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BORDER PATROL

**Costs and Challenges
Related to Training New
Agents**

Statement of Richard M. Stana, Director
Homeland Security and Justice Issues





Highlights of [GAO-07-997T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In May 2006, the President called for comprehensive immigration reform that included strengthening control of the country's borders by, among other things, adding 6,000 new agents to the U.S. Border Patrol by the end of December 2008. This unprecedented 48 percent increase over 2 years raises concerns about the ability of the Border Patrol's basic training program to train these new agents. This testimony is based on a recent report for the ranking member of this subcommittee on the content, quality, and cost of the Border Patrol's basic training program for new agents and addresses (1) the extent to which the Border Patrol's basic training program exhibits the attributes of an effective training program and the changes to the program since September 11, 2001; (2) the cost to train a new agent and how this compares to the costs of other similar law enforcement basic training programs; and (3) any plans the Border Patrol has developed or considered to improve the efficiency of its basic training program. To address these issues, GAO reviewed relevant documents; observed classroom training and exercises at the Border Patrol Academy in Artesia, New Mexico; assessed the methodologies of training cost estimates; and interviewed Border Patrol officials.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-997T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or StanaR@gao.gov.

BORDER PATROL

Costs and Challenges Related to Training New Agents

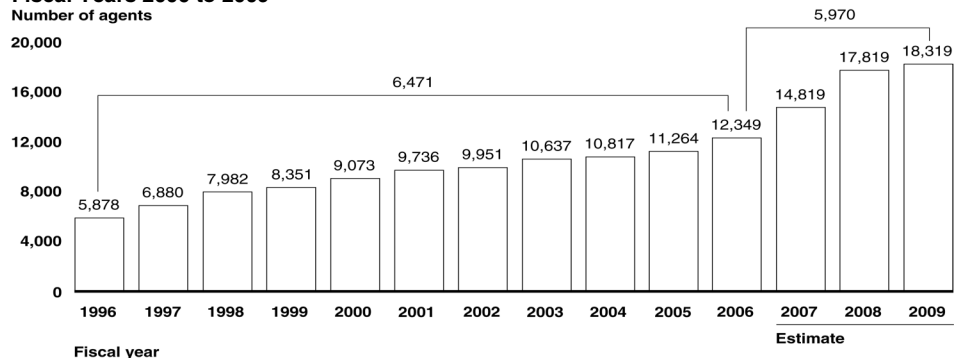
What GAO Found

The Border Patrol's basic training program exhibits attributes of an effective training program. GAO's training assessment guide suggests the kinds of documentation to look for that indicate that a training program has a particular attribute in place. The Border Patrol's training program included all of the applicable key attributes of an effective training program. The core curriculum used at the Border Patrol Academy has not changed since September 11, but the Border Patrol added new material on responding to terrorism and practical field exercises. Border Patrol officials are confident that the academy can accommodate the large influx of new trainees anticipated over the next 2 years.

In fiscal year 2006, the average cost to train a new Border Patrol agent at the academy was about \$14,700. While differences in programs make a direct comparison difficult, it appears that the Border Patrol's average cost per trainee at the academy is consistent with that of training programs that cover similar subjects and prepare officers for operations in similar geographic areas. For example, the estimated average cost per trainee for a Bureau of Indian Affairs police officer was about \$15,300; an Arizona state police officer, \$15,600; and a Texas state trooper, \$14,700.

The Border Patrol is considering several alternatives to improve the efficiency of basic training delivery at the academy and to return agents to the field more quickly. For example, in October 2007 the Border Patrol plans to implement a proficiency test for Spanish that should allow those who pass the test to shorten their time at the academy by about 30 days. The Border Patrol is also considering what training it can shift from the academy to postacademy training conducted in the field, which could further reduce the amount of time trainees spend at the academy. However, Border Patrol officials have expressed concerns with having a sufficient number of experienced agents available to serve as first-line supervisors and field training officers. The Border Patrol also currently lacks uniform standards and practices for field training, and shifting additional training responsibilities to the field could complicate this situation.

Border Patrol Agent Growth, Fiscal Years 1996 to 2006, Compared with Anticipated Growth, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2009



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss our work on the costs and challenges related to training 6,000 new Border Patrol agents by the end of December 2008.

The U.S. Border Patrol is responsible for patrolling 8,000 miles of the land and coastal borders of the United States to detect and prevent the illegal entry of aliens and contraband, including terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. Although the Border Patrol apprehends hundreds of thousands of people entering the country illegally each year, several hundreds of thousands more individuals successfully enter the country illegally and undetected each year.¹ In May 2006, the President called for comprehensive immigration reform that included strengthening control of the country's borders by, among other things, adding 6,000 new agents to the Border Patrol by the end of December 2008. This would increase the total number of agents from 12,349 to 18,319, an unprecedented 48 percent increase over the next 2 years. The Border Patrol plans to add these new agents to its nine southwest border field offices, called sectors, while transferring up to 1,000 experienced agents to the northern border. In addition, legislation has been proposed in Congress that would authorize an additional 10,000 agents, potentially increasing the size of the Border Patrol to about 28,000 agents by the end of 2012.

My testimony today is based on a recent report for the ranking member of this subcommittee on the content, quality, and cost of the Border Patrol's basic training program for new agents.² It focuses on the following issues:

- the extent to which the Border Patrol's basic training program for new border patrol agents exhibits the attributes of an effective training program and how the training program has changed since September 11, 2001;
- the estimated cost to train a new agent at the Border Patrol Academy and how the Border Patrol's basic training program and cost compared to those of other similar federal and nonfederal law enforcement basic training programs; and

¹Congressional Research Service, *Border Security: The Role of the U.S. Border Patrol*, RL32562 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 25, 2006).

²GAO, *Homeland Security: Information on Training New Border Patrol Agents*, [GAO-07-540R](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 30, 2007).

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- any plans the Border Patrol has developed or considered to improve the efficiency of its basic training program.

To determine the extent to which the Border Patrol's training program exhibited the attributes and characteristics of an effective training program, we reviewed the Border Patrol's basic training curriculum and compared it with GAO's guide for assessing federal training programs.³ While we determined the presence of indicators of particular attributes, we did not assess the extent to which these attributes contributed to the quality of the training program. We also visited the Border Patrol Academy in Artesia, New Mexico, and observed training in progress and discussed training content with the Academy Chief and course managers. To determine what changes the Border Patrol has made to the basic training program since September 11, we reviewed new training materials.

To determine the cost to train a new Border Patrol agent, we reviewed the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's (FLETC) methodology used to calculate the average training cost per agent. We assessed the data for reliability and found that the data we used for our analyses were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our report. To compare the cost of the Border Patrol's basic training program to that of other similar basic training programs (i.e., civilian, patrol-based law enforcement training for operations in the southwest region of the United States), we obtained course curricula and training cost information from FLETC, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Southern Arizona Law Enforcement Training Center, and the Texas Department of Public Safety. We did not identify any private firms offering a similar training program. We assessed the data for reliability and found them reliable for the purposes of this review.

To determine what plans the Border Patrol has developed or considered for improving the efficiency of its basic training program, we reviewed relevant documentation and interviewed CBP officials.

We performed our work from September 2006 through March 2007 and updated selected information in June 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

³GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, GAO-04-546G (Washington, D.C.: March 2004).

Summary

After reviewing the Border Patrol's basic training program and comparing it with GAO's guide for assessing federal training programs, we determined that the Border Patrol's basic training program exhibits attributes of an effective training program. The Border Patrol's training program included all of the applicable key attributes of an effective training program.⁴ The core training curriculum used at the Border Patrol Academy has not changed since September 11, but the Border Patrol has added new material on responding to terrorism and practical field exercises, such as what actions agents should take if they encounter a suspected weapon of mass destruction or an improvised explosive device. Border Patrol officials are confident that the academy can accommodate the large influx of new trainees anticipated over the next 2 years.

In fiscal year 2006, the average cost to train a new Border Patrol agent at the academy was about \$14,700. This cost represents the amounts expended by both the Border Patrol and FLETC. The Border Patrol paid about \$6,600 for the trainee's meals and lodging, and a portion of the cost of instructors, and FLETC paid about \$8,100 for tuition, a portion of the cost of instructors, and miscellaneous expenses such as support services, supplies, and utilities. The \$14,700 cost figure does not include the costs associated with instructors conducting postacademy and field training in the sectors. The Border Patrol's average cost per trainee at the academy is consistent with that of training programs that cover similar subjects and prepare officers for operations in similar geographic areas. For example, the estimated average cost per trainee for a BIA police officer was about \$15,300; an Arizona state police officer, \$15,600; and a Texas state trooper, \$14,700. However, differences in the emphasis of some subject areas over others dictated by jurisdiction and mission make a direct comparison difficult. For example, while both the Border Patrol and the Texas Department of Public Safety require Spanish instruction, the Border Patrol requires 214 hours of instruction compared with 50 hours for a Texas state trooper. Also, the Border Patrol does not provide instruction in investigation techniques, while BIA, Arizona, and Texas require 139, 50, and 165 hours of such instruction, respectively.

The Border Patrol is considering several alternatives to improve the efficiency of basic training delivery and to return agents to the sectors more quickly. For example, in October 2007 the Border Patrol plans to

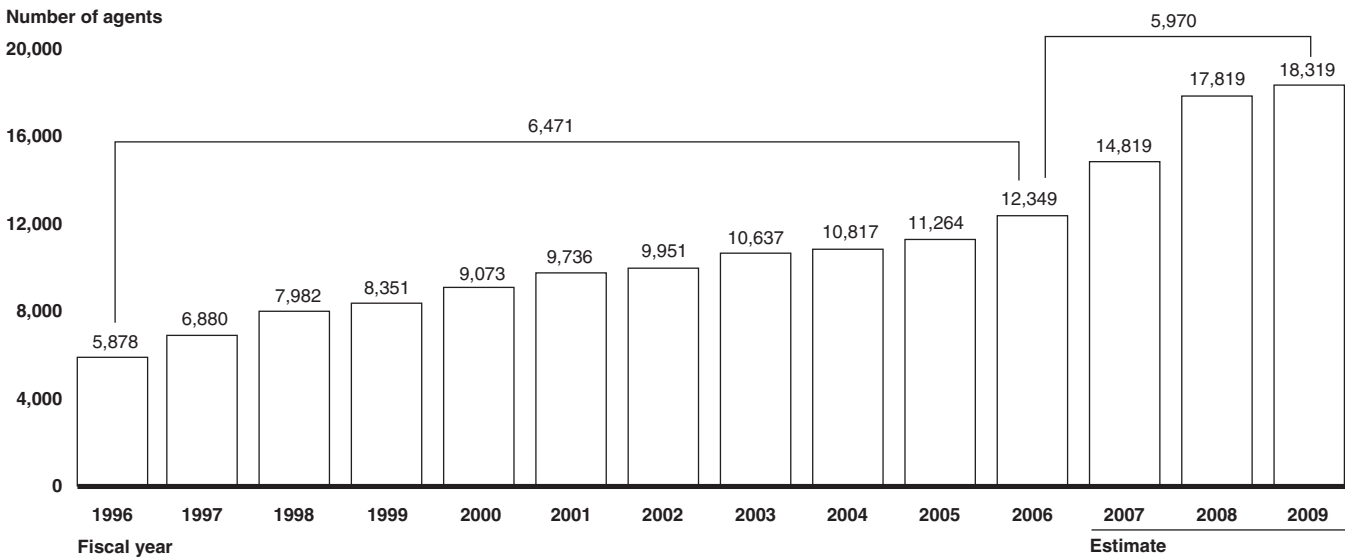
⁴One attribute dealing with the selection or voluntary self-selection of employees was not applicable because basic training is mandatory for all new Border Patrol agents.

implement a proficiency test for Spanish that should allow those who pass the test to shorten their time at the academy by about 30 days. According to Border Patrol officials, this could benefit about half of all trainees, because about half of all recruits already speak Spanish. The Border Patrol also plans to convert postacademy classroom training to computer-based training beginning in October 2007, allowing agents to complete the 1-day-a-week training at their duty stations rather than having to travel to the sector headquarters for this training. As a result, fewer senior agents will be required to serve as instructors for postacademy training. Finally, the Border Patrol is considering what other training it can shift from the academy to postacademy and field training conducted in the sectors, which could further reduce the amount of time trainees spend at the academy. However, some Border Patrol officials have expressed concerns over the sectors' ability to provide sufficient field training and supervision to new agents. For example, officials are concerned with having a sufficient number of experienced agents available in the sectors to serve as field training officers and first-line supervisors. In addition, the Border Patrol does not currently have a uniform field training program that establishes uniform standards and practices that each sector's field training should follow. The addition of new training expectations could complicate this situation.

Background

The U.S. Border Patrol, within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), is responsible for patrolling 8,000 miles of the land and coastal borders of the United States to detect and prevent the illegal entry of aliens and contraband, including terrorists, terrorist weapons, and weapons of mass destruction. As of October 2006, the Border Patrol had 12,349 agents stationed in 20 sectors along the southwest, northern, and coastal borders. In May 2006, the President called for comprehensive immigration reform that included strengthening control of the country's borders by, among other things, adding 6,000 new agents to the Border Patrol by the end of December 2008. This would increase the total number of agents from 12,349 to 18,319, an unprecedented 48 percent increase over the next 2 years. As shown in figure 1, this increase is nearly equivalent to the number of agents gained over the past 10 years. In addition, legislation has been proposed in Congress that would authorize an additional 10,000 agents, potentially increasing the size of the Border Patrol to about 28,000 agents by the end of 2012.

Figure 1: Border Patrol Agent Growth, Fiscal Years 1996 to 2006, Compared with Anticipated Growth, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2009



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

FLETC is an interagency training provider responsible for basic, advanced, and specialized training for approximately 82 federal agencies, including CBP’s Border Patrol. Under a memorandum of understanding, FLETC hosts the Border Patrol’s training academy in Artesia, New Mexico, and shares the cost of providing training with the Border Patrol. For example, FLETC provides the facilities, some instructors (e.g., retired Border Patrol agents), and services (e.g., laundry and infirmary) that are paid for out of FLETC’s annual appropriations. CBP’s Office of Training and Development designs the training curriculum (in conjunction with the Border Patrol and with input from FLETC) for the academy, administers the Border Patrol Academy, and provides permanent instructors and staff.

Basic training for new Border Patrol agents consists of three components: (1) basic training at the academy, (2) postacademy classroom training administered by the academy but conducted in the sectors, and (3) field training conducted on the job in the sectors. The academy portion of the training is currently an 81-day program consisting of 663 curriculum hours in six subject areas: Spanish, law/operations, physical training, driving, firearms, and general training.

After graduating from the academy, new Border Patrol agents are required to attend classroom instruction at their respective sectors in Spanish and

law/operations 1 day a week for a total of 20 weeks. Finally, new agents are generally assigned to senior agents in a sector's field training unit for additional on-the-job training intended to reinforce new agents' skills in safely, effectively, and ethically performing their duties under actual field conditions.

The Border Patrol's Basic Training Program Exhibits Attributes of an Effective Training Program

The Border Patrol's basic training program exhibits attributes of an effective training program. GAO's training assessment guide suggests the kinds of documentation to look for that indicate that a training program has a particular attribute in place, such as incorporating measures of effectiveness into its course designs. As shown in table 1, the Border Patrol was able to document that its training program had key indicators in place for the applicable attributes of an effective training program.⁵

⁵One attribute dealing with the selection or voluntary self-selection of employees was not applicable because basic training is mandatory for all new Border Patrol agents.

Table 1: GAO Attributes of an Effective Training Program

Planning and front-end analysis	
✓	Training goals are consistent with its overall mission, goals, and culture
✓	Has strategic and annual performance planning processes that incorporate human capital professionals
✓	Determines the skills and competencies its workforce
✓	Identifies the appropriate level of investment to provide for training
✓	Has measures to assess the contributions that training efforts make toward individual mastery of learning
✓	Incorporates employees' developmental goals in its planning processes
✓	Integrates the need for continuous and lifelong learning into its planning processes
✓	Considers governmentwide reforms and other targeted initiatives to improve management and performance when planning its training programs
✓	Has a formal process to ensure that strategic and tactical changes are promptly incorporated in training
Design and development	
✓	Ensures that training is connected to improving individual and agency performance in achieving specific results
✓	The design of the training program is integrated with other strategies to improve performance and meet emerging demands
✓	Uses the most appropriate mix of centralized and decentralized approaches for its training
✓	Uses criteria in determining whether to design training programs in-house or obtain from a contractor or other external source
✓	Compares the merits of different delivery mechanisms (such as classroom or computer-based training) and determines what mix to use to ensure efficient and cost-effective delivery
✓	Determines a targeted level of improved performance in order to ensure that the cost of a training program is appropriate to achieve the anticipated benefit
✓	Incorporates measures of effectiveness into courses it designs
Implementation	
✓	Agency leaders communicate the importance of training and developing employees, and their expectations for training programs to achieve results
✓	Has a training and performance organization that is held accountable, along with the line executives, for the maximum performance of the workforce
✓	Agency managers are responsible for reinforcing new behaviors, providing useful tools, and identifying and removing barriers to help employees implement learned behaviors on the job
n/a	Selects employees (or provides the opportunity for employees to self-select) to participate in training and development efforts
✓	The agency considers options in paying for employee training and development and adjusting employee work schedules so that employees can participate in these developmental activities
✓	Takes actions to foster an environment conducive to effective training
✓	Takes steps to encourage employees to buy in to the goals of training efforts
✓	Collects data during implementation to ensure feedback on its training programs
Evaluation	
✓	Systematically plans for and evaluates the effectiveness of its training efforts
✓	Uses the appropriate analytical approaches to assess its training programs
✓	Uses performance data (including qualitative and quantitative measures) to assess the results achieved through training efforts

Planning and front-end analysis

- ✓ Incorporates evaluation feedback into the planning, design, and implementation of its training efforts
 - ✓ Incorporates different perspectives (including those of line managers and staff, customers, and experts in areas such as financial, information, and human capital management) in assessing the impact of training on performance
 - ✓ Tracks the cost and delivery of its training programs
 - ✓ Assesses the benefits achieved through training programs
 - ✓ Compares its training investments, methods, or outcomes with those of other organizations to identify innovative approaches or lessons learned
-

Source: GAO analysis based on [GAO-04-546G](#)

✓ = indicators (in place or in development) of the attribute

n/a = not applicable

In addition, the Border Patrol is pursuing accreditation of its training program from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation organization. The core training curriculum used at the Border Patrol Academy has not changed since September 11, but the Border Patrol added new material on responding to terrorism and practical field exercises. For example, the Border Patrol added an antiterrorism course that covers, among other things, what actions agents should take if they encounter what they believe to be a weapon of mass destruction or an improvised explosive device. The Border Patrol also incorporated practical field exercises that simulate a variety of situations that agents may encounter, such as arresting an individual who is armed with a weapon, as shown in figure 2. With regard to capacity, Border Patrol officials told us they are confident that the academy can accommodate the large influx of new trainees anticipated over the next 2 years.

Figure 2: Trainees Engaged in Simulated Apprehension of an Armed Individual



Source: GAO.

The Average Cost to Train a New Border Patrol Agent in Fiscal Year 2006 Was About \$14,700 and Was Comparable to Those of Other Federal and Nonfederal Law Enforcement Training Programs

In fiscal year 2006, the average cost to train a new Border Patrol agent at the academy was about \$14,700. This cost represents the amounts expended by both the Border Patrol and FLETC. (See table 2.) The Border Patrol paid about \$6,600 for the trainee's meals and lodging, and a portion of the cost of instructors, and FLETC paid about \$8,100 for tuition, a portion of the cost of instructors, and miscellaneous expenses such as support services, supplies, and utilities. The \$14,700 cost figure does not include the costs associated with instructors conducting postacademy and field training in the sectors.

Table 2: Average Cost to Train a New Border Patrol Agent, Fiscal Year 2006

	FLETC	CBP	Total cost to DHS
Tuition	\$1,773	0	\$ 1,773
Meals	0	\$2,010	2,010
Lodging	0	1,826	1,826
Instructor cost per student	3,069	2,805	5,874
Miscellaneous ^a	3,250	0	3,250
Total cost per student	\$8,092	\$6,641	\$14,733

Source: Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

Note: While FLETC's costs include the cost of training materials for postacademy training conducted in the sectors, these costs do not include the cost of postacademy instructors or field training conducted in the sectors.

^aMiscellaneous costs include items such as support services (health unit, uniform laundry, janitorial), supplies (athletic trainer and student supplies, utility uniforms), and utilities (garbage collection, gas, electricity, and water and sewer).

For fiscal year 2007, the average cost to train a new agent will increase to about \$16,200. This is primarily due to an increase in the number of instructors hired, which increased CBP's instructor costs from about \$2,800 to \$6,100 per student.

The Border Patrol's average cost per trainee at the academy is consistent with that of training programs that cover similar subjects and prepare officers for operations in similar geographic areas. For example, the estimated average cost per trainee for a BIA police officer was about \$15,300; an Arizona state police officer, \$15,600; and a Texas state trooper, \$14,700. However, differences in the emphasis of some subject areas over others dictated by jurisdiction and mission make a direct comparison difficult. For example, while both the Border Patrol and the Texas Department of Public Safety require Spanish instruction, the Border Patrol requires 214 hours of instruction, compared with 50 hours for a Texas state trooper. Similarly, the Border Patrol does not provide instruction in investigative techniques, while BIA, Arizona, and Texas require 139, 50, and 165 hours of such instruction, respectively. Table 3 shows a comparison of Border Patrol's basic training program with other federal and nonfederal law enforcement basic training programs.

Table 3: Border Patrol's Basic Training Program Compared with Other Federal and Nonfederal Law Enforcement Basic Training Programs

	Border Patrol Academy	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Southern Arizona Law Enforcement Training Center	Texas Department of Public Safety
Class size (average)	50	50	40	130
Length of training (weeks)	16	16	36	26
Length of training (hours)	663	736	680	1,246
Cost per student	\$14,733	\$15,291	\$15,555	\$14,739
Course curriculum		Training hours		
Spanish	214	n/a	n/a	50
Law/operations	191	152	223.5	567
Firearms training	67	71.25	70	119.5
Driving training	44	104.5	28	71
Basic investigative techniques	n/a	139	50	165
Physical fitness and safety	125	239.5	114.75	96.5
Antiterrorism	8	9	4	16
General Training and administration	14	21	189.75	161

Source: GAO analysis of information received from FLETC, the Office of Border Patrol, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Southern Arizona Law Enforcement Training Center, and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Note: Training hours may not add to length of training due to rounding.

n/a = not applicable

Plans under Consideration to Improve Basic Training Efficiency May Present Challenges

The Border Patrol is considering several alternatives to improve the efficiency of basic training delivery and to return agents to the sectors more quickly. For example, in October 2007 the Border Patrol plans to implement a proficiency test for Spanish that should allow those who pass the test to shorten their time at the academy by about 30 days. According to Border Patrol officials, this could benefit about half of all trainees, because about half of all recruits already speak Spanish. The Border Patrol also plans to convert postacademy classroom training to computer-based training beginning in October 2007, allowing agents to complete the 1-day-a-week training at their duty stations rather than having to travel to the sector headquarters for this training. As a result, fewer senior agents will be required to serve as instructors for postacademy training. Finally, the Border Patrol is considering what other training it can shift from the academy to postacademy and field training conducted in the sectors,

which could further reduce the amount of time trainees spend at the academy.

While these strategies may improve the efficiency of training at the academy, officials expressed concern about the sectors' ability provide adequate supervision and continued training once the new agents arrive at the sectors. Some Border Patrol officials are concerned with having enough experienced agents available in the sectors to serve as first-line supervisors and field training officers for these new agents. According to the Chief of the Border Patrol, agencywide the average experience level of Border Patrol agents is about 4 or 5 years of service. However, in certain southwest border sectors the average experience level is only about 18 months. Moreover, the supervisor-to-agent ratio is higher than the agency would like in some southwest sectors. Border Patrol officials told us that a 5-to-1 agent-to-supervisor ratio is desirable to ensure proper supervision of new agents, although the desired ratio in certain work units with more experienced agents would be higher. Our analysis of Border Patrol data showed that as of October 2006, the overall agent-to-supervisor ratios for southwest sectors, where the Border Patrol assigns all new agents, ranged from about 7 to 1 up to 11 to 1.

These ratios include some work units with a higher percentage of experienced agents that do not require the same level of supervision as new agents. To augment the supervision of new agents, the Border Patrol is considering using retired Border Patrol agents to act as mentors for new agents. Nevertheless, given the large numbers of new agents the Border Patrol plans to assign to the southwest border over the next 2 years, along with the planned reassignment of experienced agents from the southwest border to the northern border, it will be a challenge for the agency to achieve the desired 5-to-1 ratio for new agents in all work units in those sectors receiving the largest numbers of new agents.

In addition to concerns about having a sufficient number of experienced agents to serve as supervisors and field training officers, the Border Patrol does not have a uniform field training program that establishes uniform standards and practices that each sector's field training should follow. As a result, Border Patrol officials are not confident that all new trainees currently receive consistent postacademy field training. Moreover, the addition of new training expectations may complicate this situation. The Border Patrol is in the process of developing a uniform field training program that it plans to implement beginning in fiscal year 2008.

Concluding Observations

While Border Patrol officials are confident that the academy can accommodate the large influx of new trainees anticipated over the next 2 years, the larger challenge will be the sectors' capacity to provide adequate supervision and training. The rapid addition of new agents along the southwest border, coupled with the planned transfer of more experienced agents to the northern border, will likely reduce the overall experience level of agents assigned to the southwest border. In turn, the Border Patrol will be faced with relying on a higher proportion of less seasoned agents to supervise these new agents. In addition, the possible shifting of some training from the academy to the sectors could increase demand for experienced agents to serve as field training officers. Moreover, without a standardized field training program, training has not been consistent from sector to sector, a fact that has implications for the sectors' ability to add new training requirements and possibly consequences for how well agents will perform their duties. To ensure that these new agents become proficient in the safe, effective, and ethical performance of their duties, it will be extremely important that new agents have the appropriate level of supervision and that the Border Patrol have a sufficient number of field training officers and a standardized field training program.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For further information about this testimony, please contact me at (202) 512-8816 or by e-mail at Stanar@gao.gov. Key contributors to this testimony were Michael Dino, Assistant Director; Mark Abraham; E. Jerry Seigler; and Julie Silvers. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this testimony.

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