

Analysis of USPHS Commissioned Corps Health Services Officers 2015 Training and Needs Assessment Survey

**Health Services Professional Advisory Committee
Career Development Subcommittee
Assessment and Analytics Team**

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Prepared October 15, 2015

Executive Summary

This report analyzes the data associated with the 2015 Health Services Officer (HSO) Training and Needs Assessment Survey.

All HSOs received a link to the website survey via e-mail and completed the survey over a two-week period. Respondents perceived the following factors as contributing the most to their career success: Positive COERs, Leadership Roles, and Career/Billet Mobility. Lack of Awards/Recognition, Deployment Opportunities, and Lack of Career/Billet mobility were perceived to have the greatest negative effect on career success.

The types and topics of training of interest to respondents were varied, as one might expect for a category as multifaceted as the HSO category, although all respondents showed specific interest in topics related to career development, awards/recognition, and skill development.

The HS-PAC website was a specific focus of the survey and revealed that the website is a potential resource that could be leveraged for additional communication with officers. Respondents offered suggestions for enhancing the HS-PAC website as a resource, including content revisions and organization, regular updates and availability of webinar/live sessions.

Purpose

At the request of United States Public Health Service (USPHS) HSO category leadership, the Assessment and Analytics Team of the Health Services Professional Advisory Committee's (HS-PAC) Career Development Subcommittee (CDS) was tasked with conducting a Training and Needs Assessment of all HSOs. This assessment aims to inform HS-PAC members and Commissioned Corps leadership about critical demographic information, characteristics, career successes and challenges, and areas of need for the HSO category officers.

Methods

The HS-PAC CDS's Assessment and Analytics Team developed an anonymous online survey to assess HSO demographics, training needs and perceptions of critical factors in career progression. The data from survey responses, summarized in **Table 1**, was collected between April 17, 2015 and May 5, 2015. The survey was distributed to 1,282 USPHS HSOs via the HSO listserv.

All HSOs registered for the HS-PAC listserv initially received the survey via the HSO Weekly

Announcements on April 17, 2015, with a reminder to complete the survey in the HSO Weekly Announcements message on April 24, 2015. On April 21, 2015, the HS-PAC Chair sent a separate email to the HSO listserv requesting participation in the survey.

A complete copy of the survey is available in **Appendix A**.

Survey Limitations

The survey was distributed through the Health Services Officer listserv and as a result may not have reached those officers who are not registered for the listserv, or who have inaccurate e-mail addresses in the listserv.

All data was self-reported by individual officers.

None of the questions included in the survey required responses.

Table 1. Data Points Collected through Health Services Officer Survey

- **Current Temporary Grade**
- **Commissioning degree/discipline**
- **Level of Commissioning Degree**
- **Years of service in the USPHS Commissioned Corps**
- **Biggest perceived factor(s) affecting career success**
- **Training topics/programs of interest**
- **Information distribution preferences**
- **Website and listserv accessibility**
- **Professional Advisory Group (PAG) involvement**

Results

Two hundred and eighty-eight HSOs began the survey; 263 completed the survey and 25 respondents began, but did not complete every question. Responses from all officers, including those who did not complete every question in the survey, were included in the analysis.

Officer Demographics, HSO Profile

Temporary Grade

Figure A shows the percentage of respondents by Temporary grade. Over 60% of respondents are currently between O-2 and O-4 grade, demonstrating a strong response rate from junior officers. Of note, no officers at the O-1 or O-7 (or above) Temporary grades responded to the survey.

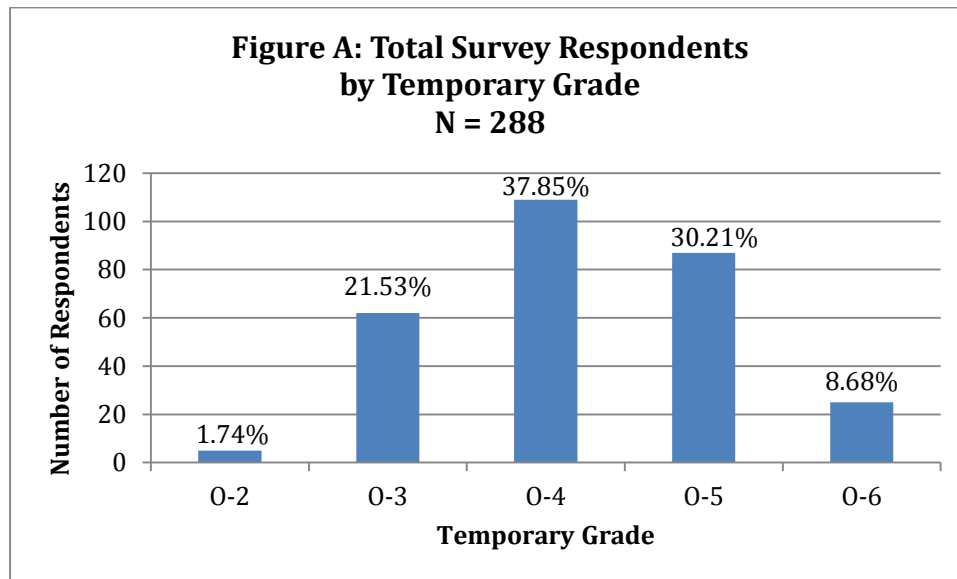


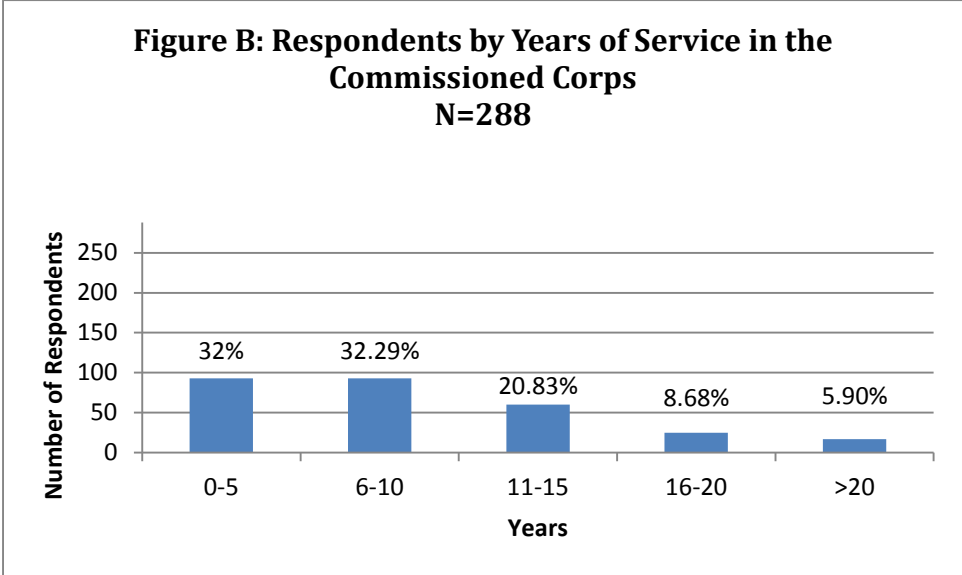
Table 2 shows the Temporary grade distributions for both survey respondents and the overall HSO category.¹ The Temporary grade distribution of survey respondents mirrors that of the overall HSO category, indicating that the survey data may be an accurate representation of the entire HSO category population, despite the relatively small sample size

¹ http://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/statuscharts/REPORT_Public_Pivot.aspx

Table 2. By-rank Comparison of Survey Respondents with all of HSO Category		
Temporary Grade	% of Survey Respondents	% of Total HSOs
O-2	1.74%	1.25%
O-3	21.53%	14.97%
O-4	37.85%	33.19%
O-5	30.21%	30.53%
O-6	8.68%	13.42%

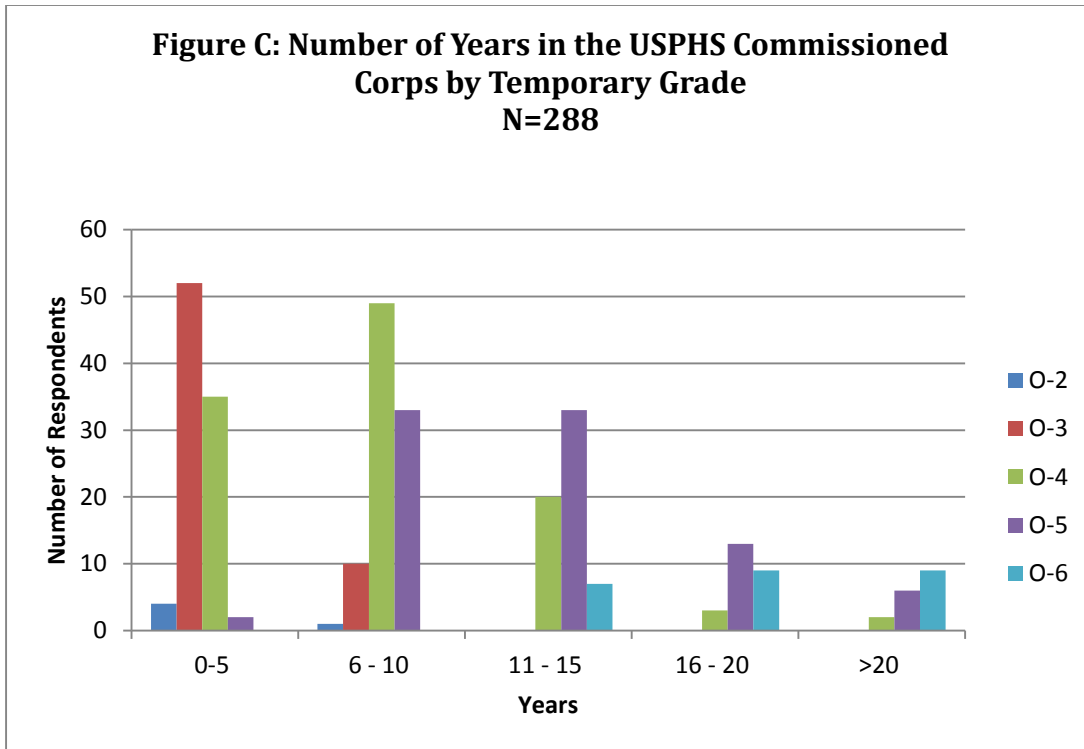
Number of Years in USPHS Commissioned Corps

Figure B shows that the majority of survey respondents have been in the USPHS Commissioned Corps for 10 years or less. Responses include representation from officers at all stages of their Commissioned Corps career.



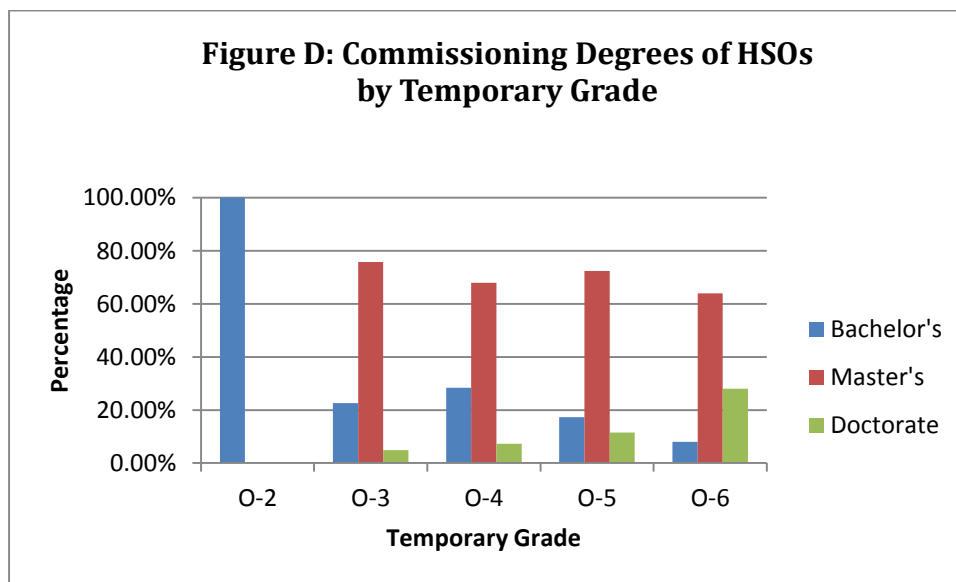
Number of Years in USPHS Commissioned Corps by Temporary Grade

Figure C shows respondent's time in service, by grade. Generally, officers who have been in the Commissioned Corps for fewer years hold lower ranks (O-1 through O-4) and officers who have been in the Commissioned Corps for many years hold higher ranks (O-5 through O-6).



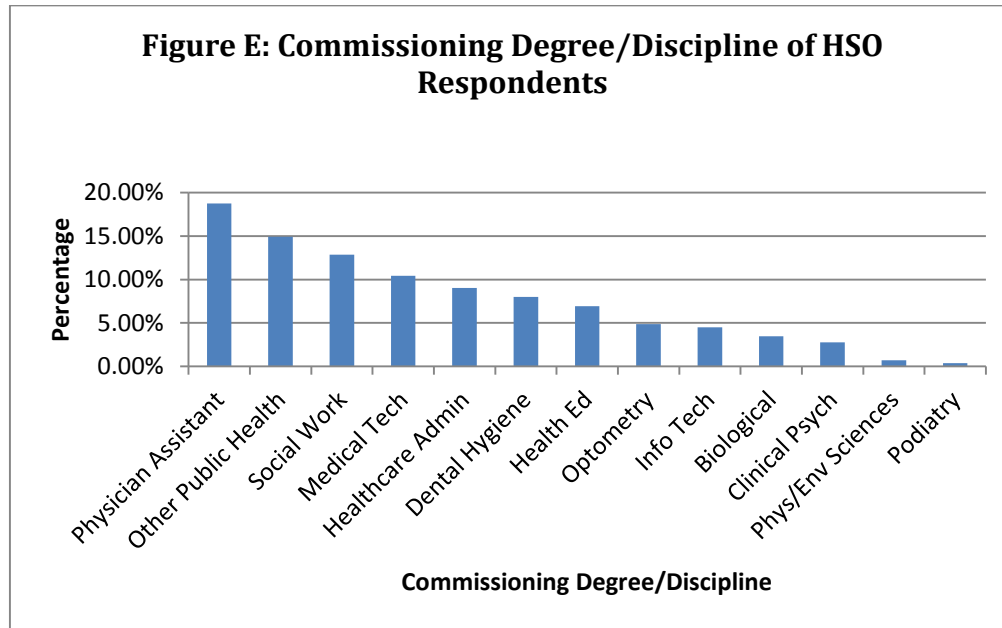
Level of Commissioning Degree

The commissioning degrees of surveyed HSOs are listed in **Figure D**. Because HSO category officers possess diverse academic training specialties, survey results did not show trends from rank-to-rank. However, it does appear that HSOs are most likely to have a Master’s degree as their commissioning degree, regardless of their current rank, with the exception of officers at O-2 (Bachelor’s). Note: not all columns in Figure D add up to 100%; some respondents did not provide an answer to the associated question. The survey did not collect data on post-commissioning conferred degrees.



Commissioning Degree/Discipline

As demonstrated in **Figure E**, there was wide representation of commissioning degree/discipline among survey respondents. Unlike many categories, HSO officers represent a diverse portfolio of academic specialties.



The top five commissioning degree/disciplines of respondents are listed in **Table 3**:

Table 3. Most Common Commissioning Degree/Disciplines of Respondents		
Commissioning Degree/Discipline	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondent Pool
1. Physician Assistant	54	18.95%
2. Other Public Health Specialties	43	15.09%
3. Social Work	37	12.98%
4. Medical Technology	30	10.53%
5. Healthcare Administration	26	9.12%

Respondents were also permitted to enter their response in a free-text area if they felt the choices given were insufficient. Answers in the free-text area included: MPH, Dentist, International Health/Environmental Health, Public Health Analyst, Global Health/Tropical Diseases, Epidemiology, Health Promotion, Toxicology, Chemistry, Generalist, Public Health, Industrial Hygiene, Health Policy, and Prevention Science.

Career Progression: Positive Career Factors for HSOs

Officers were asked, “In your opinion, what has been the biggest positive factor in the success of your career?” It is important to note that officers were able to select multiple responses to this question. **Figure F** shows the responses from HSOs. Responses from officers at the O-2 rank are not included, due to a small response rate.

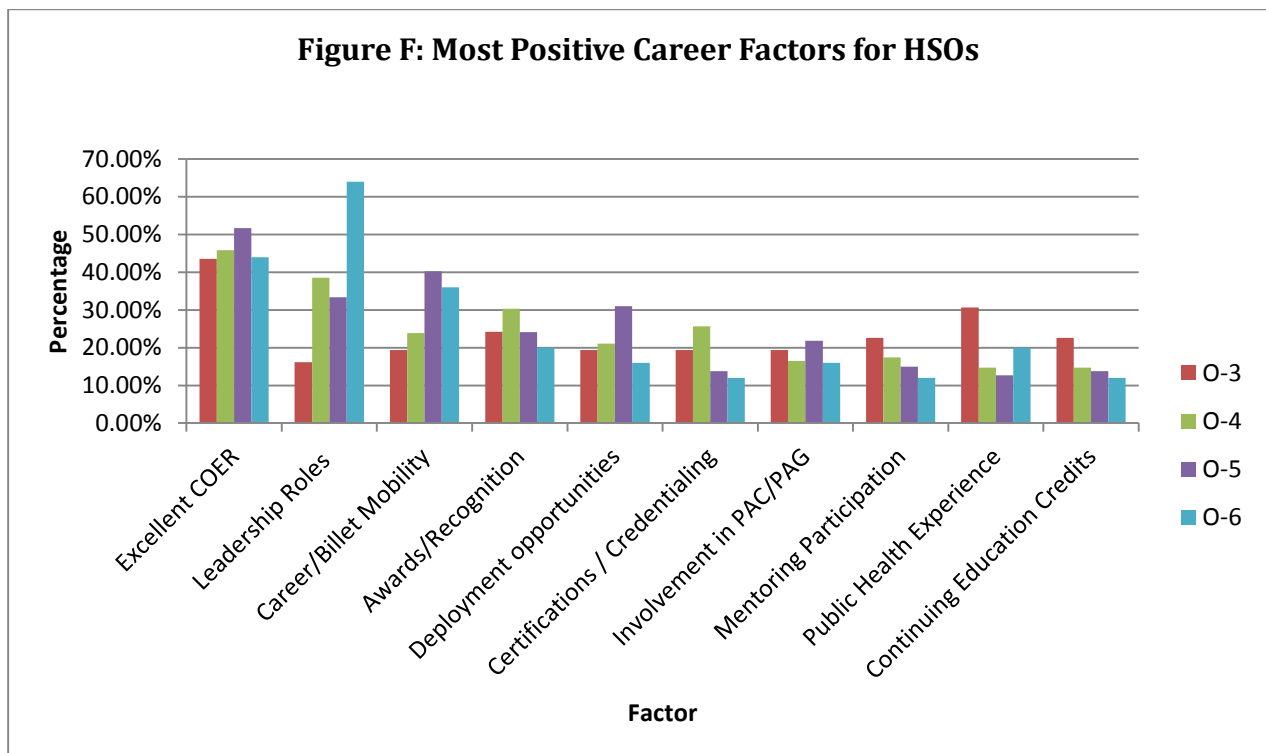
Results demonstrate that HSOs value and rely on a wide range of career-related opportunities and resources throughout their career. A majority of HSOs feel that an excellent performance rating/COER has been a critical factor contributing to their career success. Of particular note, O-6 respondents valued “Leadership Roles” as having a greater positive impact on their careers than their lower-ranking peers.

Overall, the most selected positive factors were:

- Excellent Performance Rating/COER (53.85% of all respondents)
- Leadership roles (39.27% of all respondents)
- Career/Billet Mobility (39.27% of all respondents)

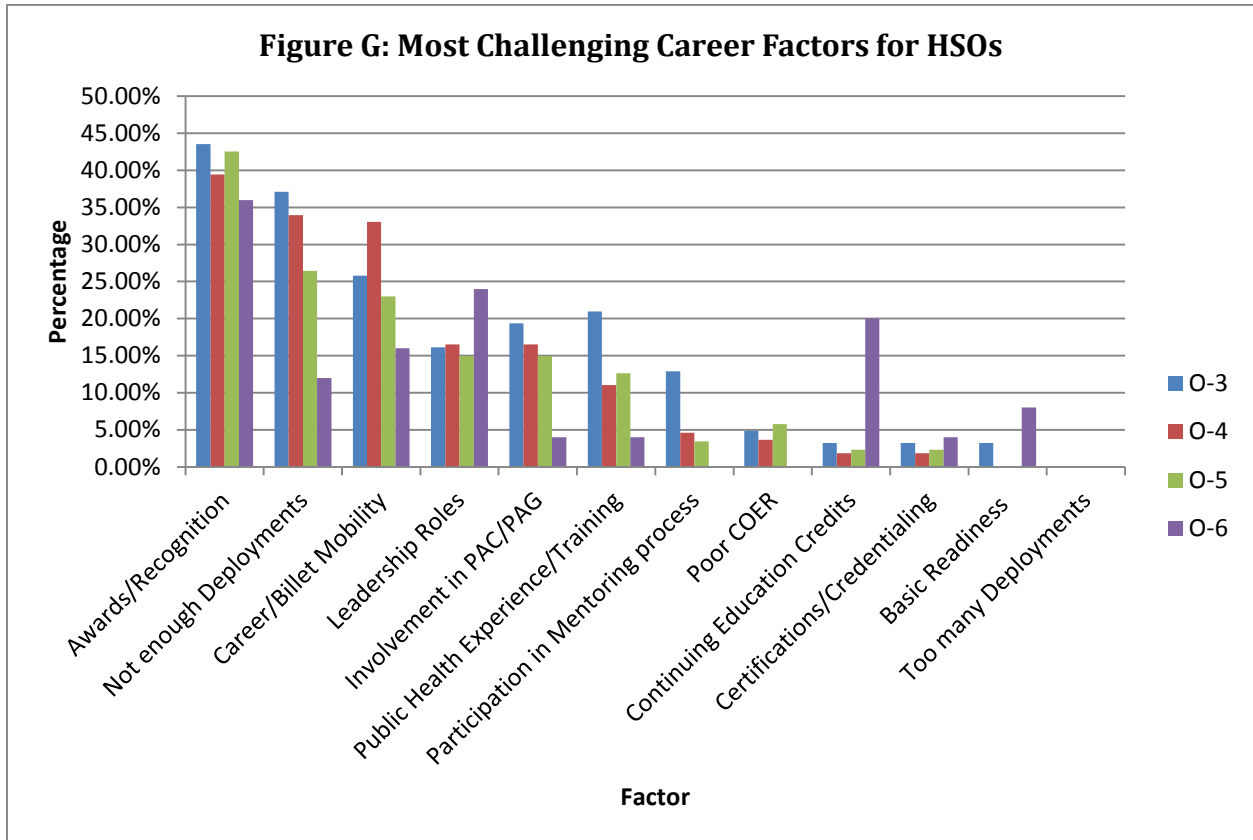
Among all respondents, regardless of rank, the most commonly selected factors perceived to contribute the least to career success were:

- Participating in the Mentoring Process (19.8%)
- Acquiring Public Health Experience/Training (18.2%)
- Acquiring/Maintaining Continuing Education Credits (18.2%)



Career Progression: Challenging Career Factors for HSOs

Officers were asked, “In your opinion, what has been the most challenging factor in the success of your career?” Again, officers were able to select multiple responses. **Figure G** shows the responses from HSOs. Responses from officers at the O-2 rank are not included, due to the small response rate.



The most selected Challenging Career Factors were:

- Difficulty receiving awards/recognition (48.9% of all respondents)
- Not enough deployment opportunities (36.3% of all respondents)
- Lack of career/billet mobility (32.1% of all respondents)

Although the overwhelming positive factor for career success was excellent performance rating/COER, only 5% of respondents selected poor performance ratings as a challenge to career success.

Respondents at the O-6 grade were more likely to view Leadership Roles as a challenging factor, while they also were most likely to view Leadership Roles as a positive factor in career progression. This may mean that O-6s place a heavy emphasis on the need for officers to transition into leadership roles as their careers progress. Also, O-6s are approximately 8 times more likely than O-3-O-5s to answer that Continuing Education

Credits is a challenging career factor, perhaps indicating that O-6s see this factor increasing in value as an officer progresses in his or her career.

Deployment is clearly an area where officers would like additional opportunities; many officers (36.3%) feel that a lack of deployments is a challenge to their overall career success.

HS-PAC Awareness: HS-PAC Website

HSOs were asked, via an open-ended question, “Is there any additional information they would like to be able to read on the HS-PAC website?” Fifty five respondents commented on this question, with 18 of them noting that nothing additional was needed for the HS-PAC website or the respondent’s comment was unclear. The remaining 37 comments were organized by researchers into four main categories: Content, Webinars/Live Sessions, Organization, and Updates, each of which is described in further detail below. Respondents most commonly commented that they would like the website to include updated job announcements and CEU information along with improved website organization and regular updates.

Only one respondent suggested each response, unless noted otherwise.

Content

- Job announcements/openings by discipline (4 respondents)
- Educational Opportunities
 - CEU information (3 respondents)
 - Agency programs for higher education
 - Training availability
 - Intermediate Career Leadership Opportunities and Certifications from other active duty/military fields
- Calendar of Events (2 respondents)
 - USPHS Events
 - State/Regional Events
- Promotion Information
 - A general summary is unhelpful
 - Detailed promotion statistics, precepts, and how to prepare
 - Identify a promotion mentor for specific questions
- Officer “spotlights”
 - Successful career opportunities, including mobility, leadership, promotion, and deployment
- Policy information and Points of Contact
- Presentations
 - Slides from PAG presentations
- Award Information

- Examples of Award narratives
- Information on “outside” awards (i.e. Association awards)
- Commissioned Corps chronology
 - History of the Corps, especially the HSO category
 - Photos of past and present leaders
 - Impact HSOs have made throughout the history of the Corps
 - Rationale for including PAs in the HSO Category
 - What will the Corps look like in 5 years? Will the Corps still be a viable force in the future with fewer officers joining and promotion stagnation?

Webinars/Live Sessions

- Open sessions to talk with leadership (i.e. HS-PAC Chair)
- Retirement

Regular Updates

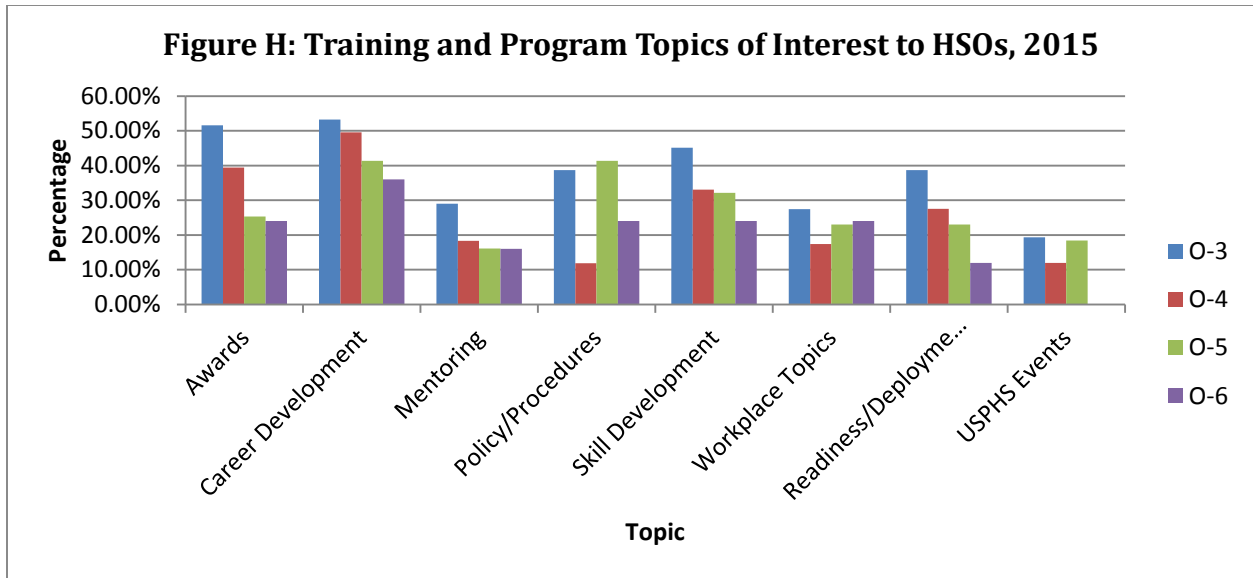
- Majority of information is outdated (4 respondents)
- Resource Directory website links are broken
 - Researchers were unable to replicate any broken website links on the HSO website and thus cannot verify the accuracy of this response

Website Organization

- CV template is difficult to find (2 respondents)
- Difficult to locate many items

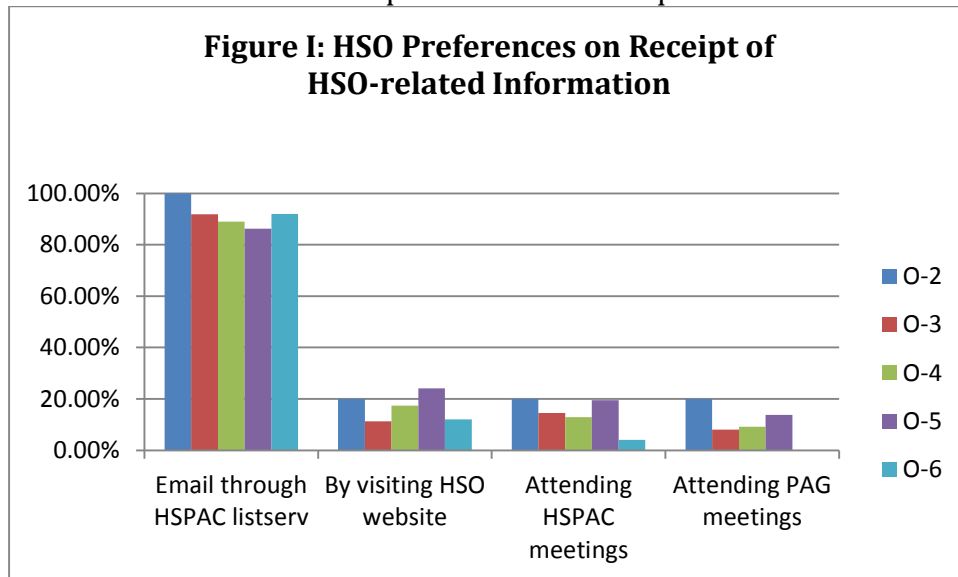
HS-PAC Awareness: Training and Program Topics of Interest

Figure H shows training and program topics of interest to HSOs. The responses vary somewhat by rank, although all officers show interest in topics related to career development, awards/recognition, and skill development.



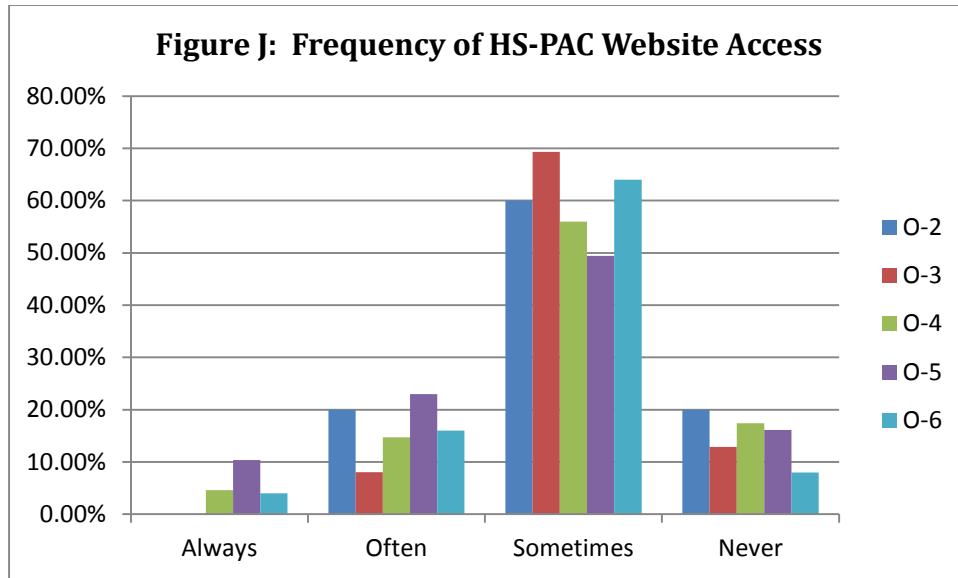
HS-PAC Awareness: Preferences on How to Receive HSO-related Information

As shown in **Figure I**, the large majority of HSOs prefer to receive information through the HS-PAC e-mail listserv. Some officers do utilize the HSO website, HS-PAC meetings and PAG meetings as channels for information, so these methods of communication should not be discounted. Increased sharing of information to other distribution lists (Commissioned Corps liaisons, PAG listservs, et al) may be beneficial to ensure all HSOs are reached. Respondents were able to select multiple choices for this question.



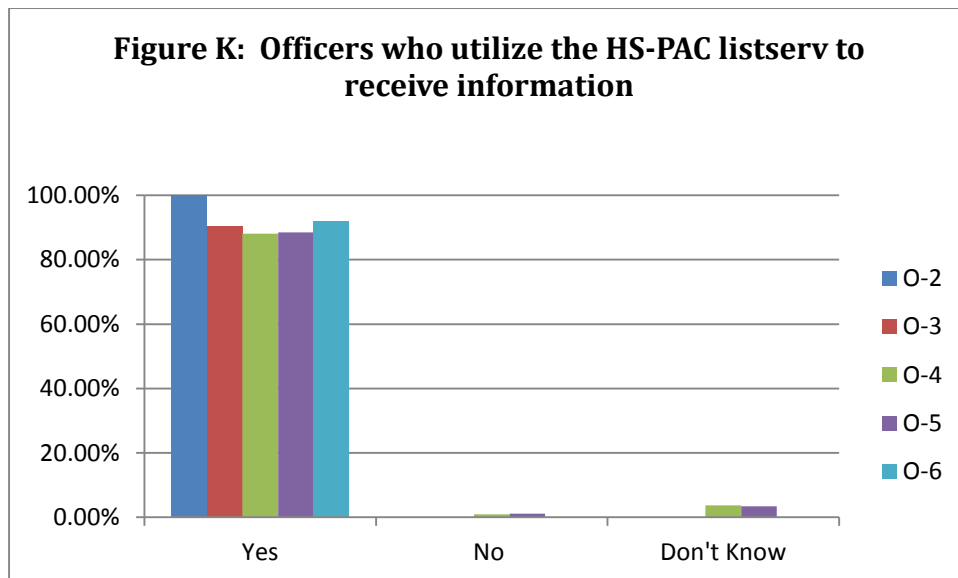
HS-PAC Awareness: Frequency of HS-PAC Website Access

Figure J describes how often HSOs access the HS-PAC website. Most HSOs access the HS-PAC website at least quarterly (Sometimes). Of note, over 15% of total respondents never access the website. Additional research may be beneficial to understand why these officers are not utilizing the website as a resource.



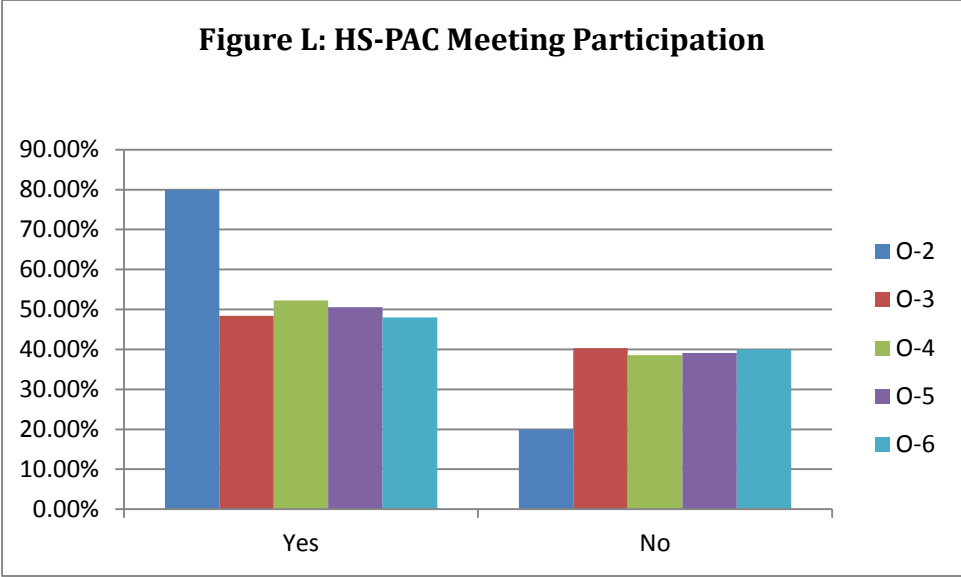
HS-PAC Awareness: HS-PAC Listserv

HSOs were asked if they utilize the HS-PAC listserv as a way to receive information, with the vast majority of officers indicated that they receive information from the HS-PAC listserv. The data for this question may be seen in **Figure K** and also mirrors the similar information found in **Figure I** (above).



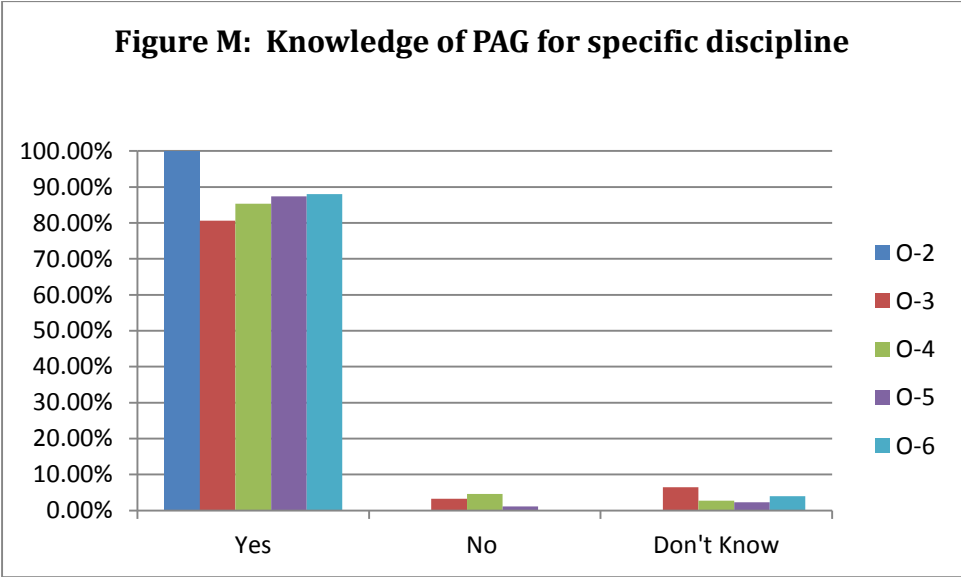
HS-PAC Meeting Participation

Figure L shows that over 40% of respondents do not participate in HS-PAC meetings. Some reasons included in the comment section are that meeting times are not convenient and clinicians are unable to separate from work duties to attend.



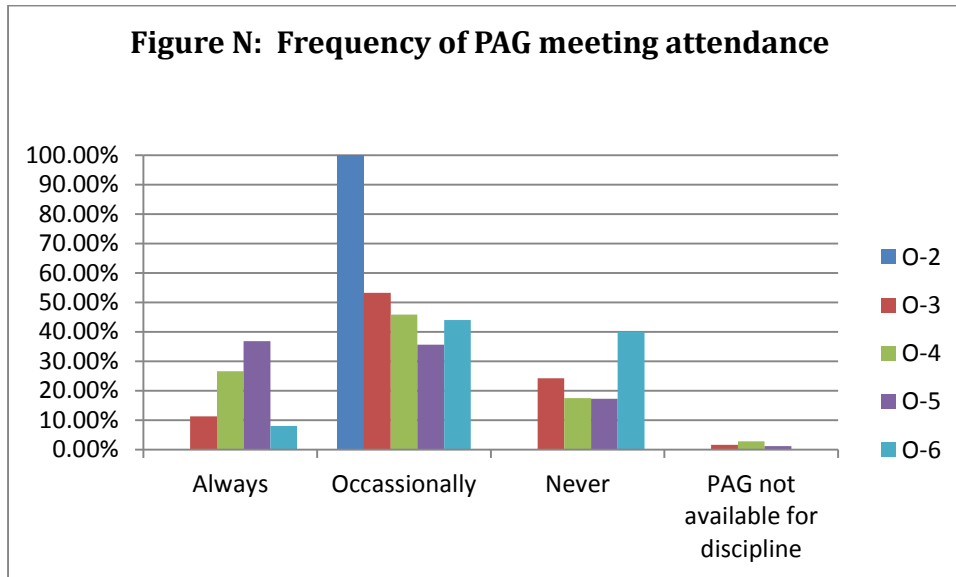
Professional Advisory Group (PAG) for Discipline

Over 93% of all HSO respondents are aware of the PAG for their specific discipline, as demonstrated in **Figure M**. A small number of officers (less than 5%) reported that they did not know if they have a PAG for their discipline. This may suggest that an opportunity exists for further analysis of officers who are unaware of the PAG for their discipline to identify any trends or barriers. Also, if there are HSOs without a PAG for their discipline, they may find it beneficial to join an established PAG with comparable or similar disciplines.



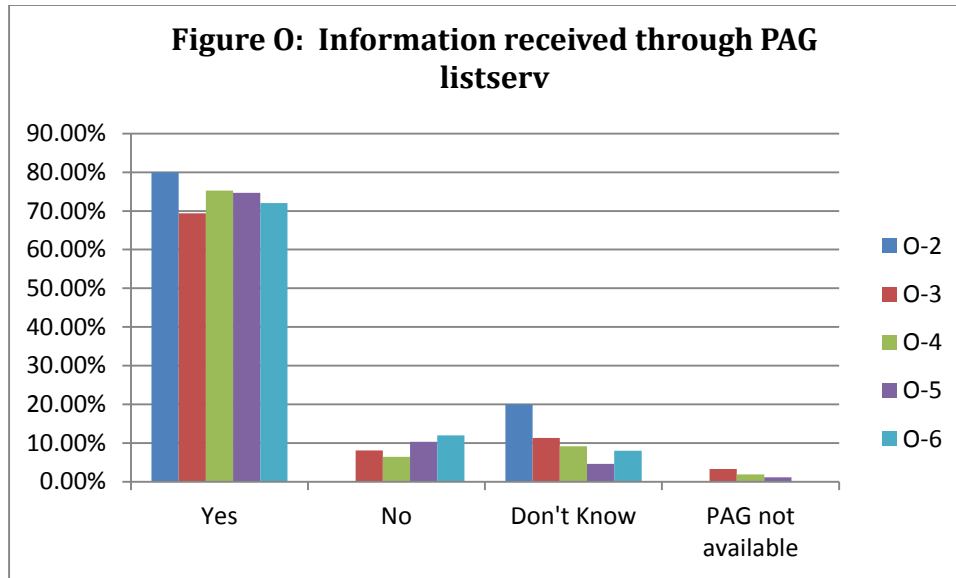
PAG Meeting Attendance

As shown in **Figure N**, the majority of officers answered that they attend PAG meetings “Occasionally”. Of note, 40% of officers at O-6 grade who participated in this survey never attend PAG meetings. Increased PAG participation from senior HSOs is a potential opportunity for engagement. Also, nearly 40% officers at the O-5 rank always attend meetings.



Receipt of PAG Specific Information

Approximately 75% of all respondents receive information through their PAG list serv. Nearly 10% of all respondents do not know whether they receive information through the PAG listserv, likely meaning they are unsure of their registration status. This may represent an opportunity for outreach by the PAG to ensure that all officers in their category are registered for the listserv. Additionally, since the Corps has many e-mail listservs, it may be beneficial to differentiate them from one another.



Other Areas for HS-PAC to Address

As a final survey question, HSOs were asked, via an open-ended question, whether there are any other areas they would like to see the HS PAC address. Sixty-seven total responses were received, with seven respondents specifically noting that no other areas should be addressed or that the PAC is doing a great job. Sixty respondents offered suggestions, which have been organized into 9 categories: Career Development, Engagement, Deployment, HS-PAC Meetings/Participation, Career Advancement/Billets, Awards, Policies/Procedures, and Benefits. The most common response was that field/remote officers are interested in leadership positions and a desire by HSOs to participate in training and officership opportunities.

Only one respondent suggested each bulleted response, unless noted otherwise.

Career Development

- General career development/resources (2 respondents)
- Leadership training, focused for junior officers as well as by position held (2 respondents)
- More education amongst HSOs about our wide range of disciplines
- Anonymous promotion packages for successful and unsuccessful officers
- CV and COER improvements
- Advice on how to reach HSO promotion benchmarks
- Tangible career advice from engaged mentors and other sources
- Require that senior officers mentor and offer leadership training

Engagement

- Field Officers
 - Opportunities for remote/field officers, including training, learning sessions, officership and PAC/PAG leadership options (5 respondents)
 - Less emphasis on PAC participation for promotion since difficult for field officers to participate
 - Field officers feel passed over for promotions and headquarters staff unfairly rewarded
- External stakeholders
 - Educating Civil Service supervisors on Corps policies and procedures, including opportunities for officer recognition (2 respondents)
 - Agency liaison participation
- Internal Interaction
 - Camaraderie as a Corps
 - Building capacity of PAGs to utilize team-based approach instead of competitive approach
 - More interaction between PAG and PAC

Deployment

- Additional opportunities to deploy (2 respondents)
- Deployment training/exercises

HS-PAC Meetings/Participation

- Meetings and presentations available by podcast
- Meeting minutes
- Officer spotlights each month
- More content outside of subcommittee reports each month
- Discuss initiatives and information from the Surgeon General
- Remove in-person requirement for PAC membership
- Other ways to engage mission critical staff who cannot attend meetings
- Invite new members
- Shorten meetings or rotate topics

Advancement/Billets

- Job opportunities outside of what is available on USAJobs website (2 respondents)

- Difficult to get higher billets, particularly O-6 billets (2 respondents)
- Higher billets based on clinical expertise (officers feel forced into administrative billets)
- The ability to serve in billets outside of one's discipline
- A separate category for HSOs without licensure requirement
- More DoD and VA billets
- 3 year rotation like sister services, with ability to select assignments
- Mobility
- Job opportunities that match training and experience
- Specific opportunities by discipline (i.e. Social Work)
- Focus on the Service component with less emphasis on promotion. Leadership and growth should ultimately lead to promotion.
- Billet review
- Agency career tracks

Awards

- Lack of formal recognition of achievements and accomplishments (2 respondents)
- Deployed officers get more accolades although many officers are performing critical public health functions on a daily basis
- Assist officers who are uncomfortable with self-promotion

Policies/Procedures

- Current and scheduled changes in Corps policies and procedures
- Established procedures for promotions
- Bylaws for membership

Benefits

- Student loan forgiveness funding

Results Summary

The information compiled from the 2015 HSO Training and Needs Assessment Survey reveals some common themes for the HSO category.

The factors perceived to contribute the most to the career success of HSOs include Positive COERs, Leadership Roles, and Career/Billet Mobility, while Lack of Awards/Recognition, Deployment Opportunities, and Lack of Career/Billet mobility are perceived to have the greatest negative effect. Career/Billet mobility is dually noted as both a perceived positive

and negative factor, potentially demonstrating that it is considered important for career success, but difficult to obtain.

The types of training and program topics that interest respondents varied somewhat by rank, although all officers show specific interest in topics related to career development, awards/recognition, and skill development. However, all answer choices received at least 37 votes (14% or more of responses for that question), demonstrating that officers have a range of needs in terms of training and topics of interest.

The HS-PAC website is a potential resource that could be leveraged for additional communication with officers. The majority of officers access the website at least quarterly, but over 15% of surveyed officers noted that they never access the HS-PAC website. Respondents offered suggestions for enhancing the HS-PAC website as a resource, including content revisions and organization, regular updates and availability of webinar/live sessions.

HS-PAC meetings are not attended by over 40% of survey respondents, demonstrating a potential area of engagement for all officers in the category.

Future Steps

This study represents efforts by the HS-PAC to conduct a training and needs assessment for current HSOs. As previously mentioned, study limitations exist in establishing the greatest needs of HSOs. Future studies and initiatives may consider: 1) using information gathered from this analysis to focus career development training and mentoring opportunities, 2) consider alternate approaches for meeting the overall needs of HSOs, particularly those in remote location billets or who have workplace obstacles to active HS-PAC participation, and 3) obtaining additional focused feedback from HSOs on key themes from this analysis, including remote/field officer engagement, HS-PAC participation, advancement and mobility, and stakeholder interaction. Lastly, future Training and Needs Assessment reports should incorporate year-over-year trend analysis in order to examine if the needs of HSOs change over time.

Appendix A: Health Services Officer Needs Assessment Survey 2015

Officer Information:

Q1. Current Temporary Rank	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): All ranks ENS through RADM or above]
Q2. Commissioning Degree/Discipline	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Physical and Environmental Sciences, Optometry, Clinical Psychology, Social Work, Podiatry, Medical Technology, Dental Hygiene, Medical Records Administration, Physician Assistant, Information Technology, Health Education, Healthcare Administration, Other Public Health Specialties] [Comment field: Other, please specify]
Q3. Level of Commissioning Degree	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate]
Q4. Years in the USPHS Commissioned Corps	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, >20]

HS-PAC Programs and Opportunities:

Q5. In your opinion, what has been the biggest positive factor in the success of your career? Think not only in terms of promotions, but also job billets	[Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers): Excellent Performance Rating/COER, I've received Awards/Recognition to highlight my accomplishments, I've attained Leadership Roles which allow me to thrive, Acquiring/maintaining my Certifications/Credentialing/Licensure, Acquiring/maintaining my Continuing Education Credits, Acquiring Public Health Experience/Training, Career/Billet Mobility, Involvement in the PAC/PAG, Participation in the Mentoring process, Deployment opportunities] [Comment field: Other, please specify]
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<p>Q6. Similarly, in your opinion, what has been the biggest challenge to the success of your career? Think not only in terms of promotions, but also job billets.</p>	<p>[Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers): Poor Performance Rating/COER, Difficulty receiving Awards/Recognition, Difficulty attaining Leadership Roles, Difficulty acquiring/maintaining Certifications/Credentialing/Licensure, Difficulty acquiring Continuing Education Credits, Difficulty acquiring Public Health Experience/Training, Lack of Career/Billet Mobility, Lack of involvement in the PAC/PAG, Lack of participation in the Mentoring process, Basic Readiness (not meeting readiness standards), Not enough Deployment opportunities, Too many Deployments]</p> <p>[Comment field: Other, please specify]</p>
<p>Q7. Relative to the types of training that the HS-PAC community might be able to provide, which of the topics and/or programs below are you most interested in?</p>	<p>[Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers): Awards, Career Development/Promotion, Recruitment/Retention, Mentoring, Training on USPHS and HSO Policies and Procedures, Readiness/Deployment, Skill Development, USPHS Events, Workplace Topics]</p> <p>[Comment field: Other, please specify]</p>
<p>Q8. How do you prefer to receive HSO-related information?</p>	<p>[Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers): By email through the HS-PAC listserv, by visiting the HSO website, by attending/calling in to HS PAC meetings, by attending/calling in to PAG meetings]</p> <p>[Comment field: Other, please specify]</p>

HS-PAC Website and Listserv:

<p>Q9. How often do you access the HS-PAC website?</p>	<p>[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Always (at least weekly), Often (at least monthly), Sometimes (at least quarterly), Never]</p>
<p>Q10. Is there anything additional that you would like to see on the HS-PAC website?</p>	<p>[Comment field]</p>
<p>Q11. Do you currently receive information from the HS-PAC listserv?</p>	<p>[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Yes, No, Don't Know]</p>

Professional Advisory Groups:

Q12. Do you have a Professional Advisory Group (PAG) specific to your discipline?	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Yes, No, Don't Know]
Q13. How often do you attend PAG meetings?	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Always, Occasionally, Never, PAG not available for my discipline]
Q14. Do you currently receive information from your discipline specific PAG listserv?	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Yes, No, Don't Know, PAG not available for my discipline]

How can the HS-PAC better serve you?:

Q15. Do you participate or listen to the HS-PAC meetings?	[Multiple Choice (Only one answer): Yes, No] [Comment field: If you answered no, please specify why not]
Q16. What other areas would you like to see the HS-PAC address?	[Comment field]