Research in Support of The Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) Program Development, Piloting, and Instrumentation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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The Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) partnership between the Department of Defense (DoD) and academia represents a first-of-its-kind investment to prepare and ensure the readiness of college graduates to become new civilian acquisition professionals (see dctc.mil). DCTC is distinguished by its focus on DoD-unique development and its data-driven approach that guides programming and organization decisions. The result is experiences inside and outside the classroom that instill in undergraduate student scholars the critical skills, behaviors, and character to have an immediate impact, adapt at a competitive pace, and achieve improved results for the warfighter. DCTC complements other workforce initiatives, such as ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), SMART (Science Mathematics and Research for Transformation), and the DoD Cyber Service Academy, thereby strengthening the DoD talent pipeline in different ways. DCTC is developing an acquisition workforce with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to ensure the adoption of emerging technology and new practices within the DoD.

The Acquisition Policy and Innovation directorate within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition (OSD API)—part of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (OUSD(A&S))—engaged the Acquisition Innovation Research Center (AIRC) to pilot DCTC. The DCTC pilot provides targeted education, development, and experiences that support the National Defense Strategy's (NDS's) commitment to streamline hiring practices, fill technology gaps, and work with institutions of higher education to build the civilian defense acquisition workforce of the future. AIRC and OSD API accelerated the DCTC Program Pilot implementation timeline initially set by Congress by one year, an action that embodied the overall agility and spirit of experimentation that distinguishes the DCTC program. The pilot spans three cohorts from the graduating classes of 2025 (Cohort '25), 2026 (Cohort '26), and 2027 (Cohort '27). Throughout the initial pilot, the DCTC program team focused on utilizing the lessons learned from each of the three cohort classes to guide continuous improvement, with Cohort '27 setting the stage for scalable models for DCTC's full-scale implementation.

DCTC goes beyond scholarship-for-service to include curricula, immersive learning experiences on campus, project-based summer internships at DoD installations, and a culture of care to instill resilience and critical DoD skills on top of students' major field courses. This integrated approach was tailored to align with the critical skills needed for the workforce of the future, providing scholars with a head start in cultivating the network, community, and support needed for personal and professional success. An array of DoD organizations served as strategic partners with DCTC, offering internships, site visits, security clearances, and mentorships that created a pathway to DoD employment upon graduation. As this final report of the program pilot's first twenty-one months shows, DCTC is building the next generation of DoD civilian leaders who will be *impactful and adaptable on Day 1, ensuring that the DoD stay ahead in The Great Power Competition*.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) mandates achieving an enduring advantage over our adversaries. The current DoD civilian talent pipeline could be strengthened by implementing a more structured process that directly links workforce needs to a dedicated civilian pipeline to deliver a workforce prepared from Day 1 to meet present and future needs. The Department can benefit from adopting a systematic approach similar to the military's established pipeline for projecting workforce needs. DCTC serves as a civilian counterpart to the ROTC model, focusing on attracting, preparing, and equipping well-prepared new DoD civilian hires.

About 30 percent of the DoD workforce is within five years of being eligible to retire (see Figure 1). While this can contribute to a significant loss of expertise, the upside is that we are in the perfect place to increase both the numbers and capabilities of new graduates coming into the DoD acquisition workforce in the next few years. The DCTC Program is designed to proactively attract, train, and retain civil servants from college who can perform immediately upon hiring and have the leadership and workforce skills critical for their long-term success in the DoD.
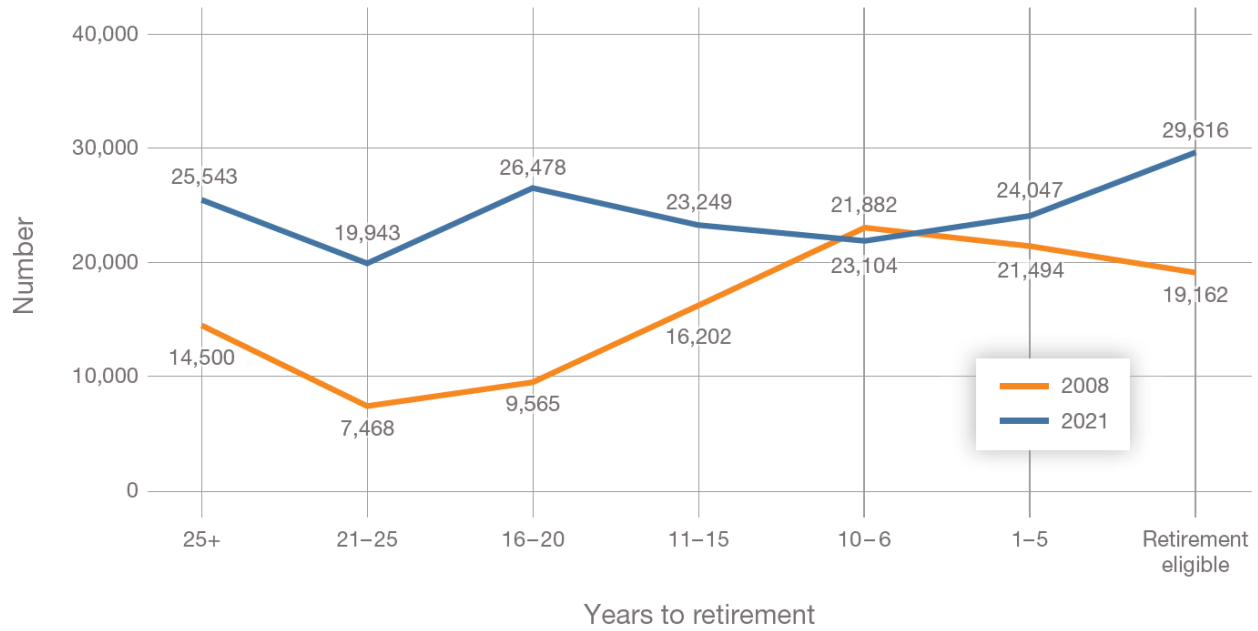
SOURCE: Gates et al., 2022, p. 32.

Figure 1. DoD acquisition workforce years to retirement (2008 and 2021)

DEFINING THE PATH TO THE FUTURE FOR SCHOLARS

Figure 2. Cohort '25 Scholars with Senior Leaders and Champions at the Pentagon (July 2024)

Scholar Testimonials (see Appendix B in the full report)

"**Before hearing about DCTC I didn't know how to get a job or a clearance in the DoD.** I look forward to attending the DCTC course more than any other class on campus because the *DCTC class has a direct link to my very near future*. The curriculum material is exciting and meaningful, and the instructor truly cares for our well-being."

- Faith Jones, DCTC Scholar '25, Virginia Tech

"It was refreshing to *work with a career professional on an actual, ongoing problem* rather than school projects that have a smaller scope. Through this project **I gained a unique perspective on the challenges of moving the working parts of the DoD toward modernization.**"

- Owen Gee, DCTC Scholar '25, University of Arizona

"**I want to work within the government and support the warfighter.** The *scholarship and stipend were a huge bonus* and an important part of my decision to pursue the DCTC program. This program *helps students obtain a security clearance* and exposes them to the various opportunities that the DoD has to offer."

- Nick Canovas, DCTC Scholar '25, Purdue University

"**The summer internship project isn't just about developing and presenting ideas; it's about personal growth and embracing a new work culture**. It has shown me why classroom learning is crucial and what an internship should truly embody, and helped me *recognize my importance* in every project, no matter how minuscule."

- Tamara Daye, DCTC Scholar '25, North Carolina A&T

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