

Promotion Boards Will Not See Degree Info

The Air Force has stopped including academic degree information in most officer records sent to promotion boards. The move marks the end of “square-filling” degrees, said Gen. John P. Jumper, Chief of Staff, in a Feb. 2 paper to Air Force personnel.

The change applies to active duty line officers only, beginning this year. The Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command will implement the new procedure in 2006. It does not apply to health profession and chaplaincy officers.

Jumper said the new policy ushers in a “significant change” in mind-set for officers. Attaining a master’s degree—of any type and in any area—has long been considered essential to officer advancement. “This must change,” he said.

“Education must be tailored to benefit airmen in doing their jobs,” explained Jumper. “Promotion is, and will continue to be, determined by your performance and demonstrated leadership potential.”

The Chief does not want officers “chasing a degree just to get promoted,” explained Lt. Col. Leslie Formolo, promotions and evaluation chief at the Pentagon. When it came to advanced degrees, many officers “took whatever” degree just to remain promotion-eligible. The result was a lot of MBAs but not enough degrees directly related to Air Force missions, Formolo said.

Professional military education, which is directed by the Air Force, will stay in promotion records, but there will no longer be an advantage—real or perceived—in attending “in-residence,” she said. The goal is simply professional development.

The Air Force will have to track the number of officers eligible to teach ROTC courses or at the Air Force Academy, Formolo said. These teaching positions require an advanced degree, and officials cannot predict how the “pool” of officers eligible for these assignments will change in future years.

Jumper noted that the Air Force would not discourage individuals from pursuing advanced degrees on their own and would continue to offer tuition assistance.

“The Air Force’s emphasis is on job performance and providing airmen the right opportunities for advanced education when it is required,” he said.