

U.S. Army Seeks Acquisition Interns

By MICHAEL HOFFMAN

Upon hearing the U.S. Army's plan to bolster a beleaguered acquisitions work force by hiring more than 1,800 interns, U.S. Sen.

Scott Brown, R-Mass., ranking member of Senate Armed Services airland subcommittee, chuckled and asked the service's acquisition leadership if the interns would be paid or unpaid.

"Paid, sir," said Lt. Gen. William Phillips, military deputy to the Army's acquisition executive.

Brown didn't let the Army off the hook. He wanted to know whether he could "put out a feeler and tell

them that you have job openings?"

Phillips told him the Army is "recruiting" but emphasized to the senator and potential applicants that "the standards that the Army uses to bring in an intern today with a GPA of 3.5 is pretty high."

The Army hopes this intern program will aid an acquisitions branch that has terminated 22 ma-

ior weapon programs since 1990. The service has spent \$3.3 billion to \$3.8 billion each year since 2004 on programs that eventually were canceled, an internal study found.

Some question whether hiring interns straight out of college gives the Army the experience it needs to fix what many Army leaders call a broken acquisition system.

"Interns, really? How do they have the experience to deal with this," asked one defense industry official while walking out of the Army modernization hearing April 5.

The program started two years ago with 1,347 interns already hired for the Army's two-year program. In March, the first 165 interns graduated.

Paid for by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund, the program resulted from Defense Secretary Robert Gates' plan to hire 9,000 more government acquisition professionals by 2015 and convert 11,000 contractors to full-time government employees. The Army spent \$134 million on the intern program in 2011.

"It's not like we all of a sudden said, we'll put a bunch of interns on it and that will fix it," said Nelson McCouch, the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center's strategic communication division chief. "You are building a force structure over six years to accommodate the requirements the Army has identified. This is a long-term approach to the way the Army is going to do business."

And it's not just interns who make up the program. The Army is also hiring what it calls "journeymen," or those who have worked in the defense industry and want to complete the same training program. Journeymen make up 19 percent of the 1,347 already hired.

The interns and journeymen are spread throughout the Army, with most serving as cost analysts. Others work in program management offices, lifecycle logistics and facilities engineering to name a few, but 1,500 of the 1,885 who will be hired will work in contracting, according to Army statistics.

The service has hired experienced specialists out of the defense industry, but the idea with the intern program is to grow that expertise from within. Training will vary depending on the job the interns will take, McCouch said.

"We want to prime the pump," said Jack Kendall, the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center's Program Executive Branch chief. "We're funding the training, funding the interns up to the 1,885. So after their second year, when they graduate from the intern program, they fall under Army requirements, which is long term and the funding is there through 2016." □



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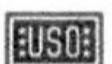


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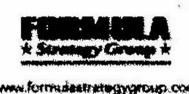
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