**SWO Accessions**

**Land of 1000 ENS.** We often lament about the need to fill Wardrooms beyond capacity with first tour DIVOs vying for the training resources required to qualify SWO at the same time. For ships in long availabilities or fighting through tough certification cycles, the challenge to train and qualify JOs is even more acute. It seems like an unnecessary burden that falls squarely on already overworked department heads and triads. Why do we do it?

**Fun Fact: We don’t “need” ensigns.** We actually aren’t buying 1000 ENS because we have valid work for that many officers. Many of the JOs assigned to ships are filling billets labeled “OOE” in the Activity Manning Slate, billets paid for to cover “over-execution” of JO requirements as determined by NAVMAC in manpower studies. The ENS bill actually covers a whole bunch of requirements. Let’s break it down:

1. **SWO Department Heads.**  The growth to 355 ships over the next decade or so entails a nearly 15% increase in surface combatants. In addition, with Blue/Gold crews on LCS and the expansion of CRUDES complexity, the surface fleet averages more than four department heads per hull. This drives the DH annual fill requirement up, in turn driving the need for ENS accessions. DHRB has improved retention to about 35%, which is great, but we still need more input to meet DH output.
2. **SWO(N).** Of the 1093 programmedaccessions for FY20, 137 are specifically paid for by the Office of Naval Reactors, with intent to fill nuclear DIVO and Principal Assistant (PA) roles in future years.
3. **RL/Staff accessions.** Many of the officers who start out as SWOs are pre-selected for RL communities like EDO, OCEANO, and Intel through “Option” commissions. Overall, around 150 officers from each year group will conduct a lateral transfer into an RL or Staff Corps community before the mid-point of their career. The other communities actually count on SWO attrition to meet their accession quotas, and do not budget for JOs in their manpower models.
4. **FTS/SELRES.** Believe it or not, the reserve component of the Navy is vital to the health of the Fleet. Jobs filled by FTS and reserve officers often may not enhance the careers of due course SWOs, but keep the wheels in motion for our community. Without organic training pipelines, the FTS and reserve components rely on SWO JOs to fill their ranks through lateral transfer and attrition.

**Fun Fact:** **SWO retention is among the BEST in the URL!** You may have heard that SWOs need three DIVOs to make a DH. Statistics don’t lie, and that is still a fair assumption, but with the factors above taken into account, SWO retention to the eighth year of commissioned service is actually significantly better than the submarine community. Recent SWO DH retention is about 37.5%, however SWO accessions consistently retain within the Navy at a rate above 50%. We can still do better.

**What you can do.** Every CO, XO, or DH in the surface Navy is a talent scout. Quality officers leave SWO every year because they see opportunity or quality of service/living elsewhere. If you catch yourself saying something like “if you don’t want to be a SWO, we don’t need you,” maybe you’ve got it wrong. If an officer simply lacks SWO skills and can’t be trained to success, he/she needs to non-attain and move on, either in a new community or out of the Navy… but motivation can be addressed. Ask what it is about your Wardroom that might not appeal, and what can be done to ensure we meet the needs of JOs in training without watering down development. Their struggle is real, just as yours is. If we get better at retaining our quality talent, we won’t need to access above requirements, and in turn we will improve training conditions for future generations of SWO JOs through reduced overcrowding and resource competition. Next, strongly consider who you are sending forward to OCS. If you endorse a package for one of your Sailors to commission as a SWO, consider whether that Sailor has the right motivation and aptitude to someday be a SWO DH. You aren’t hiring a 1st LT or GUNNO… we have plenty of those. Your endorsement should indicate the Sailor wants to follow in your footsteps. If not, you risk perpetuating the “Seaman-to-LCDR” trend through your attempt to reward Sailors with a commission for their past achievements rather than for their future potential. *You* are the recruiter.