

**GAO**

**Testimony**

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

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**GAO HUMAN CAPITAL  
MANAGEMENT**

**Efforts Taken to Ensure  
Effective Campus  
Recruitment**

Statement of Patricia Dalton,  
Chief Operating Officer



**G A O**

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss GAO's campus recruitment program. As an organization committed to having a high-performing, diverse workforce, we place great importance on attracting, hiring, training, and retaining employees with the skills needed to support GAO's mission to serve Congress and the American public. We have a multi-disciplinary workforce, with most staff having backgrounds in public policy, public administration, law, business, computer science, accounting, or social sciences. While our current and future hiring will be shaped by today's constrained budget environment, over the past 5 years, on average, we have hired about 300 employees each year. The majority of these hires were for analyst and analyst-related positions at the entry level. We also have a robust paid student intern program each year. Many of these interns return as entry-level analysts.

Having a strong campus recruitment program has played a key role in attracting highly qualified candidates for our permanent and intern positions and building our workforce. In response to your request, I will focus my remarks on (1) the strong partnerships developed through our campus recruitment program, (2) recent actions we have taken to enhance the program and the positive outcomes we've experienced, and (3) the programs and policies we have in place to support new staff.

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## Our Campus Recruitment Program Has Led to Strong Partnerships with Schools

About a decade ago we implemented a campus recruitment program to increase GAO's visibility on campuses and help us attract highly-qualified and diverse candidates. The key elements of this program are (1) ongoing relationships with many colleges and universities and (2) the use of senior executives and other staff to develop and maintain those relationships. We supplement this program through additional activities designed to help others learn about GAO.

We have established ongoing relationships with many colleges and universities across the country. While we advertise all of our new positions publicly, currently we have relationships with about 70 colleges and universities, including private and public colleges and universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions. These targeted schools have academic programs relevant to our skill needs (e.g., public policy, accounting, business or computer science) and that prepare students well for success at GAO. Our relationship-building over the years has been

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based primarily on visiting many of these schools to participate in on-campus events.

We use senior executives and other staff from across the agency to develop and maintain these relationships. Serving as “recruiters,” these executives and staff help faculty, career placement officials, and students at the colleges and universities we visit understand the work we do and the skills required for that work. Senior executives, who serve as Campus Executives, have specific schools for which they are responsible. Other staff—often alumni of those schools—support the executives by setting up and participating in campus events, such as information sessions, class presentations, or career fairs. Our staff often seek opportunities to communicate about our mission and their experiences at GAO to interested parties, as they view recruitment opportunities as part of their institutional stewardship responsibility.

In addition to our targeted campus outreach, we conduct a variety of activities to help potential candidates and officials from colleges and universities learn about GAO or the type of work we do. For example, our analyst staff often works with students enrolled in masters’ programs in public policy or administration on projects in which GAO acts as a “client.” Groups of students are assigned an issue or evaluation topic, then advised by our staff as they proceed with their research, which culminates in a report to us as the client. These projects provide students “real world” experience in conducting public policy analysis. We also address classes or groups of students and host visits from groups to hear about our work and GAO’s impact. Since 2001, we have held a yearly Educators’ Advisory Panel, which includes deans and professors from schools we visit as well as selected others. Through this panel, we have obtained advice and provided feedback about ways schools can refine and strengthen their curricula to make their graduates more successful.

Finally, we conduct outreach to professional organizations and groups. We attend and/or make presentations at various conferences or invite representatives of these groups to address GAO staff. The groups we have networked with in the past include those whose members have relevant backgrounds (e.g., the American Economic Association), as well as other groups with members that traditionally have been underrepresented in the federal workforce, including the American Association of Hispanic CPAs, the National Association of Black Accountants, or the Federal Asian Pacific American Council.

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Our approach has been extremely effective in developing strong partnerships with many colleges and universities and professional organizations. Our brand recognition has grown tremendously on campuses and in the public policy arena. This, among other reasons, has contributed to our receiving thousands of high-quality applicants each year for our advertised positions.

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## We Have Taken Actions to Enhance Our Campus Recruitment Program

As part of overall efforts to focus more attention on our strategic human capital management, we have taken proactive steps to improve our recruitment program. Specifically, we (1) established stronger linkages between our recruitment efforts and organizational workforce needs, (2) increased diversity of and enhanced supports for our staff serving as recruiters, and (3) instituted stronger program management and accountability processes. We have seen positive outcomes from these efforts.

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## Established Stronger Linkages between Recruitment Efforts and Workforce Needs

Consistent with our recommendations to other agencies,<sup>1</sup> we have established stronger linkages between our recruitment efforts and our workforce needs identified through our annual workforce and strategic planning processes and in our annual Workforce Diversity Plans.<sup>2</sup> To accomplish this, we adopted a recruiting framework that has allowed us to better address our skill gaps and enhance the diversity of our workforce, such as hiring more Hispanics, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. This framework was particularly critical this year, as we needed to identify how to address our needs despite significant fiscal constraints. Using this framework, we made decisions to discontinue certain efforts or initiate new ones to meet our needs and better allocate our resources. For example, we customized our interactions with campuses so that we could devote the appropriate level and type of resources needed to meet our needs. While we continue to believe that developing and maintaining strong relationships

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *Human Capital: Sustained Attention to Strategic Human Capital Management Needed*, GAO-09-632T (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 22, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Each year we issue a Workforce Diversity Plan that assesses the representation of our workforce, evaluates the outcomes from our key human capital processes, and summarizes the views of our employees. Based on this information, we identify areas for improvement and action steps for the following year.

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with college and university campuses is critical,<sup>3</sup> on-site visits are less necessary given workforce and technological changes. As a result, based on an analysis of our workforce needs, school characteristics (e.g., student demographics, academic programs, and proximity of the campus to GAO offices), and our history with the campuses (e.g., number of applicants, applicant experience, and hires), our efforts now include a range of both on-site and virtual activities. The benefit of this approach is that we can adjust it at any time based on our needs.

We also made critical decisions about how to best supplement our campus outreach efforts to support our workforce needs in the most cost-effective manner. We considered our costs to participate in various events, results from past participation, and the anticipated future benefits in order to set our future priorities about what organizations and events we would centrally support.<sup>4</sup> For example, we supported participation in the Careers and the disABLED Expo and the Association of Latinos in Public Finance and Accounting Conference to help enhance the diversity of our workforce as well as to attract candidates with needed skills. We also partnered with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, as well as the Public Policy and International Affairs Fellowship Program, to hire 10 qualified student interns.<sup>5</sup> We also determined how we could cost-efficiently use other approaches to meet our needs. As a result, we have advertised in those journals targeting individuals with disabilities, African-Americans, or critical skill areas (e.g., economists) to expand our outreach. We also utilized low-cost mechanisms such as electronically notifying hundreds of colleges and universities and relevant organizations about vacancies, revamping our external careers web site, and updating our recruitment materials to provide better information about GAO's worklife, programs, and values.<sup>6</sup> These efforts are important ways to inform any interested candidate about GAO and available opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup>In 2008, we reported that one of the major challenges for federal hiring was that agencies were often too passive in their recruitment efforts. See GAO, *Human Capital: Transforming Federal Recruiting and Hiring Efforts*, [GAO-08-762T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 8, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>GAO staff attend a wide range of professional development conferences. However, these events are generally supported by individual units rather than centrally.

<sup>5</sup>These organizations were selected in part because they serve Hispanic students or others underrepresented in leadership positions in government and other organizations.

<sup>6</sup>We also use our Twitter™, YouTube™, and Flickr™ accounts as mechanisms to enhance our name recognition.

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## Increased Diversity of and Enhanced Supports for Recruiters

Given the important role our recruiters serve in our campus recruitment program, we have taken steps to have a recruitment cadre that is diverse and well-trained. We solicited recruiters from throughout GAO and asked representatives from our numerous employee groups to serve as recruiters. Our recruitment cadre is diverse—representing staff from various GAO offices, teams, locations, job levels and positions. We also required that each employee interested in becoming a recruiter obtain senior management approval and attend our training workshop to learn about GAO-wide workforce needs and improve his or her ability to provide accurate, consistent, and timely information about our operations, programs, worklife, and values. This training has helped to ensure that all recruiters understand their responsibilities.

We also have developed additional support for our recruiters to ensure consistent and timely dissemination of information. This support has included a slide presentation that describes GAO's core values, business operations, and impact; a tip sheet that helps recruiters understand how to work with prospective applicants who may need to be accommodated; and a listing of specific types of activities recruiters can undertake at targeted campuses. While we have not identified a single "best practice," some of our efforts that have proven successful include:

- sending recruitment brochures/supplies to campus contacts;
- researching and contacting appropriate campus-based groups that have a diverse membership, as well as professional associations and relevant academic programs;
- establishing strong relationships with career placement staff;
- conducting information sessions with appropriate audiences;
- participating in career fairs, when appropriate;
- making class presentations that illustrate the nature of our work;
- getting our work incorporated into program curricula; and
- serving on advisory boards or as adjunct faculty with colleges and universities.

To further assist our recruiters, we have provided real-time information and suggestions to help them better leverage their time. Specifically, we have kept recruiters apprised of the status of hiring announcements and

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shared data on the number of individuals hired for different positions—including the names of individuals hired from their specific schools—so recruiters could see the results of their efforts. Given additional budget constraints, we have suggested ways for our recruiters to more cost-effectively maintain strong campus relationships such as

- asking various academic programs within the same college or university to schedule joint presentations or visits by GAO;
- asking recent interns/hires to serve as informal ambassadors; and
- using local GAO staff to attend events at various campuses.

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## Instituted Stronger Program Management and Accountability Processes

In order to be able to better manage our campus recruitment program and assess program outcomes, we instituted a number of structural and administrative changes over the last several years. We placed overall program responsibility in our Human Capital Office and created three senior-level advisory boards to provide insight on our program operations and results. To obtain more robust information on recruiter activity, as well as create more program accountability, we have developed a standardized template to document recruiters' strategies for working with individual schools and organizations. Through this template, recruiters must provide information on the members of the recruitment team, planned activities at the school or organization, and estimated costs. This strategy document must be completed by the recruiters, submitted to, and approved by Human Capital Office staff before funding is authorized and activities can begin. When an event is completed, recruiters report what occurred and assess the outcome. This information is summarized and subsequently shared with our recruiters in the form of best practices or lessons learned. The template also serves as the basis for data collection on agency-wide recruitment activity, including number of campuses and organizations visited, number and type of events conducted, costs associated with each event, and recruiters' views on the effectiveness of various events.

We also have instituted more rigorous data collection and analysis of applicant and hire information. For example, for fiscal year 2010 vacancies, we analyzed information on the background and diversity of our applicants and hires (e.g., degree level obtained, school attended, years of work experience, ethnicity, race, gender) and the information applicants provided on why they applied for the job. Through analysis of these data, we were able to gain insight on how our program activities

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related to our hiring outcomes. For example, we identified the percentage of applicants and hires that came from the colleges and universities we targeted, or that applied because of an interaction with GAO. While not perfect, this analysis has helped us to learn what is working, or what changes we need to make to enhance our recruitment approach.

While we have made great strides in using data to inform and assess our campus recruitment program operations, we continue to explore how to judge the effectiveness of our recruitment efforts. For example, it is challenging to define a specific benchmark when assessing whether the number of applicants and hires from the schools or organizations we target is sufficient given our expenditures. Additionally, it is difficult to specifically identify those factors beyond our outreach—such as our mission, recognition as one of the best places to work, or informal communications—that affect an individual’s decision to apply to GAO. To that end, we plan to gather more detailed information from our applicants about the role of factors beyond our outreach efforts that have influenced their decisions to apply to GAO. This information can inform our future recruitment efforts.

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## Achieved Positive Outcomes

Our efforts have led to positive outcomes. We have achieved the institutional focus we were seeking by ensuring that our recruitment efforts are both driven by and support organizational needs. We also have gained efficiencies by adopting approaches that allow us to be more agile in responding to changing workforce needs and budget constraints. We continue to be an employer of choice and we received thousands of applications for our open positions in fiscal year 2010. As an example, we received about 20 applications for each of our GAO Graduate Analyst Intern positions filled in fiscal year 2010. Even more, representation of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans in the pool of qualified applicants and hires for the intern and entry-level positions filled in fiscal year 2010 exceeded the established benchmarks.

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## Our Programs and Policies Help Support New Staff

Along with attracting and hiring high-quality, diverse staff, we have implemented programs and policies to support new staff once they arrive at GAO. The support for our entry-level staff comes predominantly through their participation in our highly regarded, 2-year, Professional Development Program (PDP). This program provides new employees with the foundations to be successful because it teaches them about our core values, how we do our work, and the standards by which we assess our performance. All entry-level analyst or analyst-related new hires are



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assigned advisers to assist in their development and provide support, although staff are also strongly encouraged to take an active role in their own career development by crafting Individual Development Plans and assessing their own strengths and growth areas. Staff receive multiple assignments while in the program so they can gain firsthand experience with the wide range of our work. They also receive a rigorous regimen of classroom and on-the-job training to learn about our work processes and requirements. Staff in the PDP program also receive formal feedback every 3 months and twice-yearly performance appraisals that can result in salary increases.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, actions of our senior leaders as well as several policies and other programs help our new hires make a successful adjustment to GAO. For example, various agency leaders, including the Comptroller General, Chief Human Capital Officer, Special Assistant to the Comptroller General for Diversity Issues, General Counsel, and our Chief Learning Officer participate in new-hire orientation. In addition, the Comptroller General and I meet with new employees during their first few months to answer any questions about GAO or our relationship with Congress. Other senior managers, including Managing Directors and directors in each GAO team, are encouraged not only to meet with new staff but take an active role in their development and day-to-day work environment. We also have policies in place to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment and help all staff balance work and life. For example, we support flexible scheduling, including telework and part-time arrangements, as allowed, given work responsibilities. We also have a student loan repayment program to help eligible staff defray educational costs. PDP staff, as all staff at GAO, can take advantage of a mentoring program to assist staff in becoming effective leaders, managing their work environments, and developing their careers.

These programs and policies have helped make GAO a great place to work, as evidenced by our employees' decisions to stay with GAO and results from our employee feedback surveys. GAO's overall attrition rate has generally been below 10 percent for the last 5 years, and it was 6 percent in fiscal year 2010. About 90 percent of analyst and analyst-related staff hired in fiscal year 2008 are still with us. Feedback from newly hired staff show high levels of overall job satisfaction, as well as high levels of

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<sup>7</sup>Staff in the intern program also receive training, formal expectations, and an end-of-internship assessment with performance feedback.

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satisfaction regarding the on-the-job training they receive and staff development opportunities they are provided. Overall employee satisfaction levels contributed to GAO being named as the second best place to work in the federal government in both 2009 and 2010.

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

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## GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For more information about this testimony, please contact Patricia Dalton, Chief Operating Officer, at (202) 512-5600 or by e-mail at [daltonp@gao.gov](mailto:daltonp@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this testimony. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony included Carolyn M. Taylor, Special Assistant to the Comptroller General for Diversity Issues; Lori Rectanus, Assistant Director; Harriet Ganson, Assistant Director; Cady Panetta, Senior Analyst; and Susan Aschoff, Senior Communications Analyst.

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