ACE

A Personal Observation . . .

THE SUMMER 2002 ACE PROGRAM REVIEW BOARD PROCESS

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Introduction

The Acquisition Career Experience (ACE) Program is intended to recruit college students with multidisciplined backgrounds for civilian acquisition positions throughout the Army. It is a chance for students to gain invaluable experience while participating in a paid 2-year part-time program. Selected students have the opportunity to work at numerous Army organizations throughout the country, are assigned a mentor for on-the-job training, and are given challenging work assignments. The ACE Program's pilot year began in the summer of 2000 when seven students were placed in five Army acquisition organizations. During the program's second year, in the summer of 2001, 55 students were also placed at a number of Army acquisition organizations.

In March 2002, I was selected from the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM) Acquisition Center at Fort Monmouth, NJ, to participate in the ACE Review Board process for the program's third year, 2002. I was joined by four other individuals who were selected from various Army activities, including three civilians and one military officer. Our challenge was to develop evaluation criteria, review and rate all student application packages, identify best-qualified individuals, and make recommendations for future ACE selection boards. This article relates our observations and suggestions regarding both the ACE application and the board rating processes.

Evaluation Criteria

After reviewing the ACE Program's history, procedures, and policies, we developed evaluation criteria that would assist us in rating each student's application. Our evaluation criteria included grade point average (GPA), employment history, leadership roles, recognition and awards, publications, and the extent to which an individual was "well-rounded." The evaluation criteria were then used to rate each candidate's package, which consisted of a letter of introduction from the student, letter(s) of recommendation, college transcript, and résumé.

Additionally, an overall numeric rating was developed with scores

ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 6, with half-point increments (e.g., assigned scores could be 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5 ... up to 6.0). Each rater assigned an overall score per application package. The five scores were averaged to obtain one composite score for each applicant. Individual scores assigned to each package were kept hidden from the other raters; therefore, we did not know what score the other raters were assigning until the review board session was basically over. We also decided in advance that if any individual score assigned by a rater deviated by more than 2 points, then those raters would meet to discuss the applicant's package in an attempt to reconcile the disparity. In our case, this never occurred.

Application Ratings

For several days, we rated 220 student applications from colleges and universities throughout the country. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, there are only 75-80 positions that are currently funded for FY02, and this includes returning ACE students from the previous year. Competition was fierce, and those selected for the 2002 ACE Program should be proud of themselves because, unless additional funding can be obtained, only about 35 percent of the applicants will be chosen.

After application packages were reviewed and rated, a Relative Standing List (RSL) (a ranking of applicants' weighted scores) was established. Applicants may choose from seven geographic regions, and a separate RSL was produced for each region. (I'm located in the Northeast Region, and there are 26 slots allotted for the 2002 ACE Program in this region. Among the installations where applicants can be assigned are 16 slots at Fort Monmouth, NJ; 7 slots at Picatinny Arsenal, NJ; 2 slots at Fort Drum, NY; and 1 slot at Natick, MA.)

Recommendations

At the conclusion of the board, we provided the following recommendations and guidance to improve the selection process for future ACE selection boards.

Résumé Package. Applicants seem unsure of what information to include in their résumé package and how to format the documents. We recommend that future applicants be given general guidance in these areas.

Academics. The board considered the applicant's grades to be important, but less important than the applicant being a well-rounded person. In addition to highlighting academics in their packages, applicants should emphasize any leadership roles and participation in volunteer, sports, and other extracurricular activities. Applicants should also indicate if they are working full time to fund their education.

Letters. The faculty letter of recommendation and the applicant's introduction letter should be signed. The introduction letter should also include a sentence or two about the college and any unique programs, if applicable.

Selectees. Generally, those selected were well-rounded individuals who indicated leadership roles at work or through other activities, had strong grades with correlation to chosen career field and curriculum contents, participated in extracurricular activities such as volunteer work, and were members of academic or professional clubs or associations.

Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW) Issues. Field of study for applicants should be related to AAW positions. In addition, applicants should indicate interest in multiple career fields, if applicable.

Other Observations. The board looked at course curriculum for technical content. Applicants should highlight latest GPA in their unofficial transcript(s).

Selection Process

Board Guidance. Publishing basic criteria for rating applicants could save considerable time, and the board could then decide how to apply the criteria. We recommend that the same general criteria be used for each board, rather than each board setting its own. Notwithstanding the above, the guidance the board received and the practice of rating sample applications were helpful for the board to come to consensus on how to rate the applications.

Board Procedures. The board used a point system, with ratings 2.0 through 6.0 (highest). The board used evaluation criteria that included GPA, extent of training and experience, leadership, volunteer activities, awards, and published works.

Board Support. Acquisition Support Center personnel provided excellent support to the board. The applicant packages were well organized for review. However, to accelerate the process in the future, we suggest that each applicant's GPA be highlighted during assembly of the packages for board review.

For additional information on the ACE Program, go to **http://dacm.rdaisa.army.mil/Acepage/index.htm**, or contact Janice Kurry at (732) 427-1692 or **Janice.kurry@mail1.monmouth. army.mil**.

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