in basic and specialized job skills are particularly critical to the continued productivity and competitiveness of the civilian labor force. Training and the transferability to civilian careers of skills gained in the military is a significant inducement to enlistment. Servicemembers expect to be able to use skills gained during military service to their advantage when they re-enter the civilian labor market. Data from a recently completed study of Army veterans, for instance, found that nearly 70 percent rated the opportunity to gain job skills as an important or very important reason for their enlisting in the military (Barnes, Ramsberger, & DiFazio, 1995). The all-volunteer military depends on perception of the value of career-relevant training as an important recruitment incentive. Barriers to transfer of military training to civilian careers may discourage potential enlistees and hinder achievement of recruiting objectives.

Study Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Study of Civilian Licensure and Certification for Veterans was designed:

- To determine the extent to which military training and experience are recognized by civilian licensure and certification boards; and
- To identify methods to improve transitioning servicemembers' ability to become credentialed in the civilian workforce.

Given the wide range of occupational specialties in the military services, it was necessary to limit research into credentialing to those groups of occupations that are most likely to have licensure or certification requirements. Accordingly, the occupations examined as part of this study were limited to the aircraft maintenance and healthcare fields due to the large relative concentrations of these occupational specialties in the military and because of the known extent of licensure and certification requirements for these occupations in the civilian sector. Within the aircraft maintenance and healthcare fields, the scope of research was further limited to enlisted personnel. This was due to the fact that the credentialing requirements for officer positions tend to be met while in the service, while there is more likely to be disparity between military and civilian qualifications for enlisted occupations.

A number of research activities were undertaken to carry out the objectives of this study. Specifically, the following steps were taken:

- Matched relevant military occupational codes to civilian occupational codes;
- Identified occupations subject to certification or licensure;

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- Collected information from credentialing boards on requirements and special considerations for veterans; and
- Researched military efforts to ease transition for servicemembers to civilian careers.

Key Concepts

The need to establish standards surrounding professional and technical competence for individuals practicing in certain fields has led to the establishment of credentialing bodies that develop uniform standards that must be met prior to entry into these fields. It is important to understand the distinction between the types of standards because they have implications for the ability of individuals to become employed in a given field. In this study three key credentialing terms are used: licensure, certification and accreditation.

- ***Licensure.*** Licenses are granted by federal, state and local government agencies. Licensure is the process by which such an authorizes an Individual to engage in a given occupation. Licenses are typically required to practice an occupation, and, in order to obtain a license, an individual may have to meet any number of qualifications. For the occupations in this study, two types of licensure were examined - federal licensure and state licensure.
- ***Certification.*** Certification is the process by which a non-governmental agency or association grants recognition of competence to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications, as specified by that agency or association. Unlike licensure, certification is usually optional, but may enhance an individual's marketability to prospective employers.
- ***Accreditation.*** Accreditation is the process by which an agency or an organization evaluates and recognizes a program of study or an institution as meeting certain predetermined qualifications or standards. Accreditation is particularly important in this study because a credentialing agency will often require completion of an accredited training program or the completion of a degree from an accredited institution.

Civilian Credentialing of Aircraft Maintenance Occupations

The type of credentialing most applicable to aircraft maintenance occupations is federal licensure. Two federal agencies grant licenses in the aircraft maintenance field -- the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC.) Unlike state licenses, these federal licenses do not necessarily apply to a specific civilian occupations but rather they apply to a certain set of

working conditions or a group of occupations. In many instances the federal licenses are required to obtain a civilian position; however, in some instances whether or not an individual needs a license is up to the discretion of the employer.

FCC Licenses. The FCC grants approximately eight commercial radio operator's licenses, permits and endorsements. In general, these licenses are applicable to service personnel who maintain or repair radio, radar, navigation and communication equipment. Different types of credentials are required depending upon where the radio equipment is located, the station's frequency and power, and the mission of the station or ship on which it is located. Therefore, until a servicemember decides where he or she wants to work outside of the military, it is difficult to determine whether or not an FCC license would need to be obtained.

For a number of reasons, obtaining an FCC license does not appear to present much of a problem for exiting military personnel. First, the ability to obtain a license is based on an individual's knowledge, rather than on specific training or experience requirements. Second, testing materials and locations are widely accessible, making it easy for individuals to prepare for the FCC licensing exam. Finally, the passing rate for FCC exams is fairly high, suggesting that the exam content does not pose a major barrier to licensure. Although obtaining an FCC license appears to be fairly straightforward, in order for military service personnel to be best prepared, it would be useful to provide information to service personnel in these occupational areas about FCC licenses early in their careers.

FAA Licenses. The FAA grants four licenses related to aircraft maintenance: (1) the airframe and powerplant mechanic's certificate, (2) the inspection authorization, (3) the repairman's certificate and (4) the flight engineer certificate. Due to the large numbers of military positions, the airframe and powerplant certificate is the most pertinent certificate for enlisted service personnel in the aircraft maintenance field.

The FAA certificates are not required to obtain a civilian aircraft mechanic position. However, the certificate(s) increase the mechanic's ability to obtain a civilian position, their promotion potential, and their salary. Primarily due to inherent differences in training and experience between civilian and military aircraft maintenance, only some military aircraft maintenance positions qualify for the experience requirements of the FAA. For those who do not meet the FAA requirements, there are several options for obtaining credit for military training and experience. Credit is determined on a case by case basis by the FAA and aircraft maintenance schools. Military service personnel need to be informed early in their careers about realistic options for employment in civilian aviation and the ways to pursue and facilitate the process of obtaining credit for military training and experience.

Civilian Credentialing of Healthcare Occupations

Two types of credentialing apply to healthcare occupations - certification and state licensure. The vast majority of the civilian equivalents of healthcare related military occupational specialties are either licensed by a state or certified by a national organization. There are three main eligibility criteria established by certifying and licensing boards that affect whether or not transitioning military personnel will be granted licensure or certification, these are: (1) education and/or training, (2) work experience, and (3) exam scores. I

The number and type of eligibility criteria that must be met vary by occupation and there can be numerous combinations of the three criteria. The combinations of eligibility criteria that are applied vary according to the occupation and the certifying body. In most instances, only two of the three criteria are applied - for example, work experience and an exam - although, in some instances, all three may be required. The combinations of eligibility criteria that are applied have implications for the ability of transitioning military personnel to obtain licensure or certification.

For the types of civilian jobs that apply to enlisted personnel, the combinations of eligibility criteria that are most common are:

- Work experience and an exam; or
- Education/training and an exam; or, less frequently,
- Education/training, work experience, and an exam.

When work experience and exam are the predominant requirements, military personnel with relevant work experience typically do not encounter problems. Most credentialing bodies will consider military work experience in the same manner that they consider experience obtained in the civilian workforce. However, when education and training are the primary eligibility requirement - either with an exam or with experience and an exam - military personnel can face difficulties in obtaining recognition for two reasons. First, there is a movement towards requiring higher degrees for certain occupations making it difficult for some military personnel to become credentialed. Second, most education/training requirements usually entail completion of an accredited program and the number and types of accredited military training programs vary. The manner in which the military services have adapted to the education and training credentialing requirements vary by occupation and service.

Higher Degree Requirements. For the occupations that tend to have higher degree requirements in the civilian workforce, four alternative courses of action taken by the military have been identified: (1) reclassify the occupational specialty as an officer position (if the degree requirement is a bachelor's), (2) offer a two-year degree through a local community college, (3) if the occupational specialty is not deemed to

be mission critical, do away with the position altogether, or (4) make no attempt to address the degree requirements and continue to provide training that does not result in a degree. In instances where higher degrees are required by civilian credentialing boards, but are not offered in the military, it may be difficult for individuals leaving the military to become credentialed in the civilian workforce without obtaining additional training.

Accreditation Requirements. The requirement for accreditation appears to be the single most important factor in whether or not transitioning military personnel in health-related occupations will be able to become licensed or certified without additional training or education. This is due to the fact that many of the healthcare occupations studied require accreditation for both licensure and certification, and many credentialing bodies indicated that they will not consider training that is not accredited.

The impact that the accreditation requirement has on the ability of transitioning military personnel to obtain licensure and certification varies by occupation and across services. Since not all occupations have accreditation requirements, some military personnel are unaffected by the requirement. For those occupations with accreditation requirements, the military has taken some steps to obtain accreditation for certain programs. In some instances, if one branch has an accredited program and the others do not, the other branches will enter into inter-service training agreements with the branch that does so that their personnel will have the advantage of the accredited program. However, there are a few programs that are not accredited, making it difficult for people in these occupations to become credentialed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Civilian licensure and certification were developed in an attempt to enact professional standards for individuals who practice in various fields. There are a variety of reasons for establishing standards for entry into certain occupations. In some instances the standards are designed to confer professional status or promote professional growth, as in many white collar professional certifications, such as human resources or accounting. In other instances, the standards have been established for consumer protection - to ensure that individuals practicing in fields have the appropriate qualifications to perform quality work. This might apply to state licensure in such occupations as electricians or plumbers. But, in other instances, the consumer protection objective is carried a step further applying to issues of public safety. It is the safety issues that surround credentialing in the healthcare and aircraft maintenance fields that make the application of credentialing standards for these occupations fairly stringent.

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Although the credentialing organizations responsible for healthcare and aircraft maintenance occupations will often consider experience and training gained through other than traditional routes, such as the military, there often is not a lot of room for leeway in applying their standards. The impact of conferring licensure or certification on individuals who are not qualified to perform their job duties is too great to warrant lifting requirements for certain individuals. The results of this study suggest that problems related to credentialing do not stem from the application of overly stringent standards by civilian credentialing organizations, but rather to differences in the training and experience obtained in the military and civilian workforces. Accordingly, if there is an onus for adaptation, in some instances, it must be placed on the military, as opposed to the civilian credentialing organizations. In cases where adaptation is not feasible, an attempt should be made to give military personnel as much information as possible, as early in their military careers as possible, regarding civilian credentialing requirements, so that the responsibility to meet the requirements rests with the individual.

A number of steps should be considered to enhance the ability of transitioning military personnel to become credentialed. The following recommendations are offered in this respect:

- **Military training commands should provide servicemembers with information regarding applicable licensure and certification requirements while they are still in training. The servicemembers should also be provided with information regarding education and training resources available to them to meet those requirements during their period of military service.**
- **Military and civilian agencies involved in the provision of transition services should ensure that information is made available on applicable licensure and certification requirements.**
- **For those servicemembers who choose to seek licensure or certification while in the military, the military services should provide the . maximum accommodation and support possible to help them attain the appropriate credentials.**
- **Information should be provided to national certification bodies and to state and federal licensure bodies regarding the standard types of documentation of military training and experience that are available to support requests by veterans for credit toward licensure or certification requirements based upon their military training and experience.**

- **The military should stay abreast of adaptations to credentialing standards, which undergo frequent modification, and make every effort possible to accommodate new standards.**