

June 2009

JOB CORPS

Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Preenrollment Information Could Enhance Female Residential Student Recruitment and Retention



GAO

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Highlights of [GAO-09-470](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Established in 1964, Job Corps is the nation's largest residential, educational, and career training program for economically disadvantaged youths. Administered by the Department of Labor (Labor), Job Corps received about \$1.6 billion in program year 2007 and served about 60,000 students. Some have expressed concern that Job Corps centers are not meeting planned enrollment goals, particularly for women. To address these concerns, GAO reviewed the (1) extent to which Job Corps centers are operating at or near capacity for residential students; (2) major factors that affect the recruitment and retention of residential students, particularly females; and (3) steps, if any, Labor has taken to address the recruitment and retention of residential students. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed Labor's enrollment data, surveyed Job Corps recruiters and center directors, and visited seven Job Corps centers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Labor review career training nationwide, take steps to ensure that potential students are provided with complete and accurate information, and explore the feasibility of having virtual tours for each center. Labor generally agreed with the recommendations and noted efforts it has under way. However, GAO believes Labor's efforts do not fully address the recommendations and stress the need for additional action.

View [GAO-09-470](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Kay E. Brown at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov.

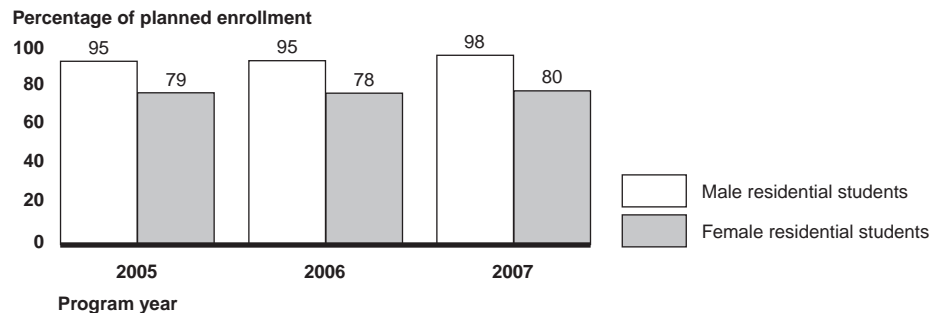
JOB CORPS

Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Preenrollment Information Could Enhance Female Residential Student Recruitment and Retention

What GAO Found

Overall, the Job Corps program has been operating at or near capacity for male residential students, but under capacity for female residential students during program years 2005 through 2007. During each of those years, Job Corps achieved between 95 and 98 percent of the planned enrollment for male residential students nationwide, but about 80 percent or less for female residential students (see below). In fact, about one-half of the centers that enrolled female residential students in program year 2007 were below 80 percent of their planned enrollment for that group.

Percentage of Planned Enrollment for Male and Female Residential Students, Program Years 2005 through 2007



Source: Department of Labor data.

Three key factors affect Job Corps' ability to recruit and retain residential students, particularly female residential students—availability of career training options, complete and accurate preenrollment information, and quality of center life. The selection and availability of career training offerings in occupations of interest to students play a major role in Job Corps' ability to recruit students, particularly female residential students, according to officials that we surveyed. A key factor affecting both recruitment and retention is ensuring that students have accurate preenrollment information about Job Corps. Officials noted that having realistic expectations of life at a center is especially important for female students. Finally, center officials said that the quality of life at the centers, including the living conditions and the sense of safety, affects students' willingness to stay in the program.

Labor has begun making improvements in career training offerings, preenrollment information, and quality of center life in an effort to address issues related to the recruitment and retention of residential students. While Labor has gradually made more training opportunities available that are likely to appeal to female students, these are typically at a center's request and not part of an overall strategy. In addition, Labor has taken some steps to ensure that students receive detailed preenrollment information, but has not yet expanded these efforts nationally. Finally, Labor has several efforts under way to improve the quality of center life for students, including ensuring a drug-free environment and providing child care facilities for single parents.

Contents

Letter		1
	Background	4
	Overall, Job Corps Operated at or Near Capacity for Male Residential Students, but Not for Female Residential Students	13
	Three Key Factors Affect Job Corps' Ability to Recruit and Retain Residential Students	18
	Labor Has Taken Some Steps to Address Job Corps' Recruitment and Retention Issues, but These Efforts Are Limited in Scope	24
	Conclusions	28
	Recommendations for Executive Action	29
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	29
Appendix I	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	32
Appendix II	Listing of Job Corps Career Training Offerings in Program Year 2007, by Industry Area	38
Appendix III	Career Trainings Offered at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited	40
Appendix IV	Percentage of Planned Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State and Job Corps Center	41
Appendix V	Regional Initiatives Approved by the Department of Labor	46
Appendix VI	Comments from the Department of Labor	47
Appendix VII	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	50

Related GAO Products

51

Tables

Table 1: Number of Career Training Offerings in Various Industries at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited	11
Table 2: Job Corps Centers Achieving One-Half or Less of Their Planned Enrollment for Female Residential Students in Program Year 2007	15
Table 3: Health Care Training Offered at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited	21
Table 4: Characteristics of the Job Corps Centers That We Visited, by Region (Program Year 2007)	34
Table 5: Characteristics of Outreach and Admissions Contractors That We Visited	36

Figures

Figure 1: Job Corps Center Locations	2
Figure 2: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Race or Ethnic Group	5
Figure 3: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Age	6
Figure 4: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Reading Level at the Time of Enrollment	7
Figure 5: Percentage of Job Corps Career Training Slots in Program Year 2006, by Industry Area	10
Figure 6: Male and Female Job Corps Residential Students' Average Actual Enrollment as a Percentage of the Planned Enrollment for Program Years 2005 through 2007	14
Figure 7: Reasons That Students Left Job Corps in Program Year 2007	16
Figure 8: Reasons That Students Left Job Corps in Program Year 2007, by Gender	17
Figure 9: Percentage of Survey Respondents Reporting Specific Job Corps Career Training Offerings as a Very Important Factor for Recruiting Residential Students	18
Figure 10: Percentage of Male and Female Graduates in Major Job Corps Career Training Programs in Program Year 2007	19

Figure 11: Health Care Training Programs at 2 Job Corps Centers That We Visited	20
Figure 12: Percentage of Center Directors Reporting Specific Aspects of Job Corps Center Life as Very Important for Retaining Residential Students	23

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

June 2, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Employment and
Workplace Safety
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate

Established in 1964 as part of the Economic Opportunity Act, Job Corps is the nation's largest residential, educational, and career technical training program for disadvantaged youths. Administered by the Department of Labor (Labor), Job Corps received about \$1.6 billion for program year 2007¹ to support a planned enrollment of about 44,000.² Approximately 86 percent of this enrollment is reserved for residential students, with the remainder reserved for nonresidential students who commute to the center on a daily basis. Job Corps has 122 centers located in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (see fig. 1).³ Large and small corporations and nonprofit organizations manage and operate 94 of the Job Corps centers. The other 28 centers—called Civilian Conservation

¹A program year begins July 1 of a year and ends on June 30 of the following year. Thus, program year 2007 began on July 1, 2007, and ended on June 30, 2008.

²Because students stay on average for 8 months, approximately 60,000 students will occupy the 44,000 slots allocated for the year.

³This number includes 2 centers that are temporarily closed—1 because of Hurricane Katrina and 1 because of safety issues. In addition, Job Corps has plans to open 5 new centers.

Centers—are operated through interagency agreements with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior.

Figure 1: Job Corps Center Locations



Sources: GAO analysis of Department of Labor data; Map Resources (map).

Most youths enrolling in Job Corps have not completed high school and read at or below the sixth-grade level. Most are working toward a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and may also receive career technical training from among a range of industries, including business and finance, construction, and health care. Since its inception, Job Corps has educated and trained more than 2 million young people, preparing them to enter the nation's workforce.

Recent congressional hearings raised concerns that Job Corps centers are not operating at or near capacity—that is, not meeting their planned enrollment goals. In particular, some have expressed concern about low female residential student enrollment. As a result, you asked us to examine the issues associated with the recruitment and retention of residential students. Specifically, we reviewed the (1) extent to which Job Corps centers are operating at or near capacity for residential students; (2) major factors that affect centers' ability to recruit and retain residential students, particularly female residential students; and (3) steps, if any, Labor has taken to address the recruitment and retention of residential students.

To address these objectives, we used a multifaceted approach. To understand recent trends in the enrollment of male and female residential students, we analyzed Labor's data identifying planned enrollment for male and female residential students and the average actual number of male and female residential students onboard for each of the 122 centers. Our analysis covered July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2008—the 3 most recently completed program years (program years 2005 to 2007). On the basis of a review of the systems' internal controls, we determined that the data for program years 2005 to 2007 were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review. To understand the major factors related to the recruitment and retention of residential students, we administered two Web-based surveys during August to October, 2008. One survey was directed to the 32 outreach and admissions contractors who recruit male and female students, often for more than 1 center. A second survey was distributed to the 117 Job Corps center directors who were responsible for enrolling and retaining residential students during program year 2007.⁴ We received a 100 percent response rate on the survey from the outreach and admissions contractors, and a 97 percent response rate from the center

⁴We did not survey Job Corps center directors at the 2 centers that were closed or the 3 centers that had entirely nonresidential students.

directors. We also visited 7 Job Corps centers—located in Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Washington State—and the 4 outreach and admissions contractors responsible for recruiting students for these centers. We selected these Job Corps centers because they are geographically diverse, provide a mix of privately and federally operated centers, and reflect centers that had varying success in meeting planned male and female residential enrollment goals. In addition, we visited the Job Corps center in Denison, Iowa, because it is 1 of 7 centers with a single-parent dormitory, combined with a day-care center for children of residential students—a feature that Labor officials believe could enhance female recruitment and retention. During our site visits, we interviewed center officials and conducted focus groups with female residential students to learn about the factors that were important in decisions to choose or stay at a particular center. To gather information about Job Corps initiatives and actions to improve the recruitment and retention of residential students, we interviewed Job Corps officials located in the national office and the six regional offices.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2008 to June 2009, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. (See app.I for more details on our objectives, scope, and methodology.)

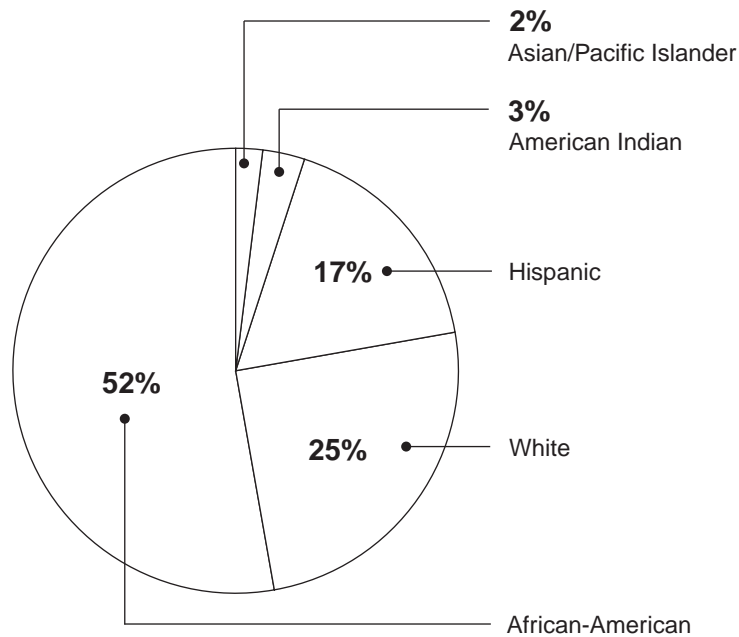
Background

Student demographics: To be eligible for Job Corps, interested youths must be at least age 16 and not yet age 25 at the time of enrollment, and they must be considered low income and have an additional barrier to employment.⁵ These barriers include being a school dropout, a runaway, a foster child, a parent, or homeless. In program year 2007, the latest year for which data were available, approximately 60 percent of the students were male and 40 percent were female. The student population reflected

⁵The criteria for being considered low income include receiving public assistance or having a total family income that does not exceed the higher of the poverty level or 70 percent of the lower living standard income level, which is adjusted annually by the Secretary of Labor to account for regional, metropolitan, urban, and rural differences and for family size.

diversity and approximately 75 percent of the students were nonwhite (see fig. 2).⁶

Figure 2: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Race or Ethnic Group



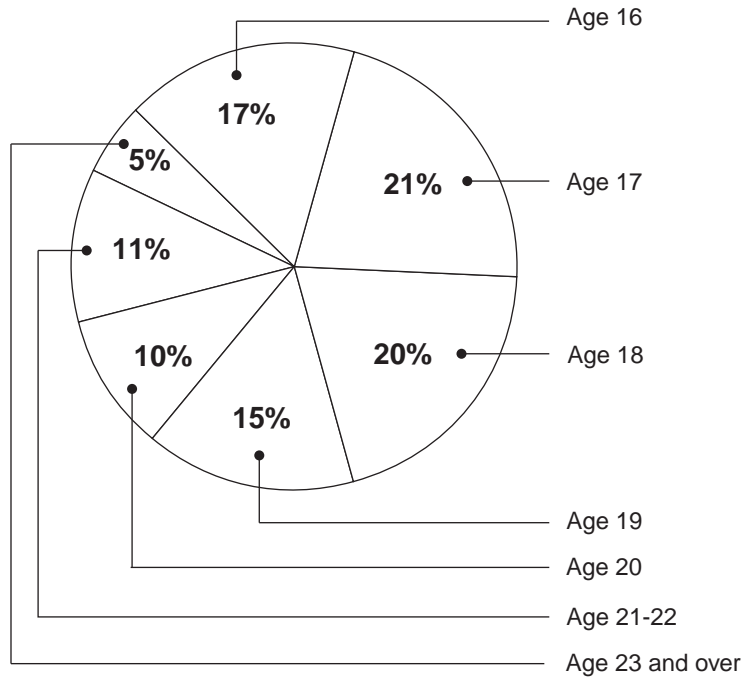
Source: Department of Labor data.

Note: Total does not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

More than one-third of the students in program year 2007 were members of families receiving some form of public assistance. In addition, as shown in figure 3, the majority of these students (58 percent) were age 18 or younger.

⁶The percentages for student characteristics were calculated using the total number of students enrolled in Job Corps during program year 2007.

Figure 3: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Age

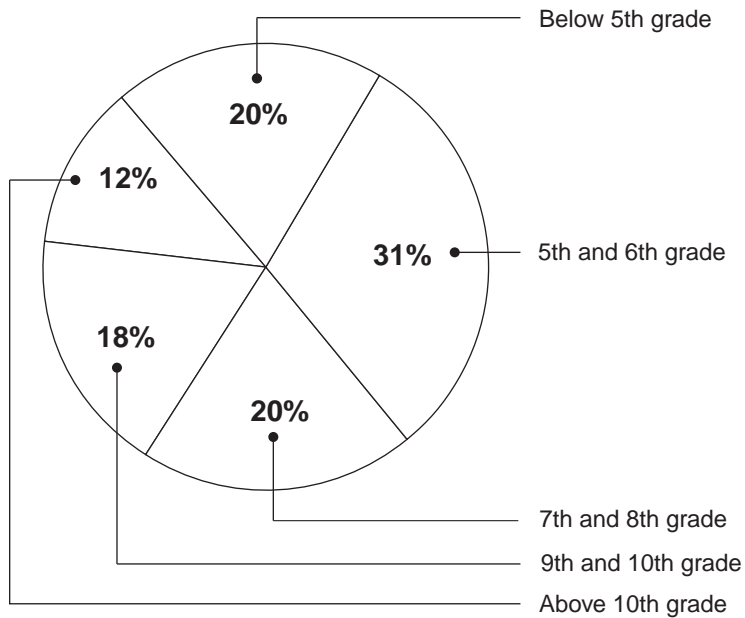


Source: Department of Labor data.

Note: Total does not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

In addition, more than three-quarters of the students in program year 2007 were high school dropouts, and, as shown in figure 4, about one-half of the students were reading at or below the sixth-grade level at the time of enrollment into the program.

Figure 4: Percentage of Job Corps Students in Program Year 2007, by Reading Level at the Time of Enrollment



Source: Department of Labor data.

Note: Total does not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Job Corps facilities: Job Corps centers vary substantially, both in terms of size and type of facility. While nearly three-fourths of the centers have a planned enrollment of fewer than 400 students, centers range in size from 107 students at 1 center in Louisiana to 1,742 students at 1 center in Texas. Some Job Corps centers are converted seminaries, hospitals, or military bases, while other centers are newly constructed. Most Job Corps centers provide a variety of services to students 7 days a week, including housing, meals, medical and dental care, and recreational activities.⁷ Among the centers we visited, the living arrangements ranged from rooms with a single bed to rooms with as many as eight beds. The centers we visited also provided on-site a variety of recreational sports activities, such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball, as well as arts and crafts.

Life in Job Corps: Job Corps believes that providing a safe environment in which Job Corps students can learn is vital to the success of the program.

⁷Three centers enroll only nonresidential students.

Job Corps requires each center to develop standards for student conduct, including a set of rules and sanctions. For example, centers have rules that prohibit gambling, using profanity, and dressing inappropriately. In addition, the program has a zero tolerance policy for violence and drugs. Students who fail to comply with this policy are to be dismissed from the program.

The Job Corps experience generally consists of the following four stages:

1. *Outreach and admissions:* Typically, students are recruited by outreach and admissions contractors who use a variety of recruiting strategies, including distributing information to various entities, such as schools, social service agencies, and one-stop centers.⁸ These contractors are responsible for explaining to applicants what it is like to live at a center and what is expected of them once they enroll in the program. In program year 2007, 32 outreach and admissions contractors recruited potential applicants for the 122 Job Corps centers.⁹
2. *Career preparation:* Career preparation encompasses a student's first few weeks after enrollment. During this time, students learn about personal responsibility, social skills, and career exploration. Students also work on job search skills, and learn to use labor market information to help them make informed decisions on which career training option to pursue. In addition, students work with Job Corps staff to develop a personal career development plan. At this stage, according to Labor, students begin to feel more comfortable being at Job Corps and are prepared to begin learning the technical skills they will need to secure a lasting career.
3. *Career development:* Students enrolled in the program spend the majority of their time in the career development stage. At this point, students learn and demonstrate career technical, academic, and employability skills. Students who did not graduate from high school will have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or GED certificate. Students will also learn and practice technical skills from a chosen career training field. For example, 1 center we visited had a

⁸One-stop centers are required under the Workforce Investment Act to be the access point for services provided by 16 federally funded employment and training programs.

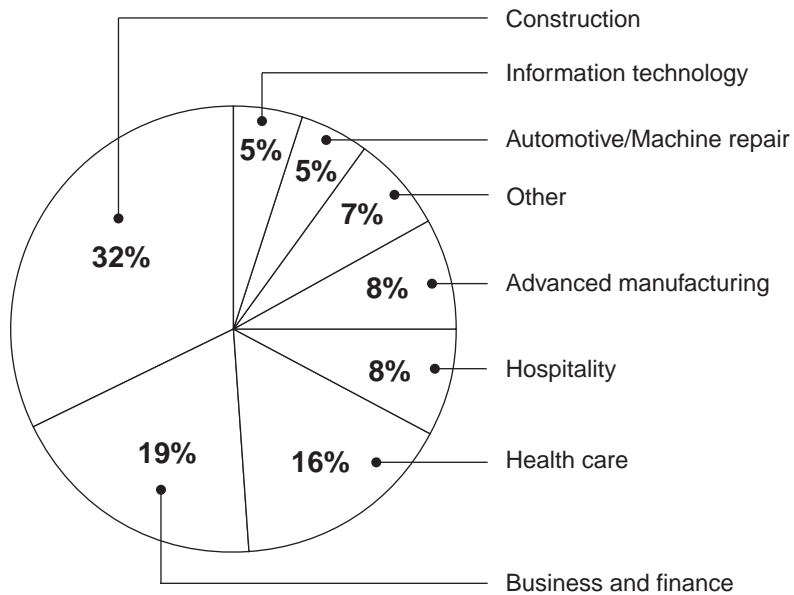
⁹In addition, several Job Corps centers also had contracts to recruit potential applicants for their specific centers.

replica of a patient examination room for its medical assistant students to receive training in such duties as recording patients' vital signs, collecting blood samples, and using an EKG machine. Another center we visited simulated a pharmacy where its pharmacy technician students learned to perform such duties as dealing with customers, detecting prescription errors, and packaging and distributing medications.

4. *Career transition:* During career transition, Job Corps staff work with graduates for up to 18 months to help them in their transition from Job Corps to productive employment. This support includes helping graduates find housing, health care, family services, and transportation to and from work.

Career training: Job Corps offers career technical training in a number of industries. Several of the career offerings have been in place since the 1960s, particularly in the construction trades, which is still the most prevalent career training. In program year 2006, the latest year for which data are available, approximately one-third of the career training slots available nationwide were in the construction industry. (See fig. 5 for more information on career training, by industry.) Job Corps officials recognize that the U.S. economy is rapidly changing, and they are placing growing emphasis on technological proficiency. Accordingly, Job Corps encourages centers to provide training that meets industry needs, particularly in high-growth, high-demand occupations. Job Corps has also begun to emphasize long-term student outcomes, where the goal is not just to prepare students for entry-level employment, but rather to prepare them for a career that provides a pathway for upward mobility.

Figure 5: Percentage of Job Corps Career Training Slots in Program Year 2006, by Industry Area



Source: Department of Labor data.

The high-growth, high-demand industry areas include many specific occupations for which Job Corps students can receive training. For example, among the career training offered by some centers in the construction industry are bricklaying, carpentry, cement masonry, electrical, facilities maintenance, painting, plastering, and plumbing. Within the health care industry, some centers provide career training in dental assistance, medical assistance, nursing assistance, and pharmacy technician. (See app. II for a list of career training offerings available within the industry areas for program year 2007.)

Most centers offer a range of career training choices, but some centers have more limited choices. For example, among the centers we visited, the number of career training offerings ranged from as many as 14 at 1 center to 3 at another center (see table 1).

Table 1: Number of Career Training Offerings in Various Industries at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited

Center/State	Number of career training offerings, by industry area					Total
	Business and finance	Construction	Health care	Hospitality	Other ^a	
Cascades, Washington State	1	5	4	1	0	11
Centennial, Idaho	1	5	1	1	2	10
Denison, Iowa	0	4	3	1	2	10
Frenchburg, Kentucky	1	5	0	1	0	7
Hartford, Connecticut	1	0	1	0	1	3
Westover, Massachusetts	1	6	3	1	3	14
Whitney Young, Kentucky	0	4	4	1	1	10

Source: Job Corps center directors.

^aIncludes advanced manufacturing, automotive and machine repair, and information technology.

Within the industry areas, the specific career choices at the centers we visited also varied. For example, all 6 of the centers that we visited with health care classes offered training as a certified nursing assistant, but only 1 center offered dental assistant training. In addition, 2 centers offered training as a medical assistant, and 3 offered training as a pharmacy technician. Similarly, the 6 centers with construction trades offered carpentry and facilities maintenance, and 4 offered painting and brick masonry. Only 1 center offered plumbing. The 6 centers with training in the hospitality industry offered culinary arts. (See app. III for a complete listing of career training offerings for each center that we visited.)

Evaluations of Job Corps: Few evaluative studies have been conducted over the years to determine whether Job Corps is cost-effective, and, when these studies have been done, the results have been mixed. In 1982, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., performed a return on investment analysis and concluded that Job Corps returned \$1.46 to society for every

\$1.00 spent on the program.¹⁰ Later, Mathematica conducted another Job Corps study that was based on an experimental design where, from late 1994 to early 1996, nearly 81,000 eligible applicants nationwide were randomly assigned either to a program group, whose members were allowed to enroll in Job Corps, or to a control group, whose members were not enrolled in Job Corps. Mathematica followed its sample members for 4 years after their random assignments. In its report issued in 2001, Mathematica concluded that Job Corps was cost-effective in that the value of the benefits exceeded the costs of the program by about \$17,000 per participant over his or her lifetime.¹¹ Among its conclusions, Mathematica reported that Job Corps

- substantially increased the education and training services that youths receive,
- improved these youths' skills and educational attainment,
- generated employment and earnings gains,
- significantly reduced involvement with crime,
- was cost-effective despite its high costs, and
- was a good investment.

Mathematica issued a follow-up report in 2006 that examined the results of the 1994- to 1996-study group over a longer period.¹² In this report, Mathematica analyzed earnings and employment rates through 2004. While Mathematica found that some of the program results reported in 2001 persisted, such as improving educational attainments and reducing involvement in crime, overall earnings gains did not persist. Mathematica concluded that the benefits to society of Job Corps were smaller than the program costs, but acknowledged that the results reflect the program as it operated in 1994 to 1996 and not necessarily as it operates today.

¹⁰Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., *Evaluation of the Economic Impact of the Job Corps Program: Third Follow-up Report* (September 1982).

¹¹Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., *Does Job Corps Work? Summary of the National Job Corps Study* (June 2001).

¹²Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., *National Job Corps Study and Longer-Term Follow-Up Study: Impact and Benefit-Cost Findings Using Survey and Summary Earnings Records Data Final Report* (August 2006).

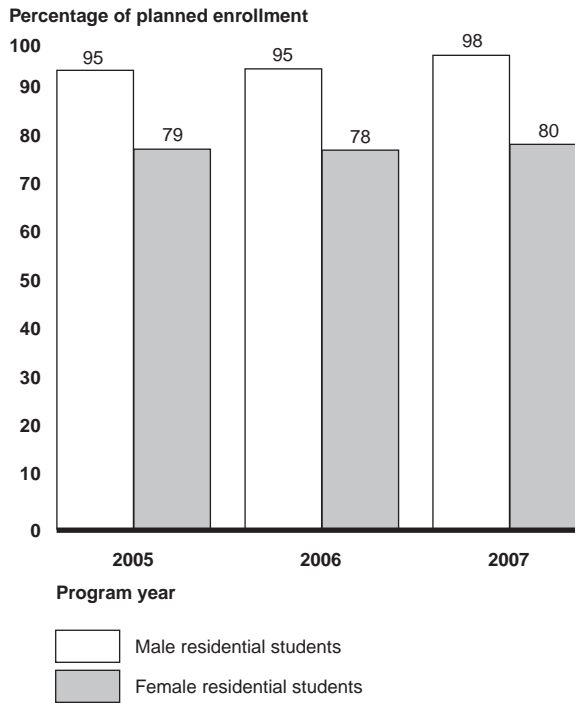
Currently, Labor does not have plans to conduct any further long-term evaluation of Job Corps.

Overall, Job Corps Operated at or Near Capacity for Male Residential Students, but Not for Female Residential Students

The Job Corps program has been operating at or near capacity for male residential students, but under capacity for female residential students during the last 3 program years.¹³ During those years, Job Corps overall achieved between 95 and 98 percent of the planned enrollment for male residential students, but achieved about 80 percent or less of the planned enrollment for female residential students (see fig. 6).

¹³In program year 2007, 115 Job Corps centers enrolled male residential students and 117 centers enrolled female residential students. We classified a center as being at or near capacity if it achieved an average actual enrollment of over 95 percent of the planned enrollment.

Figure 6: Male and Female Job Corps Residential Students' Average Actual Enrollment as a Percentage of the Planned Enrollment for Program Years 2005 through 2007



Source: Department of Labor data.

In general, operating at or near capacity for female residential students has been challenging. The majority of outreach and admissions contractors we surveyed told us that recruiting female residential students was much more difficult during the most recently completed program year than recruiting male residential students. For example, 81 percent of these outreach and admissions contractors told us that recruiting female students into Job Corps was either moderately or very difficult versus 29 percent for male students. In addition, we found that while about 62 percent of the Job Corps centers were operating at or near capacity for male residential students in program year 2007, only about 17 percent of the centers were operating at or near capacity for female residential

students.¹⁴ (See app. IV for more information on the planned and actual enrollment for male and female residential students, by center.) Moreover, about one-half of the 117 centers that enrolled female residential students in program year 2007 were below 80 percent of their planned enrollment for female residential students. Several centers achieved one-half or less than one-half of their planned enrollment for female residential students (see table 2).

Table 2: Job Corps Centers Achieving One-Half or Less of Their Planned Enrollment for Female Residential Students in Program Year 2007

Center/State	Female residential enrollment		Percentage of the average planned enrollment
	Average planned	Average actual	
Frenchburg, Kentucky	56	28	50%
Carville, Louisiana	100	48	48
Jacobs Creek, Tennessee	56	27	48
Ramey, Puerto Rico	136	65	48
Pine Knot, Kentucky	56	25	45
Great Onyx, Kentucky	54	23	43
Ouachita, Arkansas	56	23	41
Flatwoods, Virginia	56	11	20

Source: Department of Labor data.

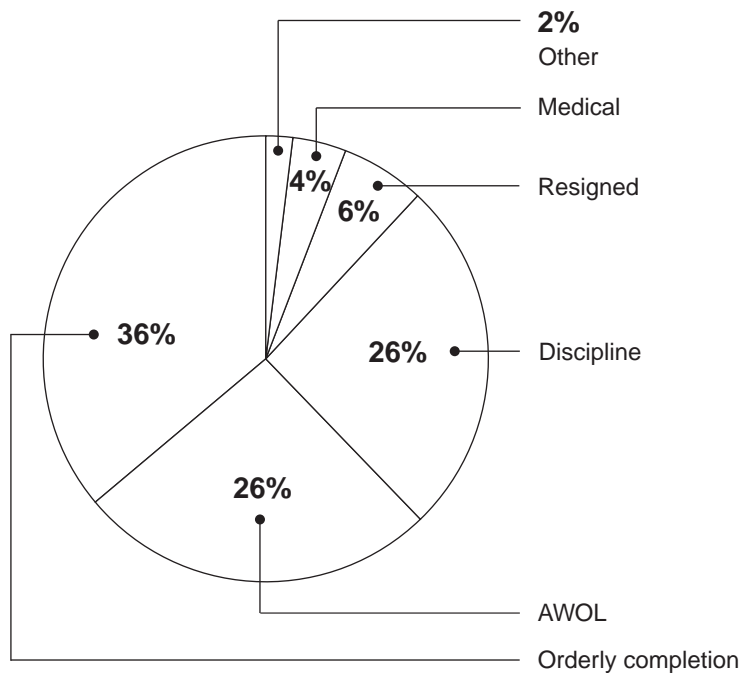
Operating at less than full capacity represents not only a lost opportunity to provide services to more youths in need of educational or career training, but also represents an inefficient use of resources. Because most of Job Corps' operating costs are fixed, such as costs for heat, electricity, and staff salaries, these costs are incurred whether a center is full or not. In program year 2007, Job Corps' operating costs were about \$1.5 billion, with a planned enrollment of about 44,000 slots. Thus, on average, a slot costs about \$34,000. In program year 2007, Job Corps had about 3,700

¹⁴Two factors enabled Job Corps to have achieved 98 percent of the planned enrollment for male residential students in program year 2007, even though only 62 percent of the centers operated at or near capacity for this group. First, 42 of the 71 centers that operated at or near capacity for males exceeded more than 100 percent of their planned enrollment. For example, 1 center we visited achieved 130 percent of its planned enrollment for male residential students. Second, centers vary in size so that a larger center with a greater planned enrollment affects the overall national percentage more than a smaller center.

unfilled residential slots, about 90 percent of which were planned for female residential students.

One factor affecting centers' ability to operate at or near capacity is how long students stay in the program once enrolled. Job Corps is a self-paced program, and, as a result, the length of stay for students varies.¹⁵ On average, during program year 2007, Job Corps students remained in the program for about 8 months. Students leave the program for a variety of reasons. In program year 2007, about one-half of the students who left Job Corps were dismissed for violating program policies, such as those related to violence, and drug and alcohol use (discipline), or exceeding the number of unauthorized absences and being considered absent without leave, or AWOL. About 36 percent of the students separated as orderly completions—that is, they completed program requirements and left the program as scheduled. (See fig. 7.)

Figure 7: Reasons That Students Left Job Corps in Program Year 2007

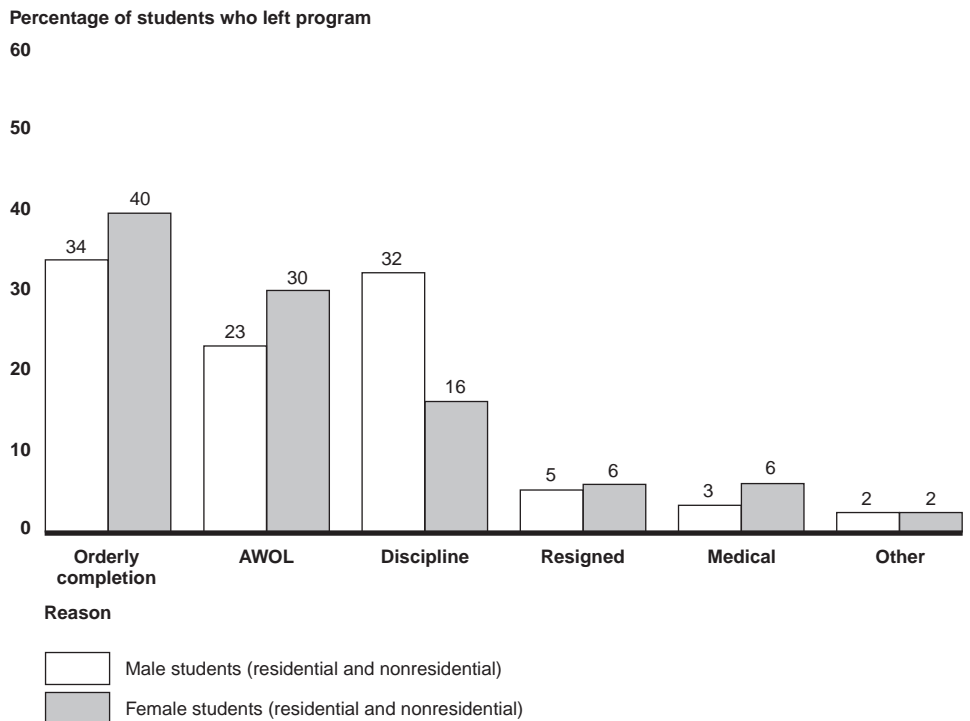


Source: Department of Labor data.

¹⁵Students may be enrolled for up to 2 years. An optional 3rd year is granted for students who qualify for advanced training.

Nationally, there were some differences between male and female students in the reasons for leaving Job Corps. In program year 2007, a somewhat higher percentage of female students left the program as scheduled having completed program requirements (orderly completion). Furthermore, a higher percentage of female students were dismissed for violating the program's policy for unauthorized absences, or AWOL, while a higher percentage of male students were dismissed from the program for violating program policies, such as those related to violence and drug and alcohol use (discipline) in program year 2007. (See fig. 8.)

Figure 8: Reasons That Students Left Job Corps in Program Year 2007, by Gender



Source: Department of Labor data.

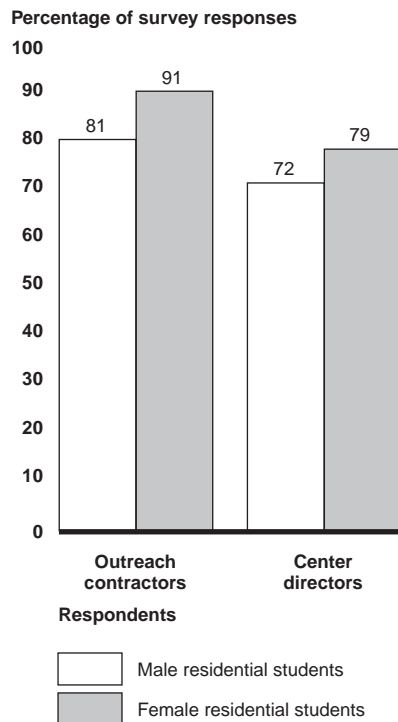
Three Key Factors Affect Job Corps' Ability to Recruit and Retain Residential Students

Three major factors affect the recruitment and retention of residential students, particularly female residential students, according to Job Corps officials. These key factors include the selection and availability of career training offerings, the availability of complete and accurate preenrollment information, and the quality of center life.

Selection and Availability of Career Training Offerings Play a Major Role in Recruiting Students

The selection and availability of career training offerings in occupations of interest to students play a major role in Job Corps' ability to recruit students, particularly female residential students. In particular, a large percentage of outreach and admissions contractors (91 percent) and center directors (79 percent) we surveyed cited the availability of particular career training offerings as very important in attracting female residential students to the program. Somewhat fewer officials rated this factor as very important for male residential students. (See fig. 9.)

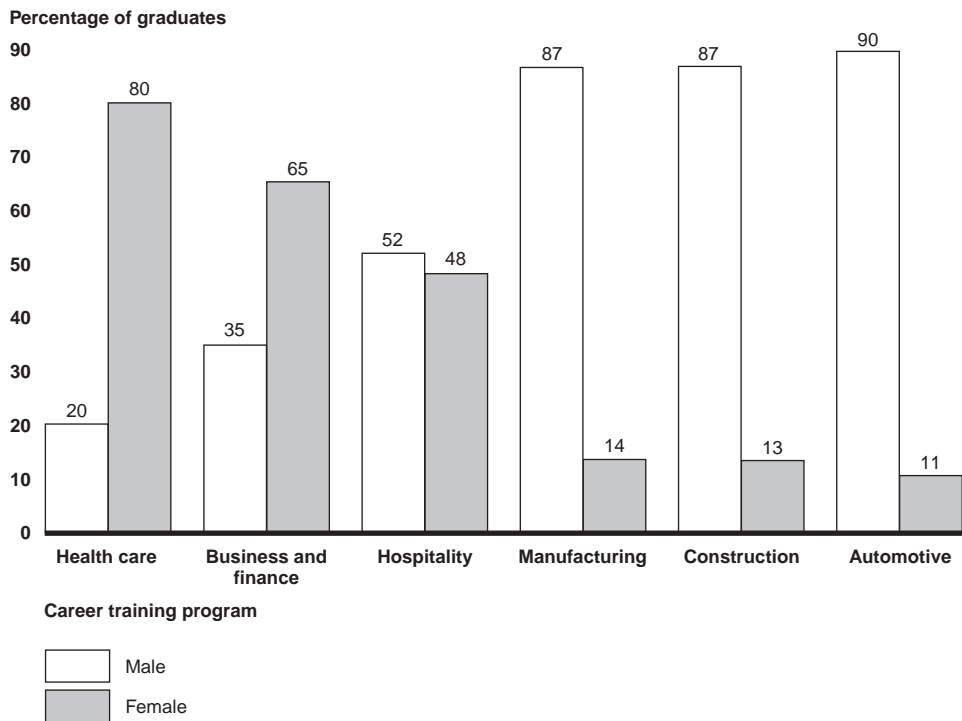
Figure 9: Percentage of Survey Respondents Reporting Specific Job Corps Career Training Offerings as a Very Important Factor for Recruiting Residential Students



Source: GAO surveys of Job Corps outreach and admissions contractors and center directors.

Providing training in careers that are attractive to women may enable Job Corps to recruit more female students. Many Job Corps officials we interviewed emphasized the importance of centers offering training in a range of careers that are attractive to female students, including training in the health care, business and finance, and hospitality industries. In program year 2007, about 80 percent of the graduates in health care training programs were women. (See fig. 10.)

Figure 10: Percentage of Male and Female Graduates in Major Job Corps Career Training Programs in Program Year 2007



Source: Department of Labor data.

Many female students told us in focus groups that they were attracted to Job Corps because of the training offered in specific health care occupations, such as certified nursing assistant and pharmacy technician. Figure 11 contains photographs of health care training programs at 2 Job Corps centers that we visited where students practice in classrooms that resemble real-life settings.

Figure 11: Health Care Training Programs at 2 Job Corps Centers That We Visited



Source: GAO.

The centers we visited that offered a variety of health care training options had relatively higher female enrollment. For example, the 4 centers we visited that were operating above 80 percent of their planned enrollment for female residential students offered a variety of health care training programs. However, the centers we visited that were below 60 percent of their planned enrollment for female students offered few, if any, health care training options. (See table 3.)

Table 3: Health Care Training Offered at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited

Health care career training offerings	Centers above 80 percent of their planned female residential student enrollment				Centers below 60 percent of their planned female residential student enrollment		
	Cascades	Denison	Westover	Whitney Young	Centennial	Frenchburg	Hartford
Certified nursing assistant	X	X	X	X	X	^a	X
Dental assistant	X						
Medical assistant	X			X			
Medical office support	X	X	X	X			
Pharmacy technician		X	X	X			

Sources: Department of Labor data and Job Corps center directors.

^aCertified nursing assistant training is not offered at the Job Corps center, but is provided through a partnership with a local community college.

Availability of Complete and Accurate Preenrollment Information for Prospective Students Is a Key Factor in Both Recruitment and Retention

Another major factor affecting Job Corps’ ability to both recruit and retain residential students is the availability of accurate and complete preenrollment information for prospective students. Having accurate information prior to enrolling in Job Corps helps students choose the center that they think best meets their needs and helps establish realistic expectations for what it will be like to live and train at the center, according to officials that we interviewed. While accurate and complete preenrollment information is important for all students, regardless of gender, these officials reported that it is especially important to highlight certain aspects of the program, such as the living arrangements, for female students prior to enrollment. Most of the outreach and admissions contractors that we surveyed reported that certain aspects of the living arrangements, such as the condition of the living facilities (about 91 percent) and the number of students per dormitory room (about 74 percent), were very important in recruiting female residential students. A much lower percentage of outreach and admissions contractors reported that living arrangements were very important in recruiting male residential students.

Having realistic expectations helps students adjust to Job Corps. According to officials that we interviewed, such expectations are key to students’ decision to remain in the program. Several officials we interviewed said that students who lack a complete understanding of what

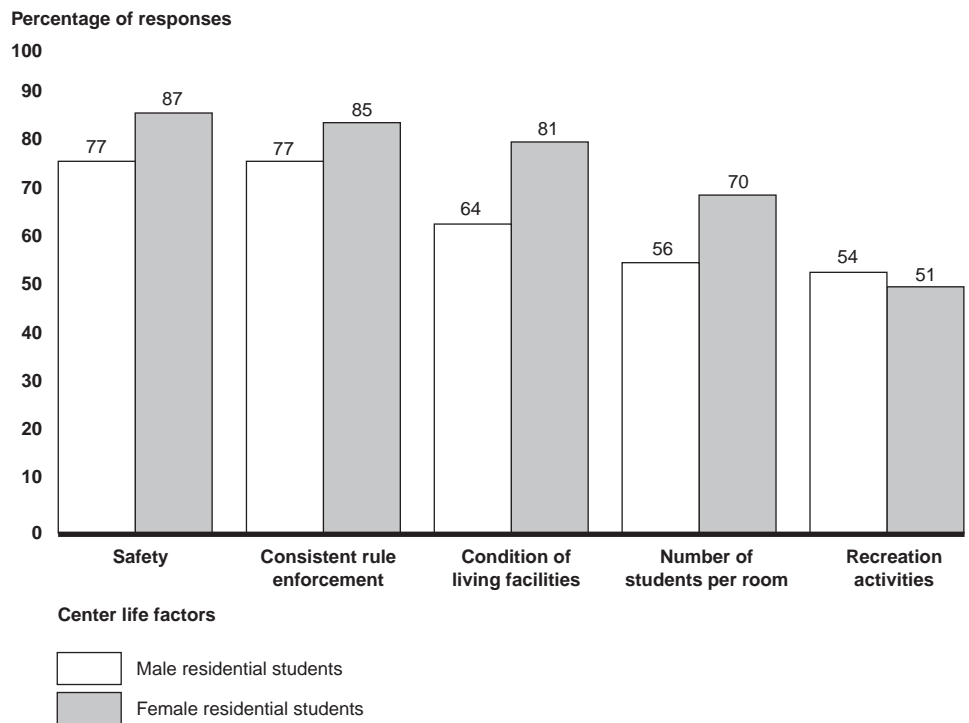
it will be like to live and train at a center prior to enrollment will be more likely to leave the program early. According to these officials, complete and accurate preenrollment information on all aspects of the program helps to preclude students from forming false expectations as well as prevents any major surprises when they arrive at a center. Furthermore, we found that the nature of the preenrollment information that students received varied. For example, one official we interviewed told us that he provided potential students with a handout containing detailed information on Job Corps training programs, including employment-related age restrictions for certain careers. Alternatively, another official provided prospective students with more general information on the program and available career training opportunities. In our focus groups, we found that several students did not receive complete and accurate information prior to enrolling in the program. For example, some female focus group participants at 1 center said that they were not told they would be sharing a dormitory room with seven other students. In another focus group, participants commented that they were not provided with complete information about specific center rules, such as cell phone use and acceptable attire. While they had decided to stay in Job Corps, these students acknowledged that the transition was difficult because they lacked realistic expectations.

Preenrollment tours, virtual tours, and center videos can be important tools in establishing realistic expectations of Job Corps life. About 80 percent of the outreach and admissions contractors we surveyed reported that a preenrollment tour and a center video or virtual online tour are at least moderately important in helping female students make a realistic decision about enrolling at a particular center. Some officials we interviewed also said that preenrollment tours are very important because they provide students with an opportunity to see and experience what it is like to live and train at a particular center. Because of key center differences, such as size and appearance, several officials emphasized the importance of showing students the center where they plan to enroll to prevent false expectations. In fact, one center director did an analysis of all students who, from April 2008 through April 2009, left the center within 60 days of enrollment due to either resignation or AWOL separation, and found that about 70 percent of them had not taken a tour of the center. Some officials with whom we spoke acknowledged that center videos and virtual tours are useful recruitment strategies to provide students who are unable to participate in a preenrollment tour with an opportunity to see and experience center life.

The Quality of Center Life Is Important in Student Retention

Once students enroll at a center, the quality of center life—such as a safe environment, consistent enforcement of center rules, and the availability of recreational and extracurricular activities—have a major effect on the retention of students, especially female residential students. In particular, center directors that we surveyed ranked several factors related to center life as especially important in retaining female residential students. For example, over 80 percent of the center directors we surveyed reported that safety, consistent enforcement of the center’s rules, and the condition of the living facilities are very important for retaining female residential students. (See fig. 12.)

Figure 12: Percentage of Center Directors Reporting Specific Aspects of Job Corps Center Life as Very Important for Retaining Residential Students



Source: GAO survey of Job Corps center directors.

Maintaining a safe center environment and consistently enforcing center rules are both important factors in retaining residential students. Over 85 percent of center directors that we surveyed reported that safety was a major factor in the retention of female students in particular. In addition, our focus group participants commented on the importance of feeling safe while at the center. At 1 Job Corps center we visited, focus group

participants said that center staff at all levels—including the center director, instructors, security staff, and facility maintenance personnel—work very hard to ensure a safe center environment by addressing student incidents in a timely manner. In our survey, 85 percent of center directors also reported that the consistent enforcement of center rules was very important in retaining female residential students. During our site visits, several officials said that the enforcement of center rules helped to create a center environment where female students felt safe on campus.

Recreational and extracurricular activities are important for male and female residential students, but it is particularly important for centers to have specific activities for female students, according to many officials that we interviewed. To help retain female students in the program, most Job Corps centers we visited developed recreational and extracurricular activities. For example, officials at 1 center we visited said that they offer specific activities that may interest female students, such as volleyball, exercise classes, and talent shows. Female focus group participants at this center told us they appreciated the various types of available activities. Additionally, officials at another center said that they set aside specific days for female students to use the weight room to ensure that male students did not dominate the equipment.

Labor Has Taken Some Steps to Address Job Corps' Recruitment and Retention Issues, but These Efforts Are Limited in Scope

Labor has made some improvements to career training offerings, preenrollment information, and quality of center life in an effort to address issues related to the recruitment and retention of residential students. However, Labor has not reviewed nationally the training options that centers provide for female students or ensured that students receive detailed preenrollment information.

Labor Has Made Improvements to Career Training Options That Are Attractive to Females, but Has Not Implemented a Nationwide Review

Labor has gradually made more training opportunities available to Job Corps students that are likely to appeal to female students and lead to self-sufficiency. Job Corps began as a predominantly male program in the 1960s, and many of its training providers in the construction area have been involved with the program since the 1960s or 1970s. Over time, the program has increasingly provided training options that are often attractive to female students and result in jobs that are in demand. Many of the additions or expansions of course offerings are generated by individual

centers. Centers submit a request to Labor that documents the demand and wages of the occupation and includes, among other things, statements from local employers and information on the local labor market, such as entry-level wages and job availability over the next 5 to 10 years. During program year 2007, Labor approved requests from 26 centers to add or expand their career training offerings, most commonly in the health care area.

Some of the expansion of career training options has come through one of Job Corps' regional initiatives that were begun as a result of new requirements by Labor. Under Labor's "New Vision for Job Corps"—an effort that seeks to modernize the program, including its academics and career training options—Labor required each Job Corps regional office to submit a proposal for a regional initiative. These initiatives, or labs, form part of a broad strategy to align training content with industry standards and certifications. (See app. V for a listing of the regional initiatives approved by Labor.) One of Labor's six Job Corps regions is implementing an initiative focused on developing training paths through additional training and forging employer partnerships, particularly in the automotive and health care industries. This initiative allows students to pursue an incremental course of study that links different centers in certain training areas. For example, a student may enroll in a medical assistant program, and could obtain additional training and certifications in such areas as pharmacy technician or phlebotomist, even if the additional training was offered at a different center. The region is also partnering with an ambulance company to start offering basic emergency medical technician and advanced paramedic training at a few centers. This company plans to hire students who complete the training. As a result, regional officials told us that they expect the initiative to increase both male and female student enrollment and to have a positive impact on graduates' long-term earnings.

While these initiatives show promise in expanding career training options that will both attract more female students and have better linkages to local employers, they are limited in scope. Labor officials noted that centers and regional Labor offices try to offer a mix of training, including options appealing to women. However, Labor has not been strategic in how it addresses issues related to female recruitment and retention, nor has it examined how the mix of career training offerings nationwide might be a factor. Typically, Labor waits until a center requests to add or expand a career training option before it responds. Labor has not conducted a center-by-center review of career training options at a national level to determine whether centers struggling with female recruitment and retention should modify their career training options to make them more

attractive to women. Such a review could identify training gaps and could help centers in their efforts to operate at or near capacity, especially for female students.

Labor Is Beginning to Require More Consistent Preenrollment Information, but More Emphasis Is Needed

Labor has begun to take some steps to ensure that potential students receive consistent information about Job Corps prior to enrollment. Labor's national office has assumed responsibility for the mass marketing of Job Corps in an effort to efficiently and economically provide a consistent general message about the program. Labor's marketing contractor has produced print materials along with television and radio advertisements that include a national toll-free telephone number so that interested youths may obtain more information and contact a local outreach and admissions contractor. Some of these national marketing materials specifically target potential female residential students. However, these materials do not describe particular centers in detail.

One of the Job Corps regions has begun to implement an initiative that, among other things, requires outreach and admissions contractors to discuss detailed information with students prior to enrollment. This detailed information covers rules about acceptable student conduct, including policies on smoking and appropriate dress, and about career training opportunities, including industry certifications or advanced training. In addition, outreach and admissions contractors are required to show potential students a video about these rules and to have students sign an agreement to adhere to them. Officials said they believe that this process helps students understand and commit to the rules. Outreach and admissions contractors in this region said that the initiative has made it easier for them to discuss the realities and benefits of Job Corps with potential students and employers. This initiative may help ensure consistent communication of the rules and benefits of Job Corps overall, but it does not provide specific information about life at a particular center, such as the number of students sharing a dormitory room or the available recreational activities.

Job Corps officials generally agree that an effective way for students to have realistic expectations about life at a Job Corps center is for them to visit the center prior to enrolling. This is not always possible, however, and virtual tours or videos of centers of interest can be a valuable means of providing potential students with detailed preenrollment information. Many officials—including center directors, outreach and admissions contractors, and Labor officials—told us they believe having a virtual or video tour of centers would help interested students obtain a more

realistic expectation of center life when they are unable to visit the center. Labor's marketing contractor conducted several focus groups in program year 2008 and found that center-specific virtual or video tours may help reduce students' false expectations. In addition, Labor's Advisory Committee on Job Corps confirmed the importance of virtual or video tours, noting that such tours may help increase student retention.¹⁶ In 2009, Labor launched a revamped national Job Corps Web site, allowing individual centers to have links posted to their approved center Web sites. As of March 2009, 72 Job Corps centers had their Web sites approved by Labor, but none of these sites had a virtual tour. While Labor officials acknowledged the value of providing such center-specific information, Labor estimates that the costs of creating a virtual or video tour for every center would total approximately \$1 million. Currently, Labor is exploring less costly alternatives.

Labor Has Taken Some Steps to Address Issues Related to the Quality of Center Life

Labor has several efforts under way to improve the quality of Job Corps center life for students. Among these are efforts designed to promote a safe environment. For example, to assess student safety, Labor requires centers to administer a quarterly survey to students to gauge how safe they feel. According to Labor, the department uses the survey results as a way to monitor student safety; recommend corrective action, as needed; and evaluate center operators. In addition, Labor has an initiative with one outreach and admissions contractor to help enforce the program's policy of zero tolerance of drugs by testing students prior to enrollment and delaying enrollment if they test positive. Labor officials noted that this preenrollment test may initially deter some students from entering the program, but it may also increase student retention by (1) reducing terminations from drug use or violence and (2) improving the safety and learning environment for male and female residential students.

Single parents who participate in Job Corps have unique quality of life needs. Approximately 1 in 10 of the female students in Job Corps in program year 2007 were single parents, and officials noted that these students face an additional barrier to participating in the program due to their need for child care. Labor helps Job Corps centers address this need by allowing centers to establish child care facilities and single-parent

¹⁶The advisory committee consists of 16 members appointed by the Secretary of Labor and includes representatives from the employer community, organized labor, law enforcement, workforce development, armed forces, education, and faith-based and community organizations.

dormitories. Also, Labor provides funds for the construction of approved facilities and for their ongoing maintenance and utilities. Twenty-eight centers currently provide on-site child care, most often for children of nonresidential students. Seven centers also have single-parent dormitories for parents and children. One center that we visited has a single-parent dormitory for 32 students, in which a parent in the program typically has a private room and bathroom for herself and her child, along with a kitchen shared with another parent. This center also has a child development center for children age 6 weeks to age 5, with staff to look after children while parents are in academic or training classes during weekdays. While Labor provides some funds for these programs, the department does not provide funds to support the ongoing costs, such as staff salaries or food for the children. Funds for these costs come from different sources, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start, and child care assistance funds. Labor officials noted that providing single-parent dormitories and child care centers is expensive, but is important to the recruitment and retention of female residential students.

Conclusions

Job Corps fills a unique role in preparing economically disadvantaged young men and women to enter the workforce. The services that the program provides to these youths are among the most comprehensive in the federal government—combining academic, vocational, and social skills training in a residential setting where staff are available 24 hours a day. Because of these services, Job Corps is the most expensive federal job training program, with the cost of each training slot averaging about \$34,000. Because much of the program’s costs are fixed, program efficiency is compromised when Job Corps centers operate under capacity. Operating under capacity represents a missed opportunity to train students who might benefit from the program. Our findings suggest that, while the program nearly achieves its planned enrollment for males, it is struggling in this area with regards to female enrollment. We found clear consensus among Job Corps officials, outreach and admissions contractors, and students that having career training options attractive to women is key to being able to recruit female students into the program. However, while centers have been adding such training, particularly in the health care area, this approach has not been universal and some centers continue to have difficulty in attracting female students. Labor has not taken a strategic approach to address this problem nationwide. The department may continue to struggle with female enrollment if it does not do a thorough review of career training offerings to determine where adjustments could be made that may enhance the ability of the program to attract women.

Job Corps centers vary widely in terms of facilities; living conditions; and, to some extent, the rules that guide daily life at the center. Officials at all levels affirmed the need for students to have, prior to enrolling in the program, a clear understanding of what it would be like to live and train at a center. These officials told us that students who do not have that opportunity have a more difficult transition and are more likely to leave short of completing the program. Yet, we found that students are not always given the sort of preenrollment information they need to make a good decision. Also, although Labor has taken some steps to encourage outreach and admissions contractors to provide more complete preenrollment information, more could be done to ensure that all students receive consistent and complete information before enrolling. Absent additional steps, Job Corps will likely continue to face difficulty in recruiting and retaining students, particularly female students.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve the recruitment and retention of residential students, we recommend that the Secretary of Labor take the following three actions:

- review the availability and selection of career training offerings at centers—particularly those centers that are experiencing difficulty with female enrollment— and assess whether centers need to adjust their career training options to offer more career training that is both attractive to women and that could lead to careers that will enable women to become self-sufficient;
- expand current efforts to ensure that outreach and admissions contractors across all six regions consistently provide potential students with complete and accurate information on all aspects of Job Corps, including providing specific information about the center in which the student will be enrolled; and
- explore the feasibility or cost-effectiveness of developing video or online virtual tours for all centers.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Labor for review and comment. Labor did not comment on our findings and generally agreed with our recommendations. Appendix VI contains a reprint of Labor's comments. In addition, we provided drafts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior for technical comments, but the departments did not provide any comments.

In its response, Labor concurred in part with our recommendation that it review the availability and selection of career training offerings. Labor acknowledged the need to offer “female friendly” career training programs to increase female enrollment. However, Labor noted that in selecting new offerings, it routinely looks beyond those considered traditional occupations for females as they seek to maximize opportunities that may result in long-term self-sufficiency. We concur with the need to focus training in areas that lead to self-sufficiency and acknowledge the need to offer training in nontraditional occupations for women. However, it is possible to offer training, such as in the health care industry, that is attractive to women and that leads to self-sufficiency. We continue to believe that a more systematic assessment of career training offered at the centers is needed, particularly at those centers that are struggling with female enrollment. Such an assessment would identify whether centers need to adjust their career training options to enhance female enrollment.

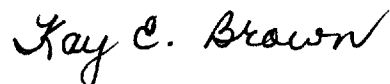
Labor concurred with our recommendation to expand current efforts to ensure that outreach and admissions contractors consistently provide potential students with complete and accurate information on all aspects of Job Corps. Labor acknowledged the importance of providing complete and accurate information and identified several ongoing initiatives, including a new national recruitment Web site that contains links to individual centers. We noted these efforts in our report; however, as of March 2009, 50 of the 122 centers were not linked to this Web site. We encourage Labor to continue to expand its efforts to require that each potential applicant is provided with complete and accurate preenrollment information.

While Labor concurred with our recommendation to explore the feasibility or cost-effectiveness of developing video or online virtual tours for all centers, officials did not provide information about the steps they are planning to take to address the recommendation. Labor acknowledged the importance of prospective students being able to tour centers prior to enrolling, but noted that this is not always possible. As we have previously reported, virtual tours provide an alternative to students who are unable to physically tour the center in which they plan to enroll. Labor officials estimated that it would cost approximately \$1 million to produce a virtual tour of all centers. In its comments, Labor noted that it is currently exploring less costly options, including a short DVD that will combine an overview of the Job Corps program, while using still photography to highlight information about individual centers. We are concerned that such an approach will not be sufficient to provide a realistic preview of life at a specific center for prospective students who are unable to visit the

center. We acknowledge that to produce a virtual tour for each center is not without cost, but stress the importance of assessing the feasibility and benefits, as well as the costs, of such an endeavor before moving forward.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the relevant congressional committees, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Interior, and other interested parties. The report will also be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staffs have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix VII.



Kay E. Brown
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

To better understand the recruitment and retention of residential students, we were asked to provide information on the (1) extent to which Job Corps centers are operating at or near capacity for residential students; (2) major factors that affect centers' ability to recruit and retain residential students, particularly female residential students; and (3) steps, if any, the Department of Labor (Labor) has taken to address the recruitment and retention of residential students. Because nearly 90 percent of Job Corps' planned enrollment is residential, our review focused on those Job Corps centers that provide educational and career technical training to male and female residential students.

To answer our objectives, we administered two Web-based surveys—one to Job Corps' outreach and admissions contractors and one to Job Corps' center directors. We also visited 7 Job Corps centers in six states and 4 outreach and admissions contractors responsible for recruiting residential students for these centers. In addition, we analyzed Labor data identifying planned residential capacity for male and female students and the average actual number of male and female residential students onboard for each of the 122 centers. Furthermore, we interviewed Job Corps officials at the national and regional levels to identify Labor's current efforts under way to improve the recruitment and retention of residential students.

Web-Based Surveys

To obtain information on the major factors that affect the recruitment and retention of residential students, we administered two Web-based surveys. One survey was sent to the 32 outreach and admissions contractors that had a contract with Labor to recruit male and female residential students for Job Corps during program year 2007.¹ Typically these contractors are responsible for recruiting residential students for centers located in the same state, but several have multiple-state responsibility. We received a 100 percent response rate on this survey, with responses from all 32 outreach and admissions contractors. The second survey was distributed to the 117 Job Corps center directors who were responsible for enrolling and retaining residential students during program year 2007.² Of the 117 Job Corps centers contacted, 114 responded to our survey, for a

¹A program year begins July 1 of a year and ends on June 30 of the following year. Thus, program year 2007 began on July 1, 2007, and ended on June 30, 2008.

²We did not survey Job Corps center directors at the 2 centers that were closed or the 3 centers that had entirely nonresidential students.

response rate of 97 percent. To field the surveys, we obtained a list and contact information for the 117 Job Corps center directors and 32 outreach and admissions contractors from Job Corps' national and regional offices. In some cases, we contacted the Job Corps centers directly to determine the appropriate contact information. We collected the survey data from August 2008 to October 2008.

Both surveys contained a section on the recruitment of male and female residential students. We obtained the perspectives of Job Corps center directors and outreach and admissions contractors on the major factors that affect the recruitment of residential students; challenges encountered in recruiting residential students, particularly female students; and successful approaches or center features that may attract residential students to Job Corps. In addition, on the Job Corps center directors' survey, we included a section with questions related to the retention of male and female residential students. We did not include these questions on the outreach and admissions contractors' survey, because these officials are not responsible for acclimating and retaining residential students once they are at a particular center. Similar to the section on recruitment, we asked Job Corps center directors about the major factors that affect the retention of residential students; challenges encountered in retaining students, particularly female students; and successful approaches or center features that may retain residential students.

Because this was not a sample survey, it has no sampling errors. However, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey may introduce errors, commonly referred to as nonsampling errors. For example, difficulties in interpreting a particular question, sources of information available to respondents, or data entry and analysis can introduce unwanted variability into the survey results. We took steps in developing the questionnaires, collecting data, and analyzing these data to minimize such nonsampling errors. For example, prior to administering the surveys, GAO survey specialists designed each questionnaire in collaboration with GAO subject matter experts. We also pretested the outreach and admissions survey with 2 outreach and admissions contractors and the center directors' survey with 2 Job Corps directors. On the basis of the findings from pretests, we modified our questionnaire to ensure that the questions were relevant, clearly stated, and easy to comprehend. To ensure adequate response rates, we sent e-mail reminders and conducted follow-up telephone calls with nonrespondents. When the data were analyzed, a second independent data analyst checked all computer programs for accuracy. Since these were Web-based surveys, respondents entered their

answers directly into the electronic questionnaires, eliminating the need to key data into a database, thereby minimizing errors.

Site Visits to Job Corps Centers and Outreach and Admissions Contractors

To further enhance our understanding of the recruitment and retention of residential students, we visited 7 Job Corps centers in six states—Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Washington State. We selected these centers because of their geographic variation and to provide a mix of privately and federally operated centers that have varying levels of success in maintaining male and female residential capacity. In addition, we selected the Denison Job Corps Center because it is 1 of 7 centers that has a single-parent dormitory and a day-care center for children of residential students. These living arrangements and supports allow single parents to live at the center with their children while they complete their education and career training. (See table 4 for key characteristics of the Job Corps centers that we visited.) Because a complete and current listing of career training offerings by Job Corps center was not available, we followed up with each Job Corps center director that we visited to ensure we had an accurate list of career training being offered at his or her center.

Table 4: Characteristics of the Job Corps Centers That We Visited, by Region (Program Year 2007)

Labor region	Job Corps center	Location	Center operator	Percentage of center planned enrollment	
				Male residents	Female residents
Boston (Region 1)	Hartford	Hartford, CT	Education Management Corp.	67.6%	58.8%
	Westover	Chicopee, MA	Management and Training Corporation	98.8	87.5
Philadelphia (Region 2)	Frenchburg	Frenchburg, KY	Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture	72.3	50.0
	Whitney Young	Simpsonville, KY	Horizons Youth Services	92.2	84.4
Chicago (Region 5)	Denison	Denison, IA	Management and Training Corporation	116.2	84.5
San Francisco (Region 6)	Cascades	Sedro Woolley, WA	Management and Training Corporation	84.9	130.3
	Centennial	Nampa, ID	Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior	154.5	53.8

Source: Department of Labor data.

During our site visits, we toured each center's facilities and interviewed the center director using a structured interview protocol to obtain his or her views on residential student recruitment and retention. To the extent that center directors' survey responses were available, we used this information to supplement our discussion and to gain further insight into the major factors and challenges associated with attracting and retaining residential students, particularly female students. We also conducted two focus groups with female residential students at 6 of the 7 Job Corps centers we visited.³ Each of our focus groups comprised 6 to 10 female residents who had been at the center for at least 60 days. In total, over 100 female residential students participated in our focus groups. For each focus group, we used a series of semistructured questions to learn about the students' experiences when they were recruited for Job Corps and to obtain their views on the enrollment process and information provided by outreach and admissions contractors. We also asked the students to identify the major factors that were important in their decisions to enroll and stay at the center.

Furthermore, we conducted site visits with the 4 outreach and admissions contractors that are responsible for recruiting residential students to the 7 Job Corps centers we visited. (See table 5 for a list of these outreach and admissions contractors and areas of responsibility.) We interviewed these officials using a semistructured interview protocol to obtain information on their recruitment and outreach efforts and how they balance providing students with their desired center and career training program. We also asked these officials about the major factors and challenges that affect residential student recruitment. To the extent possible, we used officials' survey responses to supplement our discussion.

³At the 7th center, the Denison Job Corps Center, we conducted three focus groups with female residents—two with main campus female residential students and one with female parents living in the single-parent dormitory.

Table 5: Characteristics of Outreach and Admissions Contractors That We Visited

Outreach and admissions contractor	Location	Recruitment responsibility for Job Corps centers visited	Complete area of recruitment responsibility
Del-Jen, Inc.	Shrewsbury, MA	Hartford (Hartford, CT) Westover (Chicopee, MA)	CT, MA, ME, NH, VT, RI
Insights Training Group	Louisville, KY	Frenchburg (Frenchburg, KY) Whitney Young (Simpsonville, KY)	KY
Odle Management Group	Des Moines, IA	Denison (Denison, IA)	IA
DESI Northwest	Seattle, WA	Cascades (Sedro Woolley, WA) Centennial (Nampa, ID)	WA, OR, ID

Source: Department of Labor data.

Analysis of Labor’s Enrollment Data for Residential Students

We reviewed available Job Corps’ student demographic and administrative data for program years 2006 and 2007 to provide descriptive information on the characteristics of students served, student enrollment and retention, and career training slots and industry areas. Before deciding to use the data, we reviewed prior GAO assessments performed under a previous engagement to determine their reliability. These assessments were based on observing a demonstration of the Job Corps database, interviewing Labor officials to identify data checks in place to ensure the integrity of the data, and reviewing relevant internal control policies and procedures. On the basis of our review of these assessments, we determined that the data for program years 2006 and 2007 were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review. To determine the extent to which Job Corps centers operate at or near capacity, we analyzed Job Corps’ onboard strength reports that identified the planned enrollment for male and female residential students and the average actual number of male and female residential students onboard for each of the 122 centers. Our analysis covered July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2008—the 3 most recently completed program years (program years 2005 to 2007). We also reviewed student leave and separation data to describe the reasons why male and female residential students left the program. To determine the reliability of the data, we interviewed knowledgeable Labor officials and reviewed prior GAO assessments performed under a previous engagement as we have previously described. These assessments were based on observing a demonstration of the Job Corps database,

interviewing Labor officials to identify data checks in place to ensure the integrity of the data, and reviewing relevant internal control policies and procedures. On the basis of this information, we determined that the data for program years 2005 to 2007 were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review.

Interviews with National and Regional Job Corps Offices

To obtain information on Labor's efforts to address the recruitment and retention of residential students, we interviewed Labor officials located at the national office and six regional offices—Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Specifically, we asked officials about current efforts under way at the national or regional levels to improve centers' ability to recruit and retain residential students, particularly female residential students. In addition, we reviewed relevant documentation provided by officials to obtain a better understanding of the purpose and status of these efforts. We also reviewed Labor's policies governing Job Corps, national marketing materials, and reports on regional initiatives.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2008 to June 2009, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Listing of Job Corps Career Training Offerings in Program Year 2007, by Industry Area

Industry area	Description
Advanced manufacturing	Machining
	Manufacturing technology
	Welding
Automotive and machine repair	Automobile technician
	Collision repair and refinish
	General service technician
Business and finance	Accounting services
	Office administration
Construction	Bricklaying
	Carpentry
	Cement masonry
	Electrical
	Facilities maintenance
	Heating ventilation and air conditioning repair
	Painting
	Plastering
	Plumbing
Health care	Clinical medical assistant
	Dental assistant
	Medical office support
	Nurse assistant/Home health aide
	Opticianry
	Pharmacy technician
	Licensed practical/vocational nurse
Homeland security	Security and protective services
Hospitality	Culinary arts
	Culinary arts - advanced
	Hotel and lodging
Information technology	Computer networking/Cisco
	Computer technician
	Network cable installation
	Visual communications
Renewable resources and energy	Forestry conservation and firefighting
	Landscaping
	Urban forestry
	Water and wastewater treatment

**Appendix II: Listing of Job Corps Career
Training Offerings in Program Year 2007, by
Industry Area**

Industry area	Description
Retail sales and services	Child development
	Retail sales
Transportation	Heavy equipment operations
	Heavy truck driving
	Material and distribution operations

Source: Department of Labor data.

Appendix III: Career Trainings Offered at the Job Corps Centers That We Visited

Career training	Job Corps center						Whitney Young
	Cascades	Centennial	Denison	Frenchburg	Hartford	Westover	
Advanced manufacturing							
Manufacturing					X		
Welding		X	X			X	X
Automotive and machine repair							
Automotive technician						X	
Business and finance							
Business technology	X	X		X		X	
Insurance and financial services					X		
Construction							
Brick masonry			X	X		X	X
Carpentry	X	X	X	X		X	X
Cement masonry	X			X			X
Electrical	X	X				X	
Facilities maintenance	X	X	X	X		X	X
Painting	X	X	X	X			
Plastering		X				X	
Plumbing						X	
Health care							
Certified nursing assistant	X	X	X		X	X	X
Dental assistant	X						
Medical assistant	X						X
Medical office support	X		X			X	X
Pharmacy technician			X			X	X
Homeland security							
Security guard			X				
Hospitality							
Culinary arts	X	X	X	X		X	X
Information technology							
Computer technician		X				X	

Source: Job Corps center directors.

Appendix IV: Percentage of Planned Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State and Job Corps Center

State	Job Corps center	Average planned center enrollment for residential students		Average actual center enrollment for residential students		Percentage of planned center enrollment	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Alabama	Gadsden	128	128	129	100	100.8%	78.1%
	Montgomery	132	132	121	120	91.7	90.9
Alaska	Alaska	116	116	115	98	99.1	84.5
Arizona	Fred G. Acosta	100	95	96	74	96.0	77.9
	Phoenix	97	97	114	92	117.5	94.8
Arkansas	Cass ^a	164	60	136	41	82.9	68.3
	Little Rock	95	80	78	62	82.1	77.5
	Ouachita ^a	168	56	154	23	91.7	41.1
California	Inland Empire	135	100	126	107	93.3	107.0
	Long Beach	131	129	124	119	94.7	92.2
	Los Angeles	148	232	129	182	87.2	78.4
	Sacramento	166	166	158	137	95.2	82.5
	San Diego	348	242	334	241	96.0	99.6
	San Jose	172	158	173	158	100.6	100.0
	Treasure Island	351	351	297	274	84.6	78.1
Colorado	Collbran ^a	108	92	129	73	119.4	79.3
Connecticut	Hartford	68	68	46	40	67.6	58.8
	New Haven	86	64	72	43	83.7	67.2
Delaware	Wilmington ^c	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
District of Columbia	Potomac	211	167	201	140	95.3	83.8
Florida	Gainesville	195	120	214	123	109.7	102.5
	Homestead	208	212	197	170	94.7	80.2
	Jacksonville	136	136	128	123	94.1	90.4
	Miami	96	64	87	59	90.6	92.2
Georgia	Atlanta ^d	0	325	0	256	0.0	78.8
	Brunswick	256	144	250	142	97.7	98.6
	Turner	490	390	479	295	97.8	75.6
Hawaii	Hawaii	185	137	177	135	95.7	98.5
Idaho	Centennial ^a	132	132	204	71	154.5	53.8
Illinois	Chicago Paul Simon	164	164	157	129	95.7	78.7
	Golconda ^a	175	55	180	34	102.9	61.8

Appendix IV: Percentage of Planned Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State and Job Corps Center

State	Job Corps center	Average planned center enrollment for residential students		Average actual center enrollment for residential students		Percentage of planned center enrollment	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	Joliet	120	120	138	126	115.0	105.0
Indiana	Atterbury	350	200	349	158	99.7	79.0
Iowa	Denison	148	148	172	125	116.2	84.5
Kansas	Flint Hills	120	120	136	88	113.3	73.3
Kentucky	Carl D. Perkins	180	80	154	49	85.6	61.3
	Earle C. Clements	850	450	941	284	110.7	63.1
	Frenchburg ^a	112	56	81	28	72.3	50.0
	Great Onyx ^a	160	54	156	23	97.5	42.6
	Muhlenberg	265	96	262	99	98.9	103.1
	Pine Knot ^a	168	56	170	25	101.2	44.6
	Whitney M. Young, Jr.	180	180	166	152	92.2	84.4
	Louisiana	Carville	100	100	132	48	132.0
New Orleans ^c		0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Shreveport		135	115	117	80	86.7	69.6
Maine	Loring	235	135	229	68	97.4	50.4
	Penobscot	149	147	169	99	113.4	67.3
Maryland	Woodland	168	132	162	125	96.4	94.7
	Woodstock	295	145	282	131	95.6	90.3
Massachusetts	Grafton	130	130	127	109	97.7	83.8
	Shriver	170	102	164	83	96.5	81.4
	Westover	335	160	331	140	98.8	87.5
Michigan	Detroit	120	120	109	103	90.8	85.8
	Flint/Genesee	132	162	125	155	94.7	95.7
	Gerald R. Ford	135	135	143	112	105.9	83.0
Minnesota	Hubert H. Humphrey	140	102	149	87	106.4	85.3
Mississippi	Batesville	150	145	147	115	98.0	79.3
	Gulfport ^b	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
	Mississippi	248	147	180	116	72.6	78.9
Missouri	Excelsior Springs	192	160	196	112	102.1	70.0
	Mingo ^a	168	56	136	38	81.0	67.9
	St. Louis	280	168	262	135	93.6	80.4

Appendix IV: Percentage of Planned Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State and Job Corps Center

State	Job Corps center	Average planned center enrollment for residential students		Average actual center enrollment for residential students		Percentage of planned center enrollment	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Montana	Anaconda ^a	177	59	144	40	81.4	67.8
	Kicking Horse	112	112	80	66	71.4	58.9
	Trapper Creek ^a	168	56	148	36	88.1	64.3
Nebraska	Pine Ridge ^a	168	56	140	44	83.3	78.6
Nevada	Sierra Nevada	290	255	334	209	115.2	82.0
New Jersey	Edison	295	220	324	168	109.8	76.4
New Mexico	Albuquerque	161	164	199	113	123.6	68.9
	Roswell	125	95	127	56	101.6	58.9
New York	Cassadaga	150	120	136	105	90.7	87.5
	Delaware Valley	198	198	193	173	97.5	87.4
	Glenmont	160	170	151	110	94.4	64.7
	Iroquois	123	122	133	105	108.1	86.1
	Oneonta	210	160	215	111	102.4	69.4
	South Bronx	102	97	89	82	87.3	84.5
North Carolina	Kittrell	150	150	155	153	103.3	102.0
	Lyndon B. Johnson ^a	155	50	153	50	98.7	100.0
	Oconaluftee ^{a, b}	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
	Schenck ^a	163	56	173	34	106.1	60.7
North Dakota	Quentin-Burdick	120	120	118	74	98.3	61.7
Ohio	Cincinnati	90	55	93	61	103.3	110.9
	Cleveland	120	120	154	134	128.3	111.7
	Dayton	172	128	170	105	98.8	82.0
Oklahoma	Guthrie	225	225	272	135	120.9	60.0
	Talking Leaves	130	110	114	79	87.7	71.8
	Treasure Lake ^a	112	56	94	43	83.9	76.8
	Tulsa	140	110	100	60	71.4	54.5
Oregon	Angell ^a	146	70	154	44	105.5	62.9
	Springdale	70	50	66	42	94.3	84.0
	Timber Lake ^a	186	48	177	48	95.2	100.0
	Tongue Point	250	250	264	230	105.6	92.0
	Wolf Creek ^a	181	50	175	54	96.7	108.0
Pennsylvania	Keystone	360	240	331	234	91.9	97.5

Appendix IV: Percentage of Planned Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State and Job Corps Center

State	Job Corps center	Average planned center enrollment for residential students		Average actual center enrollment for residential students		Percentage of planned center enrollment	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	Philadelphia ^c	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
	Pittsburgh	210	140	208	126	99.0	90.0
	Red Rock	210	108	235	85	111.9	78.7
Puerto Rico	Arecibo	72	45	57	30	79.2	66.7
	Barranquitas	90	95	100	54	111.1	56.8
	Ramey	136	136	139	65	102.2	47.8
Rhode Island	Exeter	100	100	104	91	104.0	91.0
South Carolina	Bamberg	120	100	124	84	103.3	84.0
South Dakota	Boxelder ^a	156	52	96	46	61.5	88.5
Tennessee	Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks	123	136	118	102	95.9	75.0
	Jacobs Creek ^a	168	56	151	27	89.9	48.2
Texas	David L. Carrasco	173	116	130	96	75.1	82.8
	Gary	986	706	985	500	99.9	70.8
	Laredo	100	100	107	78	107.0	78.0
	North Texas	310	340	329	232	106.1	68.2
Utah	Clearfield	820	309	752	279	91.7	90.3
	Weber Basin ^a	112	112	140	83	125.0	74.1
Vermont	Northlands	153	112	168	62	109.8	55.4
Virginia	Blue Ridge ^d	0	160	0	155	0.0	96.9
	Flatwoods ^a	168	56	138	11	82.1	19.6
	Old Dominion	215	115	223	105	103.7	91.3
Washington State	Cascades	218	109	185	142	84.9	130.3
	Columbia Basin ^a	175	75	157	87	89.7	116.0
	Curlew ^a	150	48	152	30	101.3	62.5
	Fort Simcoe ^a	175	49	161	37	92.0	75.5
West Virginia	Charleston	168	168	169	157	100.6	93.5
	Harpers Ferry ^a	156	54	135	35	86.5	64.8
Wisconsin	Blackwell ^a	153	52	147	54	96.1	103.8
National		21,722	15,754	21,276	12,525	97.9%	79.5%

Source: Department of Labor data.

**Appendix IV: Percentage of Planned
Enrollment in Program Year 2007, by State
and Job Corps Center**

^aCivilian Conservation Center.

^bCenter was closed during program year 2007.

^cCenter has only nonresidential students.

^dCenter has male and female nonresidential students, but only female residential students.

Appendix V: Regional Initiatives Approved by the Department of Labor

Region	Description	Number of participating centers
Boston (Region 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop training paths that allow students to pursue additional training at the same or another center, especially in the health care and automotive industries. Establish rules that all centers in the region will implement and require outreach and admissions contractors to provide students with detailed information on these rules prior to enrollment. 	19
Philadelphia (Region 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer more recreational and learning activities during evenings and weekends. Prioritize tutoring for students with tests scores in the lowest quartile to improve academic achievement and retention. 	3 5
Atlanta (Region 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deploy professional development for staff who help students during unstructured times and influence their retention, such as residential and recreational staff. Enhance coordination between these staff and instructors. 	4
Dallas (Region 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a more positive student culture based on shared norms, rather than rules and discipline, through activities such as training of Job Corps staff, peer counseling for poorly performing students, and facilitating group discussions each day for students to address concerns. 	3
Chicago (Region 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess student interests and aptitude more thoroughly to select a career training option during the career preparation period. Provide intensive drug counseling for students who test positive for drugs upon entering the program. 	1
San Francisco (Region 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen collaboration between academics and career training in the industry area of health care, such as the vocabulary needed for training. Enroll students in this industry area as a cohort rather than the traditional progression of open-entry, open-exit for each student. 	2

Source: Department of Labor.

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Office of Job Corps
Washington, D.C. 20210



MAY 14 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: DIANNE BLANK
Assistant Director, Education
Government Accountability Office

FROM: ESTHER R. JOHNSON, Ed.D. *Esther R. Johnson*
Administrator
Office of Job Corps

SUBJECT: Response to the GAO Draft Report on "Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Pre-Enrollment Information Could Enhance Female Student Recruitment and Retention,"
GAO-09-470

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled, "Better Targeted Career Training and Improved Pre-Enrollment Information Could Enhance Female Student Recruitment and Retention," GAO-09-470, dated June 2009. Listed below are GAO's recommendations including the Office of Job Corps (OJC) response:

GAO Recommendation 1

- **Review the availability and selection of career training offerings at centers, particularly at those centers that are experiencing difficulty with female enrollment, and assess whether centers need to adjust their career training options to offer more career training that is both attractive to females and that could lead to careers that will enable them to become self-sufficient.**

OJC Response

Concur-In-Part. Job Corps fully understands the need to offer "female-friendly" career technical training programs in order to increase female enrollment. We believe it is important to do so by providing training in programs that offer long term, sustainable employment. Under our New Vision, we are targeting training in high-skill, high-growth careers such as the health, automotive, and renewable energy industries. Job Corps is committed to training all our students in careers that provide a livable wage and promote career growth and pathways beyond entry level employment. In selecting new trade offerings, Job Corps routinely looks beyond traditional occupations for females and seeks to maximize opportunities, when available, that will result in significantly more substantive employment and that will ensure long term economic self-sufficiency.

Job Corps is researching new and emerging industries that will provide national direction reflecting a program design even more responsive to changes in global and local labor markets. Efforts to “green” Job Corps by adding, enhancing, and expanding green job training will support the exploration of new and emerging industries – which will expand opportunities for the entire Job Corps student population including females.

Job Corps works to address all the factors that prevent women from enrolling and graduating from the program. In addition to female trade preferences, women are more likely to have parental responsibilities that keep them from enrolling or graduating. Women are also more aware of their surroundings and how safe they feel. Job Corps will continue to address all these factors in order to increase and retain female enrollment.

GAO Recommendation 2

- **Expand current efforts to ensure that outreach and admissions contractors across all six regions consistently provide potential students with complete and accurate information on all aspects of Job Corps, including providing specific information about the center in which the student will be enrolled.**

OJC Response

Concur. The National Office of Job Corps understands the importance of providing complete and accurate information to applicants. The program has taken a number of steps in the last year to ensure complete and accurate information is provided. Job Corps has established new contracting mechanisms, created new collateral materials, and developed a new recruitment Web site to ensure applicants and their families/guardians have a complete understanding about the Job Corps program.

The Boston Regional Office has developed a very clear and concise video, “*What to Expect in Job Corps*” featuring a Job Corps student explaining center rules and the expected mode of conduct. This video is required viewing for all Job Corps applicants in the Boston Region. The National Office of Job Corps is exploring the ability to duplicate this video and require that it be seen by all Job Corps applicants across the country.

Job Corps also recently launched a new national recruitment Web site. This site was created to communicate directly with our target audience: students and parents. Multi-media information is readily available about the program. In addition, each Job Corps center has created an individual site that provides for specific center information. On each center specific site, all the details the center deems important for new students is available.

The Job Corps program will continue to explore innovative ways of informing applicants and their families/guardians about the services and expectations regarding the Job Corps program at each of our centers.

GAO Recommendation 3

- Explore the feasibility or cost effectiveness of developing video or online virtual tours for all centers.

OJC Response

Concur. Job Corps understands firsthand the importance of applicants being able to tour centers prior to enrolling. Job Corps policy requires Outreach and Admissions (OA) staff to provide center tours whenever possible. Unfortunately, due to travel expenses this may not be readily available to everyone. Therefore, the National Office of Job Corps has put tools and resources in place for applicants to gain the experience in determining what a center is actually like such as DVD's, marketing materials, and Web site information.

In addition, to the Boston Region's "*What to Expect in Job Corps*" DVD, the National Office of Job Corps is also exploring cost-effective options to creating a center-specific video for all Job Corps centers. Job Corps is developing a DVD that will combine center video footage and center-specific still photography. The six to seven minute piece will provide an overview of Job Corps' training and education opportunities while highlighting programs and information about individual centers using still photography. A prototype will be produced and evaluated for its effectiveness prior to creating one for each center.

Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Kay E. Brown, (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

Dianne Blank, Assistant Director, and Wayne Sylvia, Analyst-in-Charge, managed all aspects of this assignment. Also, Matthew Saradjian and Ashanta Williams made significant contributions to this report in all aspects of our work. In addition, Shana Wallace provided methodological assistance; Stuart Kaufman assisted in the design of the two national surveys; Catherine Hurley analyzed responses from the national surveys; Mimi Nguyen provided graphic design assistance; Jessica Botsford provided legal support; Jessica Orr provided writing assistance; and Sara Edmondson verified our findings.

Related GAO Products

Job Corps: Links With Labor Market Improved but Vocational Training Performance Overstated. [GAO/HEHS-99-15](#). Washington, D.C.: November 4, 1998.

Job Corps: Vocational Training Performance Data Overstate Program Success. [GAO/T-HEHS-98-218](#). Washington, D.C.: July 29, 1998.

Job Corps: Participant Selection and Performance Measurement Need to Be Improved. [GAO/T-HEHS-98-37](#). Washington, D.C.: October 23, 1997.

Job Corps: Need for Better Enrollment Guidance and Improved Placement Measures. [GAO/HEHS-98-1](#). Washington, D.C.: October 21, 1997.

Job Corps: Where Participants Are Recruited, Trained, and Placed in Jobs. [GAO/HEHS-96-140](#). Washington, D.C.: July 17, 1996.

Job Corps: Comparison of Federal Program With State Youth Training Initiatives. [GAO/HEHS-96-92](#). Washington, D.C.: March 28, 1996.

Job Corps: High Costs and Mixed Results Raise Questions About Program's Effectiveness. [GAO/HEHS-95-180](#). Washington, D.C.: June 30, 1995.

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