

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
SCHOOL OF CHOICE (SOC) PROGRAM  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

1. **REFERENCES:** SEE APPENDIX 1.

2. **APPLICABILITY:** This policy and procedures applies to all current civilian Army acquisition workforce members. All instructions in the SOC policy and the annual announcement must be followed. Failure to comply will result in non-selection or removal from the program.

3. **PURPOSE:** This document establishes the policy and procedures for application and selection of Army acquisition workforce member to the SOC program and supersedes any previous versions.

4. **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

a. The Deputy Director, Acquisition Career Management (DDACM).

(1) Provides oversight and management of the announcement and board process.

(2) Serves as final approval authority for Army acquisition workforce members selected to participate in the program.

(3) Serves as approval authority for SOC Program Relative Standing List (RSL).

b. U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center (USAASC), Workforce Management Division (WMD). Coordinates with Organizational Acquisition Points of Contact and Acquisition Career Management Advocates (ACMAs) to ensure target audience is notified.

c. SOC Program Manager (PM).

(1) Develops, issues and implements the SOC program policy and procedures.

(2) Markets the SOC program to the Army acquisition workforce.

(3) Publishes the SOC program announcement on the USAASC website and ensures the widest dissemination of information.

(4) Provides assistance with submission of SOC applications in the Army Acquisition Professional Development System (AAPDS).

(5) Plans, organizes and conducts the SOC program selection process.

(6) Reviews and determines eligibility of all SOC program applications.

(7) Ensures each application meets the course requirement standards set forth in the policy.

(8) Provides DDACM with the Review Board's RSL for approval.

(9) Notifies board members and students once RSL is approved by the DDACM.

(10) Manages the SOC program budget and processes all requests for tuition assistance and reimbursement.

(11) Tracks the progress of each SOC program student ensuring that grade requirements in each class ("B" graduate level and "C" undergraduate level) are maintained and changes to curriculums or funding requirements are approved.

(12) Ensures a minimum of 12 semester hours or 13.5 quarter hours of classes are taken by the students each term.

d. USAASC, Resource Management Division (RMD).

(1) Completes fund-cite information on the Standard Form 182 (SF182), Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training, to the SOC PM for dissemination to students.

(2) Submits the SF182 and invoice to the Defense Finance and Accounting System (DFAS) for payment to appropriate vendors.

e. Organization/Current Supervisor.

(1) Continues funding employee's salary during SOC program participation by retaining participant on organization's Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA).

(2) Ensures employees have met current position certification requirements prior to participation in the SOC program.

(3) Completes Post Utilization Statement by describing in 1,500 characters or less the utilization and benefits of the applicant to participate in the SOC program. The current supervisor must comment on the applicant's demonstrated potential for positions of increased responsibility and how their lack of education has impeded their career progression. This document must be physically signed and dated by the current supervisor and uploaded into the AAPDS. (Note: This physically signed and dated document endorses the applicant's participation, if selected.)

(4) Ensures all college courses for the SOC program are listed and approved on the applicant's Individual Development Plan (IDP).

(5) Ensures the participant is released from work responsibilities to participate in the selected opportunity. If approved for SOC program funding, educational requirements and commitments are first priority; therefore, participants should not be recalled for work responsibilities unless for school breaks and when enrolled in less than 12 semester hours or 13.5 quarter hours during the program.

(6) Ensures the SOC PM is notified immediately when a change in employment no longer qualifies the student for program participation.

(7) Approves continuous learning points (CLPs) earned through participation in the SOC by approving the recommended CLPs on the employee's IDP at the completion of each academic term.

(8) Notifies the student and SOC PM immediately with a decision of the student to remain in school or return to duty if enrolled in less than the minimum courses requirement until degree completion. Otherwise, the student will risk being removed from the program.

(9) Informs employee that he or she must return to duty during all school breaks. Employee must request leave through current supervisor or organization.

(10) Notifies and provides the employee's servicing civilian personnel office a copy of the Continued Service Agreement (CSA) for entry into the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS) and placement into the employee's official personnel management file.

(11) Notifies the SOC PM if an employee fails to complete the obligated period of service specified in the CSA.

(12) If applicable, notifies the new supervisor that a service obligation agreement is in effect.

f. SOC Participant.

(1) Ensures current position certification requirements have been met prior to participation in the SOC program.

(2) Provides a firm letter of acceptance or verification of enrollment from the enrolled college or university dated within one year of the SOC program application submission deadline date. Institution of higher learning must have accreditation recognized by the U. S. Department of Education. Accreditation information may be found on <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.aspx>. Furthermore, students must apply and be accepted to the college or university prior to applying for the SOC program. (Note: Conditional, out-dated letters of acceptance and verifications of enrollment will not be accepted.)

(3) Ensures the program of study meets the course requirement standards as stated in the SOC program policy.

(4) Submits application and supporting documentation as outlined in the current SOC program announcement.

(5) Directs questions concerning the SOC program announcement and application process to the SOC PM.

(6) Notifies the SOC PM immediately if approved for an alternate funding source. Participants are allowed funding from only one USAASC tuition assistance program at a time.

(7) Notifies the SOC PM immediately when a change in Employment no longer qualifies the participant for program participation or if acceptance into another training opportunity will interfere with the completion of the existing SOC program.

(8) Enrolls and attends a minimum of 12 semester hours or 13.5 quarter hours of classes each term.

(9) Contacts current supervisor and SOC PM immediately for approval to remain in school or return to duty if remaining courses for degree completion are less than the minimum courses requirement or risk removal from the program.

(10) Maintains a minimum grade of a "B" in all graduate courses and a "C" in all undergraduate courses. Participants must reimburse the program for the tuition and book costs of each incomplete, failed or withdrawn course before proceeding with the next semester or quarter. Two withdrawals, failures or incompletes from SOC program funded course(s) will result in the removal from the SOC program with a one-year restriction on reapplying.

(11) Provides final course grades to the SOC PM within 30 days of course completion. Failure to provide grade information or status may result in loss of future funding and removal from the program.

(12) Reimbursement is required upon departure from the Federal Government service prior to completion of the service agreement. This reimbursement does not include unusual circumstances, such as serious illness or sudden death. All reimbursements for the SOC will be made by money order or certified check and payable to the U.S. Treasury and mailed to: U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center, ATTN: School Of Choice, 9900 Belvoir Road, Bldg 201, Suite 101, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060-5567.

(13) Ensures current supervisor and SOC PM are made aware of any academic or other problems that might interfere with success in the educational program.

(14) Selects courses from the original program of study that underpin an acquisition function. Provides appropriate substitutes from the current university to the SOC PM when planned courses are cancelled or are unavailable prior to course commencement. If an appropriate substitute is not offered, the student must return to duties until courses are offered. In addition, the appropriate substitutes must be added to the IDP and approved. Failure to provide appropriate substitutes, notify the SOC PM, and update IDP prior to course commencement may result in the loss of future funding or removal from the program.

(15) Coordinates with the current supervisor to list all courses on the IDP to be funded by the SOC program prior to participation. Furthermore, the IDP must be in an approved status and should include current and projected courses. For each course listed on the IDP, "AETE" must be selected as the planned funding source. (Note: All SOC funded courses until graduation must be listed.)

(16) Ensures start and end dates for each course match the dates identified by the college or university and the IDP during the application process.

(17) Ensures SF182s are submitted to the SOC PM for approval at least 2 weeks prior to the start of each course or risk a delay in receiving the approved SF182s for payment.

(18) Ensures the approved SF182s are provided to the school for payment and to organizational training points of contact for reporting and recording purposes.

## **5. POLICY:**

a. SOC Program. The SOC program is a highly competitive 18 to 24 months full time degree granting program that provides civilian members of the Army acquisition workforce an opportunity to keep their current acquisition position while completing a bachelor's or master's degree during duty hours. Annually, the USAASC announces and conducts the SOC program selection process. The target audience for the SOC program is the highest performing workforce members who have been identified by their organization as demonstrating the potential for positions of increased responsibility and their lack of education is impeding their career progression. Applicants who do not meet this criterion or cannot take the minimum required courses each term should apply for part-time tuition assistance through the Acquisition Tuition Assistance Program (ATAP): <http://asc.army.mil/web/career-development/programs/acquisition-tuition-assistance-program/>.

b. SOC Program of Study. The SOC program will support the completion of a bachelor's or master's degree for Army acquisition workforce members GS-11 through GS-15 equivalent pay bands/broadband who have met their current position certification requirements. All degrees must be completed within 18 to 24 months and follow the disciplines that underpin the functions of the Army acquisition workforce. Changes to the approved course of study is not permissible except under extreme circumstances

(e.g. new course requirements for degree completion, family emergency, or deployment). Such cases must be justified and endorsed in writing by the student and current supervisor and sent via email to the SOC PM. If changes occur, other than by extreme circumstances, individuals may be removed from the SOC program with a one-year restriction on reapplying. A second bachelor's or master's degree may be considered for funding; however, priority will be given to those going for a first-time degree. (Note: One-year restriction is set from the date of removal.)

c. Learning Institutions.

(1) The SOC program will fund traditional classroom pursuits through schools that are nationally or regionally accredited by the U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>. Additionally, the SOC program will support the use of the Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) exams in lieu of approved SOC program funded courses. A failing grade on any DANTES exam will require reimbursement by the participant.

(2) Not more than one class per term may be completed via online or distance learning. Participants may request exceptions to this policy on a case by case basis through the SOC PM to the DDACM.

d. Academic Standards. The SOC program participants must complete all courses with at least a grade of "B" for each graduate course and a "C" for each undergraduate course. The participant must reimburse the government for all costs associated with withdrawn, failed or incomplete SOC program funded courses. Two withdrawals, failures, or incompletes from a SOC program funded course(s) will result in removal from the SOC program with a one-year restriction before reapplying. Reimbursements for the SOC will be made by money order or certified check and payable to the U.S. Treasury and mailed to: U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center, ATTN: School Of Choice, 9900 Belvoir Road, Bldg 201, Suite 101, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060-5567. Full repayment must be received by the PM before participant can proceed with additional courses. If full reimbursement is not received within 30 business days after the withdrawn, failed, or incomplete funded course(s), the student's supervisor will be notified and the student will risk removal from the SOC program with limited future program participation. Once full payment is received, the student may resume taking courses. This reimbursement does not apply to unusual circumstances, such as serious illness or death.

e. SOC Participation.

(1) Students will remain on their organization's TDA. The student's organization is responsible for his or her salary, administration of leave and maintenance of leave records. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure his or her organization is aware of recess periods and leave taken during program participation. Annual leave will be charged if a student does not return to their position during any recess periods unless

prior approval from the student's supervisor is obtained. The student's supervisor will request sick leave from the employee for days missed due to illness.

(2) Each student must take a minimum of 12 semester hours or 13.5 quarter hours of classes each term when completing a bachelor's or master's degree.

(3) The SOC program will not fund prerequisite course work required for admission into the degree program, to include the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) or Graduate Record Examination (GRE).

(4) Electives must underpin the functions of the Army acquisition workforce or be required as part of the program of study. SOC program participants may be required to provide documentation of actual course requirements if the legitimacy of a course is questioned by USAASC. Direct any questions on electives to the SOC PM.

(5) Any SOC program participant not attending scheduled courses for a period of one semester without prior coordination with the SOC PM will be removed from the SOC program and required to reapply after one year from the date of removal. Students will automatically be removed from the program if they have not taken a class within 45 days from the last recorded course. Due to funding constraints, there is no guarantee that funds will be available at the time of reapplication.

(6) Applicant must contact their current supervisor and the SOC PM immediately if remaining courses for degree completion are less than the minimum course requirement. If a student has less than the minimum courses required in completing a degree, the student is considered a part-time student and should report back to duty while completing the program. The student and his or her supervisor will be notified by the SOC PM via email regarding the part-time status. The current supervisor must notify the SOC PM about the student's approved work status and whether the student will return to work while completing the degree. The supervisor's failure to notify the SOC PM will initiate removal of the student from the program.

f. Program Completion. Upon completion, it is desirable that the individual assume a position of increased responsibility or one that will benefit from the degree completion.

g. Funding.

(1) Funding for the SOC program will be centrally managed by the USAASC for selected Army acquisition workforce members. SOC program funds will not be provided as reimbursement for funds expended by the student or another organization without prior approval from the SOC PM.

(2) Funding for tuition is limited to \$1,550.00 per course for a total of 20 courses or 60 credit hours for a bachelor's degree and \$2,050.00 per course for 15 courses or 45 credit hours for a master's degree. Funding above these tuition limits will not be funded by the USAASC regardless of the number of courses taken.

(3) Funding for books is limited to \$150.00 per course. Funding above this limit is the responsibility of the SOC program participant. Book costs should be included on each SF182. If the bookstore or school does not accept the SF182 for book payment, book reimbursement is authorized by completing and submitting a Standard Form 1034 (SF1034), Public Voucher for Purchases and Services other than Personal, a copy of the purchase receipt, and method of payment with required course and/or book information to the SOC PM via email.

(4) Laboratory and technology fees required for course completion will be considered as part of the tuition and count as part of the total yearly funding limit. Registration fees, parking costs, travel expenses, entrance exams and all other expenses will not be funded by the SOC program. These expenses are the responsibility of the SOC program participant.

h. Continued Service Agreement (CSA).

(1) Army acquisition workforce members selected to participate in SOC must complete an Agreement to Continue in Service before assignment to the training. Employees will be denied training if he/she fails to sign a CSA before the training begins. Supervisors will ensure the employee is informed in advance of the obligation. A signed copy of the agreement must be maintained in the organization's case file. The SOC completion must be achieved within the timeframe specified by the program. The period of CSA obligation begins at the completion of the program. The employee is in full pay status while participating in SOC.

(2) The employee is agreeing to the terms and period of obligation and is required to sign the CSA prior to the start of training. The period of continued service obligation is equal to three times the length of the training period. For example, if the training period is one year, the obligated continued service would be three years (one year times three.)

(3) An employee is required to continue in service for three times the amount of time the employee participated in the program even if the employee voluntarily drops out of the program. Employees dropped from the program do not have to reimburse funds but need to continue service within the Federal Government. The determination on whether or not an employee is involuntarily removed from the program (e.g. for performance related issues) to continue service will be decided on a case by case basis.

(4) Supervisors at all levels are charged to protect the Government's interests should an employee fail to successfully fulfill his/her signed training agreement by not completing the continued service obligation. Supervisors, or a designated official, will review the status and circumstances of each unexpired agreement to decide whether to transfer, waive or require repayment of expenses incurred other than salary costs. Managers should contact the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) immediately if

it appears that an obligated service agreement may not be fulfilled.

(5) Reimbursement is required upon departure from the Federal Government prior to completion of the service agreement. Training costs include course tuition, costs of books and materials, and laboratory and technology fees. Salary and benefits are not included in the cost of training. If the employee fails to complete the obligated service period, action can be taken to recover training costs. USAASC has the option of recovering the cost of training by setoff against accrued pay, compensation, retirement credit, or other monies due the employee if the employee fails to serve in the Federal Government for the agreed amount of time.

i. Consequences for Academic Failures and No-Shows.

(1) Army acquisition workforce members who academically fail a resident Defense Acquisition University (DAU) course required for their acquisition certification will not be eligible to participate in the SOC. These Army acquisition workforce members will remain ineligible for SOC until they successfully meet their certification requirements.

(2) The program restrictions listed in the above paragraph will also apply to any Army acquisition workforce members who are enrolled in any resident DAU course (regardless if the course is required for certification or not) and fail to show up for the class. The Army Director Acquisition Career Management office and the DAU consider these students "no-shows." This status can negatively impact the Army's future seat allocations for these courses. "No-show" Army acquisition workforce members will remain ineligible to apply for SOC for a period of one year starting on the last day of the scheduled resident course for which they failed to appear.

**6. PROCEDURES:**

a. Application.

(1) The SOC program announcement and policy may be found on the USAASC Website at <http://asc.army.mil/web/career-development/programs/school-of-choice/>. The announcement will be open a minimum of 30 days. Applications must be submitted before the closing date identified in the SOC program announcement or applicant will not be eligible for consideration. Army acquisition workforce members will be notified of SOC program announcements through direct email if their email address is listed correctly on their Acquisition Career Record Brief (ACRB.)

(2) The SOC program application is an automated process using AAPDS. To access AAPDS, please login to the Career Acquisition Management Portal at <https://rda.altess.army.mil/camp/>. Once you log in, click Career Acquisition Personnel and Position Management Information System (CAPP MIS). Once in CAPP MIS, click the "AAPDS" tab, then select the "Apply" link and select the SOC program opportunity.

(3) To be considered for the SOC program, bachelor's degree applicants must request an official transcript from the accredited college or university that will validate completion of at least 60 credit hours and upload it in AAPDS before the closing date of the announcement. Master's degree applicants must request an official transcript from the accredited college or university that will validate being a 4-year graduate and upload it in AAPDS before the closing date of the announcement.

(4) Applicants must upload in AAPDS the Statement of Interest document describing the reasons for participating in this training opportunity and the benefits to the organization and the Army upon graduation.

(5) Applicants must upload in AAPDS the Post Utilization Statement completed and physically signed and dated by the current supervisor. The Post Utilization Statement must describe the applicant's demonstrated potential for positions of increased responsibility, how his or her lack of education has impeded his or her career progression and the utilization and benefits of the completed degree to the organization and the Army. (Note: This physically signed and dated document endorses the applicant's participation, if selected.)

(6) Applicants must upload in AAPDS the CSA physically signed and dated by the applicant.

(7) Applicant must document all planned courses on the IDP for all fiscal years that the SOC program funding is requested. Courses should be listed in the Education Plan section of the IDP, with AETE-SOC selected as the planned funding source. In addition, each course must be approved in the IDP by the current supervisor prior to submitting the application in AAPDS.

(9) Applicants must complete and submit their application through AAPDS by the closing date indicated in the applicable SOC program announcement in order to be considered for acceptance in the program. Applications not completed or submitted before the closing date of the announcement will not be reviewed.

(10) Applicants applying for the SOC program must ensure their application is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the announcement and that all information is accurate and truthful to the best of their knowledge.

(11) Any changes to the SOC program participant's curriculum must be coordinated and approved by the SOC PM prior to the curriculum change or risk losing the opportunity to participate in the program.

b. SOC Selection Board Process.

(1) The SOC PM receives and reviews all submitted applications for completeness and eligibility. The SOC PM then forwards eligible application packages to the Final Review Board for review and selection recommendations.

(2) The Final Review Board reviews, ranks and compiles an RSL of qualified applicants.

(3) The SOC PM compiles application statistics and provides the RSL from the selection board to the DDACM for final decision.

(4) The DDACM approves applicants for acceptance into the SOC program based on the availability of funds.

(5) The SOC PM notifies the Final Review Board and applicants of the final results upon approval of the RSL by the DDACM.

(6) Army acquisition workforce members who apply with sufficient lead-time before the closing date of the announcement will be notified if their application is incomplete. Applicants will then have the opportunity to resubmit the correct or requested information provided it is submitted no later than the closing date of the announcement.

c. SOC Acceptance.

(1) Upon acceptance, selectees must acknowledge receipt of acceptance via email or phone no later than 14 business days from notification or risk having to reapply for the next opportunity. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure contact information is current on the ACRB or risk not being selected.

(2) Selectees must ensure their IDP has the correct course information for each term and SF182s match the information in their IDP.

**7. LABOR RELATIONS:** Activities are reminded to meet all statutory labor relations obligations in the implementation of this policy.

**8. EFFECTIVE DATE AND IMPLEMENTATION:** This document is effective immediately and will remain in effect until rescinded. This signed policy supersedes all previous SOC program policy and procedures.



CRAIG A. SPISAK  
Deputy Director  
Acquisition Career Management

MAR - 5 2013

## APPENDIX 1

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1. Title 10, United States Code, Chapter 87, Defense Acquisition Workforce, Section 1701-1764, Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act of 1990, as amended (DAWIA II) - [http://www.library.dau.mil/DAWIAPL108\\_136.pdf](http://www.library.dau.mil/DAWIAPL108_136.pdf).
2. Department of the Army, "Acquisition Career Field Certification Policy and Procedures," June 1, 2010 – <http://asc.army.mil/web/policies-main/alt-workforce-policy-procedure/>.
3. Department of the Army, "Continuous Learning Policy and Implementation Guidelines," April 11, 2011 – <http://asc.army.mil/web/policies-main/alt-workforce-policy-procedure/>.
4. Memorandum, "Consequences for Academic Failures and No-Shows in Defense Acquisition University (DAU) Resident Courses," March 30, 2012 – <http://asc.army.mil/web/policies-main/alt-workforce-policy-procedure/>.
5. Memorandum, "Enforcement of Mandatory Acquisition Certification Requirements," August 18, 2010 – <http://asc.army.mil/web/policies-main/alt-workforce-policy-procedure/>.
6. Memorandum, "Director Acquisition Career Management Guidance – Enforcement of DAWIA Certification Compliance Policy Memorandum #8," January 30, 2012 – <http://asc.army.mil/web/policies-main/alt-workforce-policy-procedure/>.