

GAUGING INTEREST IN THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

LYDIA LINDSAY YOWELL



May 2013

**PUBLISHED BY
THE DEFENSE ACQUISITION UNIVERSITY PRESS
PROJECT ADVISER: JAMES OMAN, DIRECTOR
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Abstract

The Senior Executive Service (SES) is a position classification in the federal government loosely analogous to the rank of a general officer in the U.S. Armed Forces. The intent of establishing the SES was to identify and place government leaders who possess well-honed executive skills, a broad perspective of government, and a commitment to public service in positions to influence the continuing transformation of the government.

Having Army civilian leaders in the SES with a broad diversity of skills, experience, and knowledge is imperative as our military faces unprecedented challenges, both domestically and on the foreign battlefields. Civilian senior leaders who understand these challenges and can apply the appropriate answers are vital to meeting the Army's objectives. This research study focused on the level of interest among Army civilian senior leadership to pursue the SES and factors or concerns that may influence this decision. One factor, attendance of a Senior Service College (SSC) or Senior Service College Fellowship (SSCF) program, was individually explored to determine influence in a decision to pursue the SES.

A survey was provided to a target audience of General Schedule (GS)-14/GS-15/Band IV equivalents in several Army organizations and 455 responses were received. More than one-fourth (26.7 percent) of participants responded as being interested in pursuing the SES, 22.1 percent were undecided, and the remainder were not interested. Participants identified three common factors that influenced their decision: Work-life balance, politics, and mobility requirements. Additionally, 39.7 percent of participants who attended an SSC or SSCF said their interest to pursue the SES was influenced while attending the program.

Chapter 1—Introduction

Members of the SES serve the United States globally and play a critical leadership role in managing a wide range of federal responsibilities. The SES is charged with leading the continued transformation of our government which, given the current climate of reduced budgets, congressional indecisiveness, and ethically challenged leadership, is difficult and demanding. Focusing on the Department of Defense (DoD), our military faces unprecedented challenges, both domestically and in foreign theaters of operation, so the importance of having civilian leaders in the SES with broadly diverse skills, experience, and knowledge in military operations and acquisition is imperative to battlefield dominance. With the increased demands on the SES leaders, attracting high-quality civilian candidates may require new approaches. This research paper focused on the current level of Army civilian senior leadership interest to pursue the SES and the factors that may influence this decision.

Background

The SES corps is comprised of leaders who possess well-honed executive skills and share a broad perspective of government and a public service commitment. Members of the SES serve in the key positions just below the top presidential appointees and are the major link between these appointees and the rest of the federal workforce. They operate and oversee nearly every government activity in approximately 75 federal agencies. The SES includes most managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above GS grade 15 or equivalent positions in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. There are two types of positions and four types of appointments in the SES; however, for this research project, only career appointments were considered. Incumbents for career appointments are selected by an agency merit staffing process

and must have their executive qualifications approved by a Qualifications Review Board (QRB) convened by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

In 2007, the OPM hosted a Thought Leader Symposium to discuss development of federal executives in the 21st century. There was widespread agreement across discussion groups that the conceptual framework for the SES needed to be reexamined, since the original concept of a mobile, interchangeable cadre of leaders had not yet been successful (OPM, 2007). This forum suggested that deficiencies in understanding the SES role, in developing executives and in applying incentives for mobility were a few of the reasons the goal had not yet been satisfactorily achieved. OPM quickly implemented a series of initiatives to address challenges in the SES, such as continued professional development and refinement of mobility requirements. In 2008 and again in 2011, OPM conducted a survey of the SES corps to determine how well the initiatives were implemented and to identify residual and new concerns. The concerns identified by current members of the SES in the 2011 survey served as a partial basis for this research study to identify factors that may influence Army civilian senior leadership to pursue the SES.

Problem Statement

Succession of our civilian executive service leadership is crucial to the success of our military. Hence, there is an urgent need to maintain a consistent pool of high-quality, talented candidates for the DoD SES corps. Focusing on the Department of the Army (DA), there is no information readily available to determine the interest level of the current Army senior civilian leaders in pursuing SES positions.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this research study is to gauge the interest of Army civilian senior leaders with diverse skills and knowledge to pursue an SES position. Determining the level of interest and

the factors that influence this interest may provide insight into maintaining a consistent pool of qualified candidates.

Significance of This Research

The significance of this research is to address concerns expressed by some SES members that there is a lack of interest by Army civilian senior leaders to pursue SES positions and that there may not be an attractive pool of highly skilled, quality candidates from which to choose. Questions to be examined focused on whether this perception is true and, if so, what factors could influence Army civilian senior leader's interest in pursuing an SES position. One factor—attendance of a SSC program—was individually explored as it was identified as an area of interest by senior civilian leaders. Currently, the Army has little cumulative data from civilian senior leaders to determine the level of interest and to identify concerns, if any, about pursuing an SES position. The information provided by this research will provide insight to the interest level and corresponding influence factors.

Overview of the Research Methodology

This research study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Demographic and subjective data were collected using a survey with a target audience of GS-14, GS-15, and NH-IV pay band equivalents. Data are graphically presented and analyzed using supplemental narrative information from the surveys.

Research Questions

This research study addresses the following questions:

1. Is there interest among Army civilian senior leaders to pursue an SES career?
2. What are the factors that could influence Army civilian senior leaders to pursue an SES career position?

3. Does attendance at an SSC influence the decision by an Army civilian senior leader to pursue an SES career position?

Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses of this research paper are as follows:

1. There is a lack of interest among Army civilian senior leaders to pursue SES career positions.

2. The lack of interest is based on multiple factors.

3. The interest among Army civilian senior leaders to pursue an SES position is influenced by attendance of an SSC program.

Limitations of the Study

A considerable effort was made to obtain a broad perspective from senior leaders across Army civilian organizations however, due to the limited timeframe to conduct this study, participants for this survey were limited to senior civilian leaders in two primary populations: those located at Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) and the current fellows and alumni from the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) SSCF program. The target population was civilian leaders in the GS-14, GS-15, and NH-IV equivalent bands. Survey participants were encouraged to forward the survey to colleagues of the targeted grades within other organizations to increase overall participation. As a result, there was a significant response to the survey—455 participants from 21 organizations. The survey responses reflect individual preferences and are not indicative of organizational trends. All survey responses were treated as being representative of a single population. Data were generalized by trends and cannot be independently verified. Results and comments are interpreted at face value.

Definitions of Key Terms

Allocations for SES Positions. There is no statutory limitation on the total number of SES positions. However, the law (5 U.S.C. 3133) requires OPM to allocate "spaces" to agency heads on a biennial cycle. Agencies can establish positions within their allocation without further OPM approval. Agencies manage their executive resource needs within the levels set during the biennial allocation (OPM, 2012).

Compensation. Includes salary, awards, and benefits packages.

Mentoring. This is a process that focuses specifically on providing guidance, direction, and career advice. Mentoring usually is a formal or informal relationship between two people—a senior mentor (usually outside the protégé's chain of supervision) and a junior protégé.

Mobility. Movement of SES members to a new position.

Networking. Process of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with other people and potential clients and/or customers. The benefits of networking include information sharing, knowledge enhancement, new contacts and leads, broader reputation, and increased support (Mig, 2010).

Politics. Defined in business and organizations as the pursuit of individual agendas and self-interest without regard to their effect on the organization's efforts to achieve its goals (Businessdictionary.com, 2013). Politically oriented behaviors include:

1. Behavior that is outside the legitimate, recognized power system.
2. Behavior that is designed to benefit an individual or subunit.
3. Behavior that is intentional and is designed to acquire and maintain power (Ivancevich,

Konopaske, & Matteson, 2011).

Work-Life Balance. Concept of properly prioritizing career and ambition with lifestyle.

The “proper” balance is ambiguously defined as it hinges on individual preferences.

Senior Service College. Defined for this study as a higher education institution designed to provide training, education, and development of senior leaders in specific military or governmental areas, such as military acquisition, national military strategy, national security strategy, and national resource strategy.

Chapter 2—Literature Review

Chapter 1 outlined the purpose for establishing the SES and the need to continuously attract a pool of high-quality candidates for succession. According to OPM (2011), the average age of a member of the SES is 53, suggesting an urgency to define the factors to influence interest for senior Army civilians to pursue SES positions. The literature review revealed select results from the 2011 OPM SES survey relevant to this research. Relevant responses included overall SES member and Army SES member responses. Some of the Army SES responses were further examined for comparison to this research study. A separate factor, attendance of an SSC, was investigated separately as an area of interest to senior leaders. The literature review also included an overview of the organizations responsible for Army civilian senior leader executive development and management, as well as specific information from the Army Civilian Senior Leader Management Office (CSLMO) about 2013 Army SES staffing requirements and mobility requirements.

Management of Army Civilian Senior Executives and Leaders

The Assistant Secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASA M&RA) has the mission for overall supervision of manpower and reserve components affairs of the DA. ASA M&RA serves as the Army's lead for civilian and military manpower policy, human resources, and all activities within the human capital enterprise. Within ASA M&RA is the CSLMO, the mission of which is to advise the ASA on all matters related to the recruitment, utilization, and life-cycle management of the Executive and Senior Professional (ESP) civilian workforce. The CSLMO develops, formulates, coordinates, and administers the Army's executive personnel programs to include the SES. It provides administrative support to the Secretary of the Army's

(SA) Executive Resources Board (ERB), which addresses executive personnel planning, utilization of executive resources, executive development, and evaluation of executive personnel programs.

The ASA M&RA Civilian Personnel/Quality of Life mission is to provide policy and supervision for the Army's civilian personnel, Army families and quality-of-life matters including, but not limited to, human resource oversight, compensation, entitlements, and civilian education programs (Assistant Secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs, 2011).

The OPM mission is to manage the human resources for the federal government, to include recruiting, hiring, training, and developing employees. OPM interfaces with ASA M&RA to train and develop Army civilian senior leadership to include the Executive Service. In 2008 and 2011, OPM conducted a climate survey of the SES corps to garner feedback on factors to influence SES motivation and satisfaction.

2011 OPM SES Survey

OPM surveyed all career, non-career and limited-term SES members to gather information about the strengths and challenges in the SES, from the perspective of its current members, and received a 65 percent response from all eligible executives and 53 percent response from the Army SES pool (149 respondents). Results relevant to this research study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected Results from 2011 OPM SES Survey

Question	Overall SES response*	Army SES response*
Take pride in being members of SES	94.0%	96.7%
Feel a great deal of personal accomplishment	93.0%	95.3%
Held accountable for achieving results	92.0%	92.4%
Was appointed to the SES from a Civil Service position	85.0%	79.2%
Was appointed to the SES following retirement from a military position	2.9%	13.4%
Worked for the Federal Government for more than 20 years	64.0%	57.1%
Will retire within 1 to 5 years	57.0%	38.5%
Satisfied with pay	51.1%	43.5%
Do not feel that SES pay and benefits are helpful in attracting high-quality senior executives	39.0%	20.5%
Do not feel that SES pay and benefits are helpful in retaining high-quality senior executives	37.0%	20.5%
Interested in opportunities to network outside their agencies	72.4%	81.9%
My organization demonstrates support to balance work and other life issues	72.9%	71.8%
Have a mentor advising for development purposes	29.3%	34.7%
Felt the mentor was effective	94.4%	92.0%
Serves as a mentor	66.4%	81.1%
Felt effective as a mentor	92.4%	95.0%
Organization is able to attract high-quality senior executives	69.8%	69.1%
Organization is able to retain high-quality senior executives	66.7%	66.4%
The SES application process discourages high-quality candidates when applying	40.5%	47.6%
*responded "strongly agree" or "agree"		

The response of the Army SES tracked with the overall SES responses with the following exceptions:

Retirement

Only 38.5 percent of the Army SES members plan on retiring in the next 5 years, which is much lower than the overall SES percentage (57 percent). According to OPM, there is no statutory limitation on the total number of SES positions; however, the law (5 U.S.C. 3133) requires OPM to allocate spaces to agency heads on a biennial cycle. Agencies can establish positions within their allocation without further OPM approval and are expected to manage their executive resource needs within the levels set during the biennial allocation. Currently, there are

302 Army SES positions, of which the SA has authorized 278 to be filled. As of February 2013, there are 260 Army SES members (Nash, 2013). These numbers and the low percentage of Army SES members who plan to retire in the next 5 years suggest that the need for a pool of candidates may be less urgent than in other government organizations as the Army continues to downsize.

Compensation

Only 43.5 percent of Army SES members are satisfied with their pay as compared to 51.1 percent of overall SES members. Additionally, only 20 percent of Army SES members feel that the pay and benefits will attract and retain high-quality senior executives. For this research study, the discussion of compensation packages included only salary and performance bonuses as other benefits are similar within the SES and general workforce. In January 2011, a pay freeze was enacted that prohibits statutory pay adjustments for most federal civilian employees, as well as basic pay increases for SES members. The salaries and compensation for Army SES members, as compared to Army senior level federal civilians (GS-14 and GS-15), are shown in Table 2. (OPM, 2012), (HQ, DA, 1999).

Table 2. Comparison of Compensation for SES, GS-14, and GS-15

Base Pay System	Minimum or Step 1	Maximum or Step 10	Bonus	Comp time allowed?
SES - Agencies with a Certified SES Performance Appraisal System	\$119,554	\$179,700	5 - 20%	No
SES - Agencies without a Certified SES Performance Appraisal System	\$119,554	\$165,300	5-20%	No
GS-14	\$84,69	\$110,104	up to 10%	Yes
GS-15	\$99,62	\$129,517	up to 10%	Yes

It is interesting to note that, although SES members felt that the pay and benefits would minimally attract and retain high-quality senior executives, the percentage of SES members who felt that their own organizations had the ability to attract and retain high-quality executives was

relatively high (all above 66 percent). This response suggests that factors other than compensation influence interest. Two factors may be pride and sense of accomplishment, as shown by the percentages (all above 90 percent) of the SES members' and of the Army SES members' responses. Another factor may be the opportunity to network across government agencies (72.4 percent and 81.9 percent, respectively).

Comparison to Private Industry Compensation

The comparison of SES and private industry positions depend on the structure and size of the commercial organization. One comparison was made using the U.S. Department of Labor position of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), defined as those who “determine and formulate policies and provide overall direction of companies or private and public sector organizations within guidelines set up by a board of directors or similar governing body. Plan, direct, or coordinate operational activities at the highest level of management with the help of subordinate executives and staff managers.” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). The 2011 annual salaries for CEOs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Annual Salaries for CEOs, May 2011

Percentile	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
			(Median)		
Annual Wage	\$75,860	\$109,320	\$166,910	> \$187,999	> \$187,999

Private industry compensation packages for executives typically include benefits comparable to the government, such as annual incentives, health care insurance, and retirement packages. Unlike the federal government, private industry compensation also may include signing bonuses and stock options.

Work-Life Balance

More than 70 percent of SES members felt that their organizations demonstrate support to balance work and life issues. Work-life balance is defined individually; however, organizations that make sincere efforts to recognize employees' outside-the-office lives often will see the payoff when it comes to recruiting and retaining top talent. Efforts include flexible hours, telecommuting options, compressed work weeks, fitness amenities and family friendly work environments. (Smith, 2012).

According to "The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" 2012 rankings, the Department of the Army ranked ninth out of 362 federal agencies. Agencies are measured on overall employee satisfaction and scored in 10 workplace categories, including work/life balance. The work/life balance category measures the extent to which employees consider their workloads reasonable and feasible and managers support a balance between work and life (Partnership for Public Service, 2013).

Mobility

The OPM 2011 SES survey presented a series of charts (Appendix A) which showed that most SES members have not changed jobs—either within or outside their agencies—since becoming an SES. In addition, the survey indicates SES members moved more often to different jobs and/or geographic locations before they became SES members than after becoming SES members. The change in job locations occurs mostly within an agency rather than by changing agencies. Within the DA SES, the mobility results followed the general trend and 84.6 percent of Army SES members agreed that career advancement depended on a candidate's willingness to change positions, though the survey did not specify that geographical change was required.

As part of the application process and a condition of employment, SES members sign a statement of understanding that mobility is inherent in SES positions. To maximize the talent of the SES members, an annual review is conducted by the Talent and Succession Management Board (TSMB) across the DoD to determine the enterprise needs and the availability of appropriately trained SES leaders to fill those needs. Executives and their chain of command directly contribute to the process by developing career plans and identifying requirements and characteristics needed to successfully accomplish the responsibilities of the Army's SES positions. The results of the TSMB review determine the utilization/readiness rating of Senior Executive resources and talent and the utilization of each Senior Executive from both an individual and enterprise perspective. Executives are not normally recommended for movement until they have served at least 2 years in position. The SA appoints the members of the TSMB. The TSMB makes a recommendation on utilization/readiness ratings, which must be approved by the SA (Nash, 2013).

Mentoring

The survey results show that SES members support mentoring, though only one-third of SES members have mentors. This discrepancy may result from working in the senior levels as there simply are fewer mentors available. According to the 2011 OPM survey, the Army SES corps outpaces the general SES corps with 81.1 percent serving as mentors as opposed to 66.4 percent, overall.

Mentoring has been identified as an important influence in professional development. In the mentoring process, a mentor shares knowledge, information, and experiences with his or her mentees. The benefits of mentoring most relevant to this research study are as follows (OPM, 2008):

- 1) *Career Development*—mentoring helps employees plan, develop, and manage their careers.
- 2) *Leadership and Management Development*—mentoring encourages the development of leadership competencies. These competencies are often more easily gained through example, guided practice, or experience than by education and training.
- 3) *Professional Identity*—mentors play a key role in defining norms, attitude, and behavior.
- 4) *Education Support*—mentoring helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- 5) *Recruitment and retention*—mentoring provides an encouraging environment through ongoing interactions, coaching, teaching, and role modeling that facilitate progression within the organization. Mentoring has been found to influence employee recruitment and retention because it helps establish an organizational culture that is attractive to the top talent clamoring for growth opportunities.
- 6) *Knowledge Management/Knowledge Transfer*—mentoring provides for the interchange/exchange of information/knowledge between members of different organizations.

SSC/Professional Military Education (PME) and Fellowships

SSC/PME is the apex of the Army Civilian Education System (CES) and prepares civilians for positions of greatest responsibility, including but not limited to Army Enterprise Positions (AEPs), and the SES. SSC/PME provides advanced educational opportunities and an increased knowledge of the national security mission for leaders who have an understanding of complex policy and operational challenges. Selection for attendance at an SSC is a competitive process and, like the Officer Corps, Army civilians graduating from SSC are centrally placed in a position of greater responsibility in another assignment or organization where they can apply the advanced education they have received (Civilian Personnel Office, 2012).

Fellowships are similar to SSC/PME as they are defined as short-term training opportunities focused on professional development and sponsored by a specific organization to expand leadership in their field. The differences lay in the link to civilian universities and that there are no placement requirements. Upon completion of a fellowship, graduates may return to home organizations with the understanding that they will be placed in positions of greater responsibility. Like the SSC/PME, fellowships are highly competitive and have rigorous curriculums (Civilian Personnel Office, 2012).

Selection of Army civilians to attend leader development and education courses is linked to performance in current assignments, to professional and career development and progression, to career development plans and career management models, and to future assignments. Generally, the SSC/PME and fellowship students:

- Are high-performing leaders with outstanding potential for more responsible leadership positions across the enterprise.
- Have a broad and varied history of experience leading to increased responsibility and broad perspectives.
- Have leadership and managerial experience that has demonstrated the competence, confidence, and motivation to be a bold and innovative leader in the public sector.
- Have an outstanding performance record and has progressed through positions of increasing responsibility at a faster pace than his or her peers.
- Value lifelong learning.
- Are motivated to succeed, and are willing to challenge himself/herself to do so.
- Have the passion to lead, inspire, and produce results for Army (Civilian Personnel Office, 2012).

The primary mission of each SSC/PME and fellowship is different; however, all of the curriculums include leadership training to include continuous exposure to and interaction with senior military and civilian leadership. The goal of this interface is to learn about senior leadership—the roles, responsibilities, challenges, work-life balance and other topics.

Chapter 3—Research Methodology

Introduction

This research was conducted utilizing a descriptive research methodology. A survey was developed to collect qualitative data from senior leaders of select federal agencies through an e-mail process. In addition to determining the level of interest for senior leaders to pursue an SES position, a key survey goal was to solicit input on factors that may influence this decision.

The survey questionnaire was first pilot tested in a small group of people to ensure that the questions were clear, concise, and sufficient to obtain comprehensive information. The survey questions were updated based on the input received during the pilot testing.

Research Design

This research project explored the level of interest of Army civilian senior leaders to pursue the SES. The genesis for this topic stemmed from discussions with several Army SES members who expressed concern that attracting a highly qualified pool of candidates for SES positions seemed progressively more challenging. Questions rose as to whether this perception was true and, if so, what may be the factors that influence Army civilian senior leader interest in pursuing the SES. A specific factor—attendance at a SSC or SSCF—was examined separately as it was identified as a potential key factor that may encourage interest.

Participation, Population, and Sample

The target audience for this survey consisted of GS-14, GS-15, and NH-IV equivalent Army civilian senior leaders across a wide range of Army organizations. Due to the limited timeframe to conduct this study, participants for this survey were distributed to senior leaders in two primary populations: Those located at Aberdeen Proving Ground and the current fellows and alumni from the DAU SSCF program. Survey participants were encouraged to forward the survey

to colleagues of the targeted grades within other organizations to increase overall participation. As a result, there were 455 participants from 21 organizations who completed the survey and more than half of the responses came from one organization. Since the research was intended to investigate individual and not organizational trends, the population was retained as a single entity. However, there may be bias in the results based on organizational influence. Not all participants answered every question, so the number of responses varied. Table 4 displays the organization, number of participants, and percentage of responses.

Table 4. Survey Response by Organization

A TEC	52.5%	235
PEO C3T	12.9%	58
PEO IEWS	15.8%	71
CECOM	4.2%	19
PEO CS & CSS	2.7%	12
PEO MS	2.2%	10
RDECOM	1.8%	8
ASA(ALT)	1.6%	7
PEO-Aviation	1.2%	5
PEO GCS	0.9%	4
TACOM	0.7%	3
MDA	0.7%	3
AMCCOM	0.7%	3
ACC	0.4%	2
PEO Soldier	0.4%	2
JPEO-CBD	0.4%	2
DAU	0.2%	1
PEO-Ammo	0.2%	1
CHRA	0.2%	1
COE	0.2%	1
Total	100.0%	448

(Rounded total)

Data Collection

Data were collected both quantitatively and qualitatively using a survey. Demographic information was gathered to outline the participants' backgrounds and included age, organization, grade level, and prior military experience. The survey included both definitive and open-ended questions to address the research objectives. To protect confidentiality, no other personal information was collected, and no identification codes were used. Due to the intended anonymity of the survey, all responses and comments are presented at face value.

To ensure validity, the survey was pre-tested with expert reviewers. Revisions were made based on feedback and a pilot test conducted with a selected number of respondents. Minor revisions were made and a second pilot test conducted to verify changes.

Chapter 4—Findings

The survey results and findings are grouped relative to the research questions and are presented in four sections: Demographics, interest to pursue the SES, factors that influence interest, and influence of SSC attendance.

Demographics

The target audience was GS-14, GS-15, and NH-IV equivalents. Table 5 shows the number of participant responses by age group. More than half of participants (57.5 percent) were 51 or older, suggesting they may be eligible for retirement within the next 6 years.

Table 5. Participant Response by Age Group

25-30	0.4%	2
31-40	9.5%	43
41-50	32.6%	147
51-60	50.8%	229
60+	6.7%	30
Total		451

Survey responses showed that 178 (39.3 percent) served in the military. Figure 1 displays the percentage per rank grouping of highest military rank achieved by participants with prior military experience.

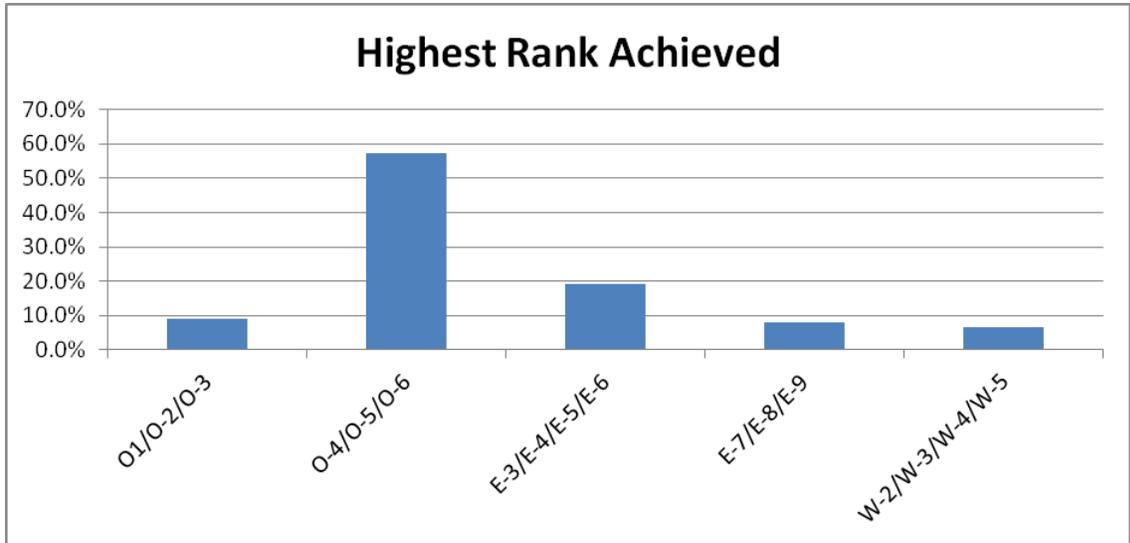


Figure 1. Highest Rank Achieved by Participants with Military Background

Interest to Pursue the SES

Overview of Level of Interest. Of 453 responses, 26.7 percent indicated an interest to pursue the SES and 22.1 percent were undecided. Figure 2 shows the number of responses by age group as to level of interest. Figure 3 shows the percentage of interest relative to age group.

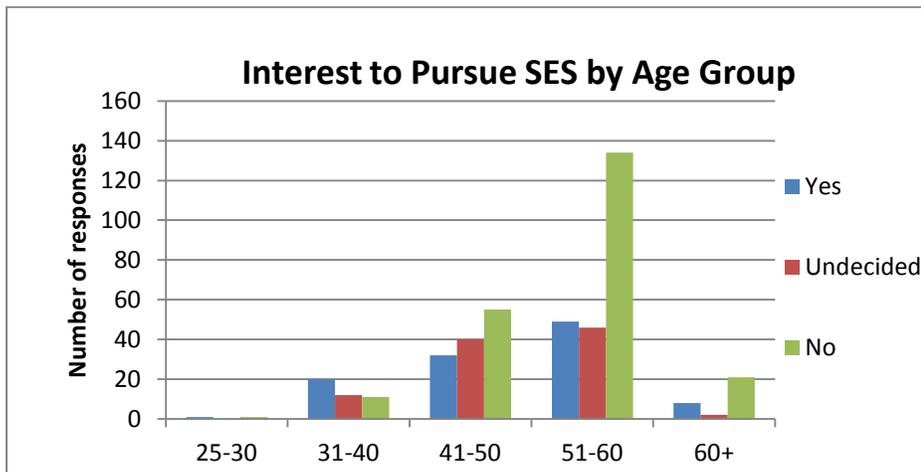


Figure 2. Level of Interest by Age Group—Number of Responses

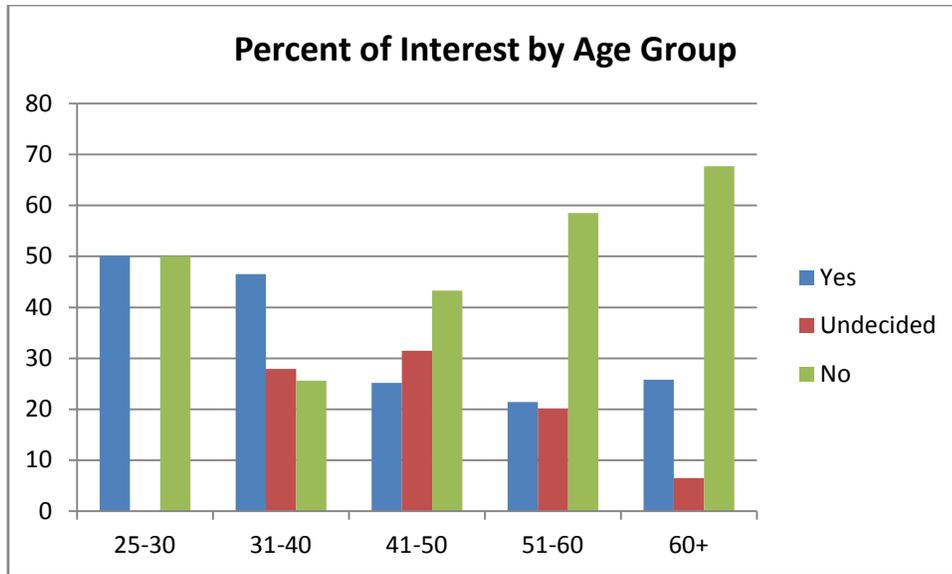


Figure 3. Percent of Interest Level by Age Group

There was more than 20 percent interest in pursuing the SES in all age groups. The actual number of responses in the 51- to 60-year-old group who are interested was the largest. However, the relative interest within age groups was greater in the younger age groups (25 to 40 years). The data show that nearly half of the interested respondents (48 percent) are 50 years old or younger. Adding in the undecided responses raised that number to 50 percent. Nearly the same number (45 percent) of interested respondents is found in the 51-to-60 age group. This is a significant finding as it suggests there is a relatively large pool of available and experienced candidates. Within the 51-to-60 age group, the interest to pursue the SES begins to decline. The data also suggest that Army senior leadership has an opportunity to prepare the most promising candidates under 50 years of age for the SES.

Figure 4 compares the level of interest based on prior military experience. There was not a significant difference in level of interest based on prior military service. Thirty-seven percent of those with prior military experience were interested, and 43 percent were not interested in pursuing the SES.

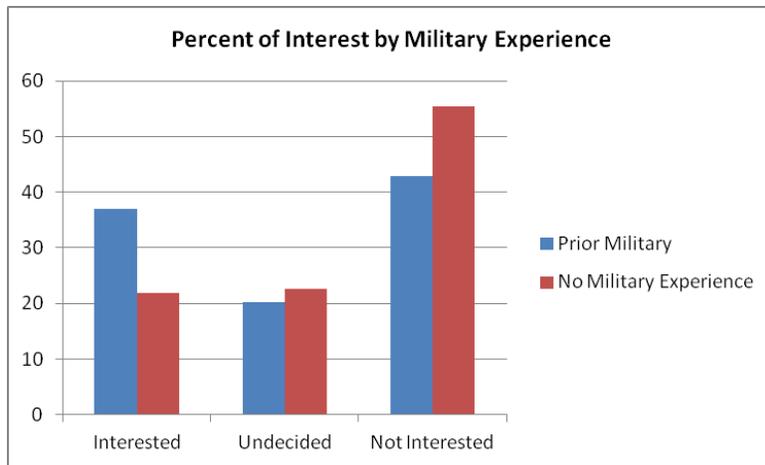


Figure 4. Percent of Interest by Participants with Military Experience

Information flow about the SES program. Participants were questioned as to whether they received information about the SES program and, if so, how they learned of the SES program. Of 451 responses, 148 (32.8 percent) said they had not received formal training or information about the SES. The remaining participants who received information were requested to identify avenues of information flow applicable to their knowledge of the SES. Figure 5 displays identified ways in which respondents received information about the SES program and the percentage of respondents who used that means to pursue information about the SES. The data show that regardless of individual interest level, the primary source of information was interaction with SES members, followed by the participants' own organizations. Information from one's own organization includes dissemination of formal information from their command.

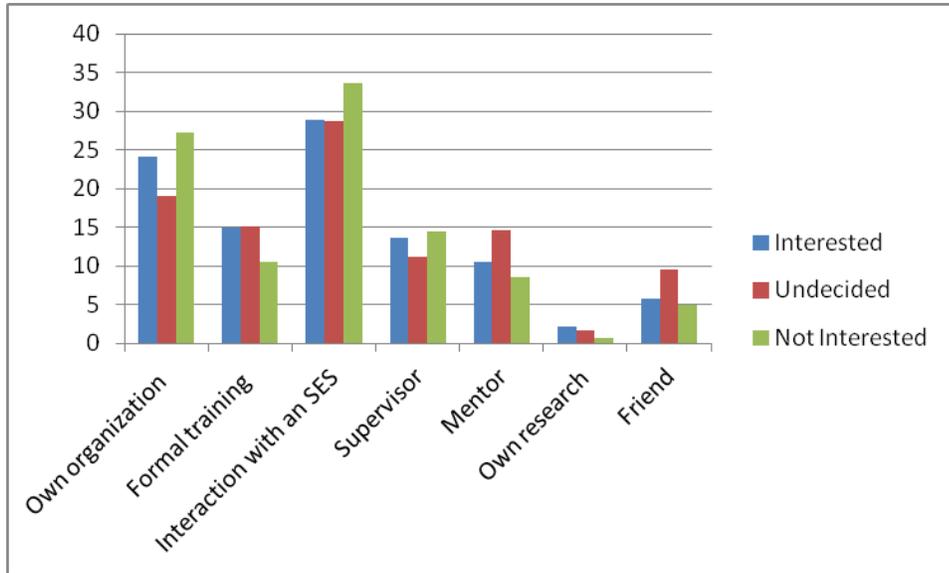


Figure 5. Information Flow Methods—Percent of Use

There were 119 participants who provided the grade/rank in which they first became interested in pursuing the SES. Figure 6 displays this information, but does not imply this is the grade in which the participant first became aware of the SES program. The data do suggest that if information is provided early in individual’s career, it can be beneficial in identifying and supporting appropriate leadership professional development to groom personnel for the SES. Furthermore, linking this information on the survey target audience (GS-14/GS-15/Band IV equivalents) with the corresponding information on the age groups, the data suggest there is an opportunity to develop young senior leaders (< 50 years old) with appropriate skills to make them highly qualified SES candidates.

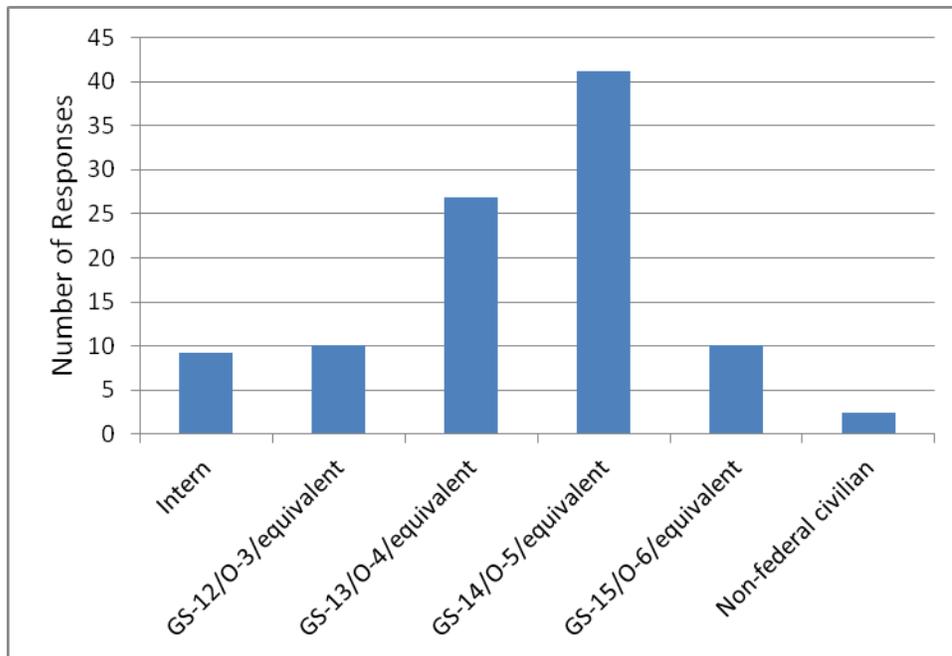


Figure 6. Grade/Rank that Participants Became Interested in the SES Program

Factors That Influence Interest

Participants who responded as interested in the SES were questioned as to their concerns that may influence their interest to actively pursue an SES position. Of those who expressed interest, 33 percent said they did not have concerns. A list of factors that may cause concern or influence their decision was provided, and participants were asked all factors that applied. They were also allowed to comment on this question. Figure 7 displays the list of factors and the percent ranking of each. The top four factors that cause concern are work-life balance (23.9 percent), lack of “right people” network (15.2 percent), politics (14.1 percent), and mobility requirements (14.1 percent). All related comments are provided in Appendix B.

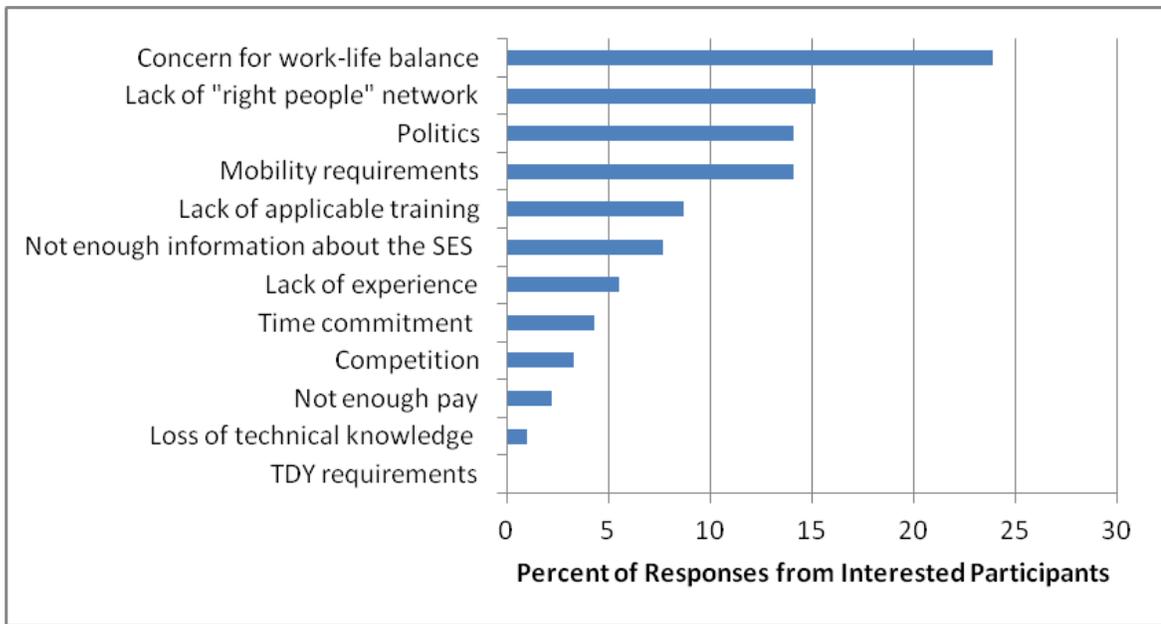


Figure 7. Priority of Concerns from Participants Who Are Interested in the SES

Participants who responded that they were not interested in or undecided about pursuing the SES were questioned as to the factors that cause concern or influence their decisions. They were provided the same list and asked to select their top priority. Participants also provided comments, which are presented in Appendix B. Figure 8 displays the list of prioritized factors that influence participants who are undecided about pursuing the SES. Figure 9 displays the list of factors with percent ranking that influenced respondents to not pursue the SES.

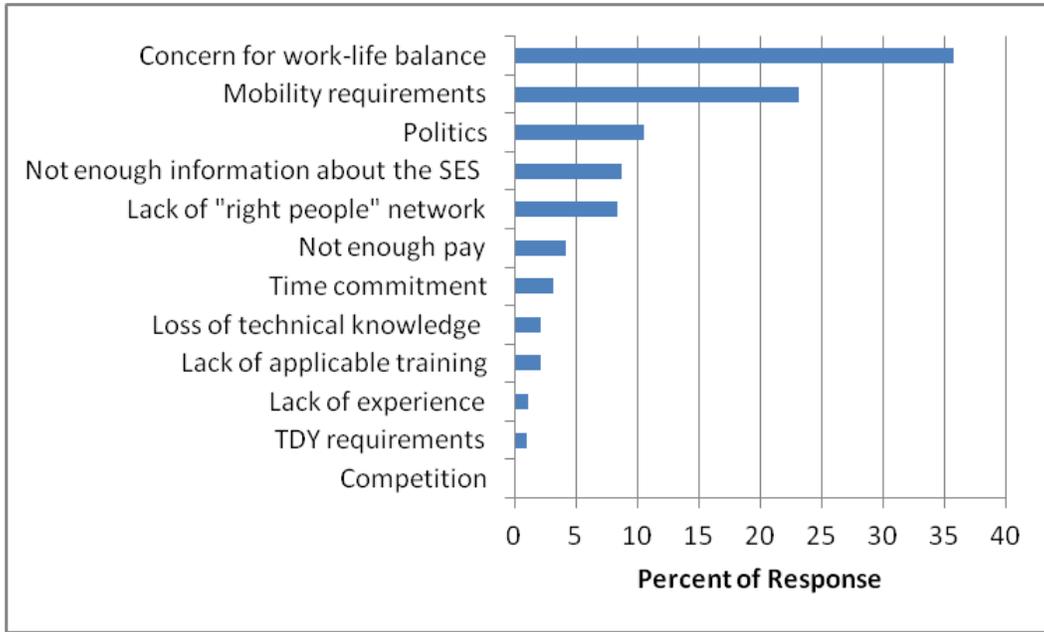


Figure 8. Priority List of Influence Factors from Participants Who are Undecided

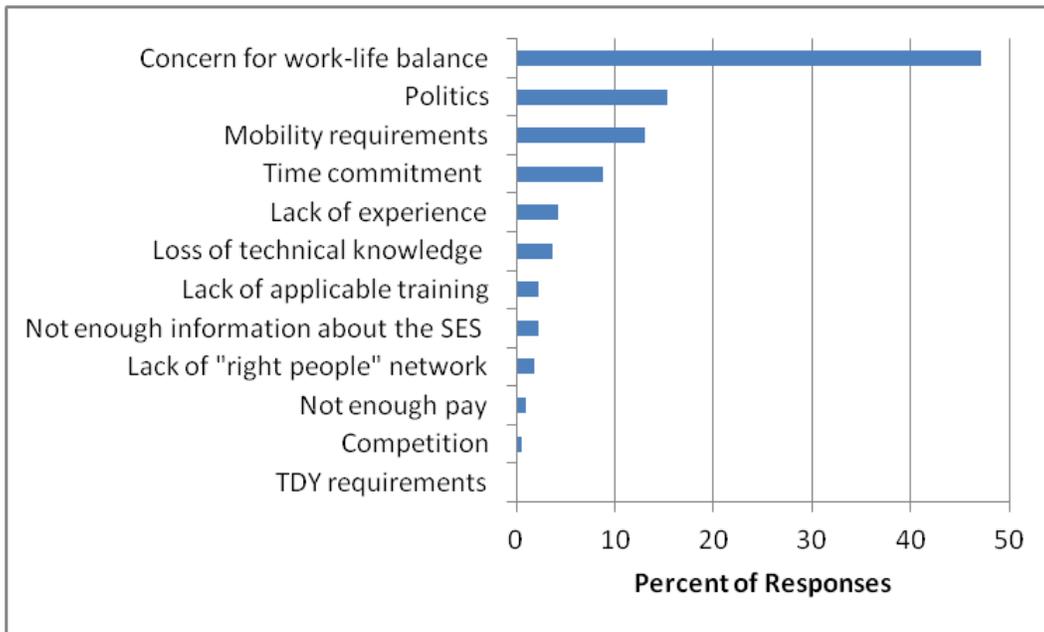


Figure 9. Priority List of Influence Factors from Participants Who are Not Interested

All three groups of survey participants (interested, undecided, and not interested) rated three common concerns within the highest four priorities: work-life balance, politics, and mobility

requirements. The two groups who responded as “interested” and “undecided” also listed “lack of ‘right people’ network” among the top concerns. The group that responded as “not interested” listed “time commitment” among the top four concerns.

Work-life balance. Work-life balance was the top concern or influence factor for all three groups. Many of the target audience expressed perceptions based on interactions with and observations of SES members that significant personal sacrifices and excessive time commitments are part of the normal expectations when joining the SES.

For the participants who responded as interested in pursuing the SES, their comments indicated they understood and accept the work-life balance challenges that are inherent in the position. Several said they deferred applying until their personal lives allowed for this level of commitment. Interestingly, the results of the 2011 OPM SES Survey showed that 71.8 percent of DA SESs felt that their organizations support balance between work and life issues. As work-life balance is based on individual perceptions, this research survey data and comments along with the OPM survey results suggest that those who understand the commitments of an SES position are able to knowledgeably decide if pursuing an SES position will meet their work-life balance goals.

Politics. The term “politics” was broadly interpreted by survey responders. Some defined politics as “who you know” in order to be nominated and selected for the SES and others defined politics as the “wheeling and dealing” required to achieve mission goals. By definition, politics are actions designed to benefit the individual over the needs of the organization (Businessdictionary.com, 2013). The comments provided minimally suggest that SES positions are self-serving, but more often reflect the understanding that the SES position requires continuous interaction and networking.

Related to politics was “lack of ‘right network’ people” which was cited as a concern or influence factor by participants who are interested in and those who are undecided about pursuing the SES. Many comments stated that one must know the right people to be considered for an SES position. One method to build "right people” networks is mentoring. Participants were surveyed as to whether or not they had a mentor. Of 450 responses, 253 participants (56.2 percent) stated that they have or had mentors. Figure 10 displays the percentage of survey participants who had or currently have mentors with respect to level of interest to pursue SES. It is noted that the percentage of participants who are interested in pursuing the SES who have mentors is slightly greater (difference of 7.4 percent) than those who did not have mentors. Conversely, the percentage of participants who are not interested in pursuing the SES who did not have mentors was greater (difference of 9.9 percent) than those who did.

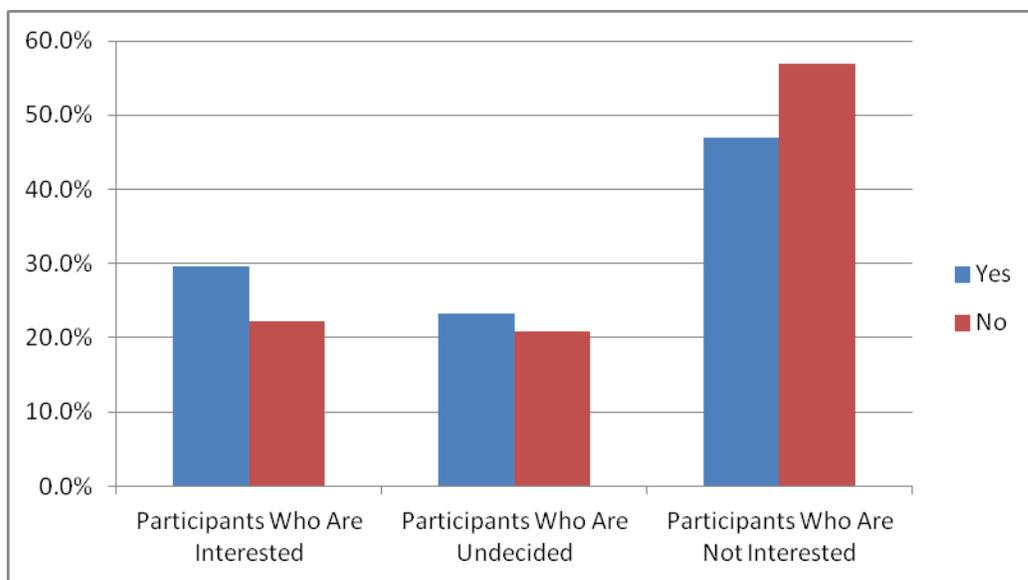


Figure 10. Percentage of Participants Who Had or Currently Have Mentors

Participants were asked if their mentors were influential in their overall decision of whether to pursue the SES. Table 6 shows the percentages of the responses.

Table 6. Percentage of Mentor Influence on Decision to Pursue the SES

Was your mentor influential in your decision to pursue SES?	
Yes	No
30.4%	69.4%

Figure 11 breaks down the percentage of respondents who state whether or not their mentors influenced their decision by their level of interest. Of participants who have had mentors, there is a significant percentage (57.0 percent) whose interest in pursuing the SES was influenced by their mentors. Conversely, there is a significant percentage (61.9 percent) not pursuing the SES who stated that their mentor had no influence in their decision.

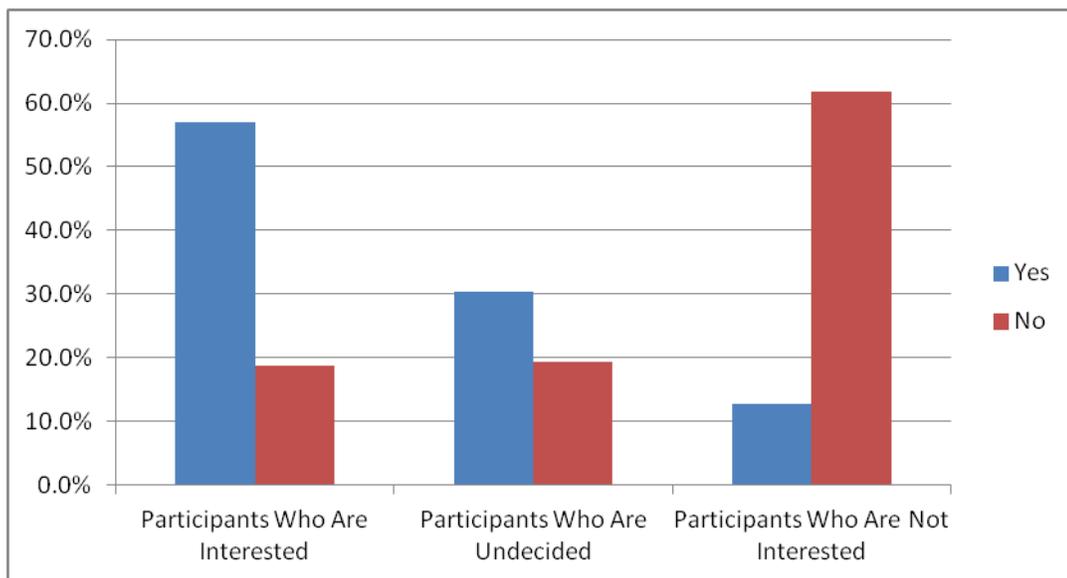


Figure 11. Influence of Mentors

The results of the 2011 OPM SES Survey show that 81.1 percent of DA SES members serve as mentors, and 95.0 percent viewed themselves as effective mentors. The CSLMO supports a formal mentoring program, and guidance on formal and informal mentoring has been published

by OPM (OPM, 2008). Based on participant comments, there are inconsistencies with implementation of mentoring programs in DA. Several participants commented that they would like a mentor and are unsure how to obtain one.

Mobility. Mobility is a top concern or decision factor; however, most of the participants do not clearly understand how the process works nor how often an SES member is required to move. Based on comments, there are perceptions that SES members move frequently to other geographical locations. The 2011 OPM survey mobility data (Appendix A) indicate that fewer than 20 percent of SES members moved geographically more than two times and fewer than 10 percent more than three times in their careers.

Related to mobility is the location of the SES positions. Most SES positions (79 percent) are located on the East Coast, primarily in the Washington, DC, area. Several participants commented that they would be interested; however, they are not currently in areas with numerous SES positions and are unable or unwilling to relocate.

Compensation and Other Factors. Compensation as a concern was surprisingly low on all of the priority lists. A few participants noted that there was some pay differential between their current salaries and an SES salary, but none of the comments specified that more compensation would incentivize interest. Interestingly, according to the 2011 OPM SES Survey, only 20 percent of the DA SES members felt that pay and benefits would attract candidates and more than 65 percent thought their organizations effectively attracted and retained quality candidates. The results of both surveys suggest that the Army civilian senior leadership seems to be incentivized by factors other than compensation, such as pride in mission accomplishment.

Participant comments in this research study suggested that career management of leader development and lack of organizational support were of significant concern. Several participants

commented that organizations and supervisors did not support training requests due to mission needs. In addition, numerous participants commented there was not enough information provided about SES programs or information provided on SES programs was confusing. Several comments addressed the application and selection process as being too lengthy and time consuming.

Influence of SSC Attendance

Participants were surveyed as to whether they attended or are currently attending an SSC or SSCF program. There were 455 responses, of which 109 participants had attended or are attending a SSC or SSCF program. Figure 12 displays the level of interest based on attendance at a SSC or SSCF.

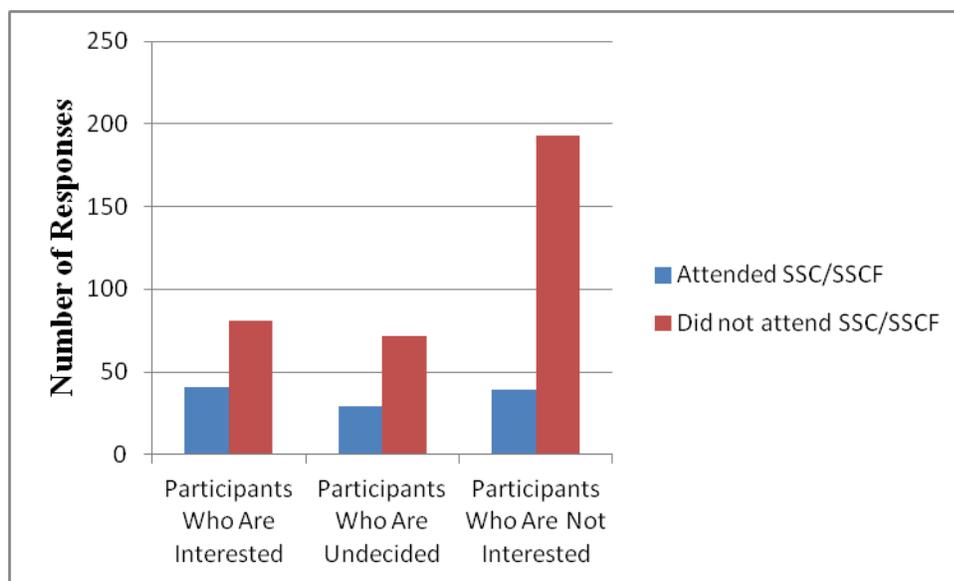


Figure 12. Number of Responses per Level of Interest based on Attendance at a SSC or SSCF

Of the population (109) who attended an SSC or SSCF, nearly 40 percent responded that attendance influenced their decision, either positively or negatively, to pursue the SES.

Table 7 displays the percent of this population influenced and not influenced by attendance at an SSC or SSCF.

Influenced By Attendance at SSC or SSCF	
Yes	No
39.7%	60.3%

Table 7. Influence on Participants Decision to Pursue the SES

The data does not show that attendance at an SSC or SSCF significantly influences the level of interest for Army civilian senior leaders to pursue the SES. Fewer than half of those who attended an SSC or SSCF were influenced in their decisions by the overall program curriculum. Comments provided by SSC and SSCF attendees who were influenced while attending SSC or SSCF showed that the interaction with the SES members was beneficial to making this decision. All comments are provided in Appendix B.

Chapter 5—Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This research study investigated the level of interest among Army civilian senior leaders to pursue the SES, along with factors that may influence that decision. A separate factor—attendance at a SSC or SSCF—was individually explored to determine if it influenced that decision. Conclusions are provided for each research question, along with recommendations.

Research Findings and Recommendations

Interest in the Army Civilian Senior Leadership to Pursue the SES

Conclusions. The data suggest there is an interest in the Army civilian senior leaders to pursue the SES in all age groups surveyed. More than one-quarter of participants were interested (26.7 percent), with another substantial portion (22.1 percent) undecided. Nearly 50 percent of those surveyed were under 50 years old. As for the concern expressed by SES members regarding a lack of qualified candidates, the challenge for senior leadership is to recognize the interest of potential candidates and properly prepare the most promising of these employees for SES positions. Senior leaders agree that preparing employees for leadership positions should begin early in their careers. Ideally, employees should be prepared to pursue the SES by no later than age 50 so the Army can increase the return on investment in its senior leaders.

Nearly half of the interested respondents were within the 51- to 60-year-old age group. This is a significant population of candidates with experience and desire to serve in the SES. This population, however, may be beyond the target age desired by Army civilian senior leaders and considered a risk in terms of investment cost as it nears retirement age. The survey results also showed no significant differences between those participants with military backgrounds and those without military experience in their interest to pursue the SES.

Recommendation. The ASA M&RA, CSLMO, and OPM are responsible for managing development of leadership talent and providing information to Army civilian senior leaders. Opportunities exist to initiate development of leaders early in their careers to ensure a pool of qualified candidates for future SES members. A focused effort is recommended to provide more information through training, mentorship programs, or other mechanisms.

Factors that Influence Interest to Pursue the SES

Conclusions. Of the group that responded as interest in pursuing the SES, 33 percent did not express concerns with their decisions. Of the remaining participants, three concerns emerged as high-priority factors regardless of their level of interest to pursue the SES: work-life balance, politics, and mobility requirements. Work-life balance is based on individual expectations and priorities. Those who were not interested in pursuing the SES said becoming a member of the SES required personal sacrifices and excessive time commitments that they were unwilling to make. Participants who are interested in pursuing the SES understood that work-life balance is an individual preference and accept the level of dedication that is part of being a member of the SES. Comparatively, the 2011 OPM survey showed that 71.8 percent of DA SES members felt that their organizations supported a work-life balance. Understanding the requirements of the SES position and management of expectations appear crucial to mitigating work-life balance.

The term “politics” was inconsistently interpreted by survey responders. Some participants defined politics as “who you know” in order to be nominated and selected for SES, and others defined politics as the continuous “wheeling and dealing” required to achieve mission goals. The definition of “who you know” is related to “lack of ‘right people’ network,” which was stated as a top concern for two groups (interested and undecided) as it applies to the application and selection process. Mentoring is identified as a mechanism for establishing the “right people” network. Of

those surveyed, slightly more than half stated that they had or have mentors. Participant comments suggest that mentoring programs are inconsistent within Army organizations. The CSLMO and OPM encourage and have provided guidance pertaining to formal and informal mentoring programs.

Mobility requirements also emerged as a key influencing factor. Participants' comments indicated a perception that movement, particularly geographical, within the SES would be required every few years. The mobility data provided in the 2011 OPM SES Survey showed that fewer than 20 percent of SES members moved more than two times. Applicants to the SES programs sign a mobility agreement; however, there seems not to be a clear understanding of the mobility process among much of the Army civilian senior leadership.

Participant comments showed that career management of leader development and lack of organizational support were significant concerns. Several participants commented that organizations and supervisors did not support training requests due to mission needs. In addition, numerous participants commented that there was not enough information provided about the SES program or the information on the SES program was confusing. Several comments addressed the application and selection process as too lengthy and time consuming.

Recommendation. Information about the SES program primarily is shared through interaction with an SES member and through individual Army organizations. Although information on the SES program is provided on the OPM and CSLMO websites, there may be other opportunities to clarify perceptions and answer questions about the SES program. Focused efforts on training, mentoring, and other communication methods to provide information are recommended.

Attendance at a SSC or SSCF to Influence the Decision to Pursue the SES

Conclusions. The data do not indicate that attending an SSC or SSCF strongly influences the level of interest to pursue the SES. The data do show that nearly 40 percent (39.7 percent) of the participants who attended SSC and SSCF responded that their decision to pursue the SES was influenced while attending these programs. The curriculums offer numerous opportunities to interact with and observe SES members such that attendees obtain a thorough understanding of the critical skills needed to become an SES member, as well as responsibilities and commitments of the position. SSC and SSCF also provide information on the application and selection processes and the opportunity to develop the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), if opting to apply.

Participant comments (Appendix B) suggest that organizations and individual managers vary greatly in their support for employees to attend SSC and SSCF programs. Several comments stated that organizations did not want to lose a valuable employee for the length of time that the programs require. Others said there were no succession or promotion plans within organizations or the Army CSLMO for graduates of these programs. Ironically, there were numerous comments on the lack of effective Army civilian senior leadership, which are skills that are taught at senior-level programs aimed at leadership development. Unquestionably, understanding of the objectives of the SSC and SSCF programs and support for these objectives differ significantly among Army organizations and management.

Recommendations. Interaction with SES members is the primary source of information about the SES corps. It is recommended that these interactions within the SSC and SSCF curriculums be retained and increased as they provide the opportunity for attendees to make informed decisions and help to create a qualified pool of candidates.

Leadership development is critical to building a qualified pool of SES candidates. Effective and accurate information flow from CSLMO and OPM to Army civilian organizations may increase knowledge and support to leadership development programs. Recommend focused effort to share information through enhanced training, mentorship and other communication methods.

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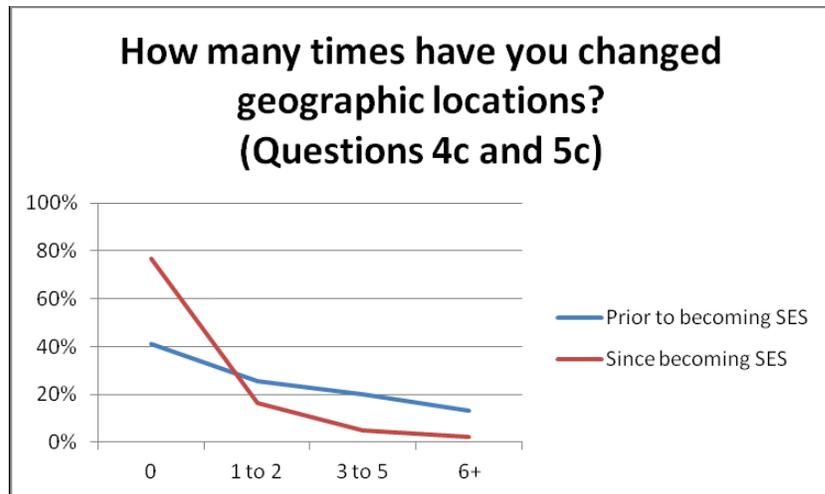
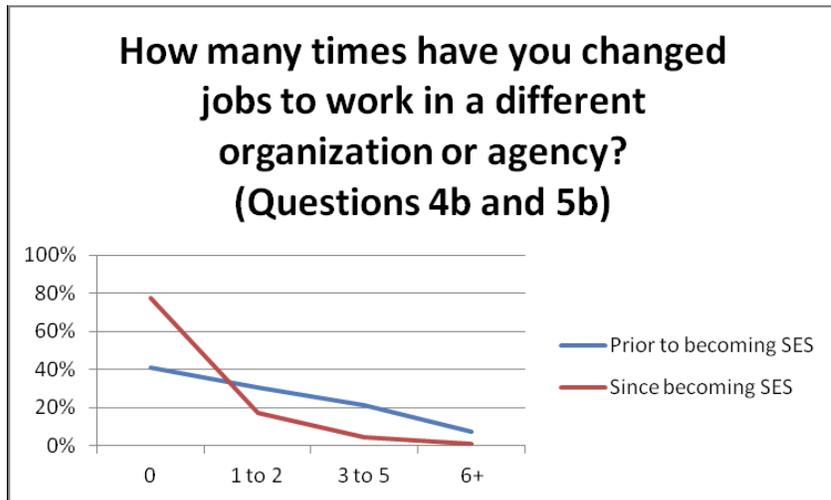
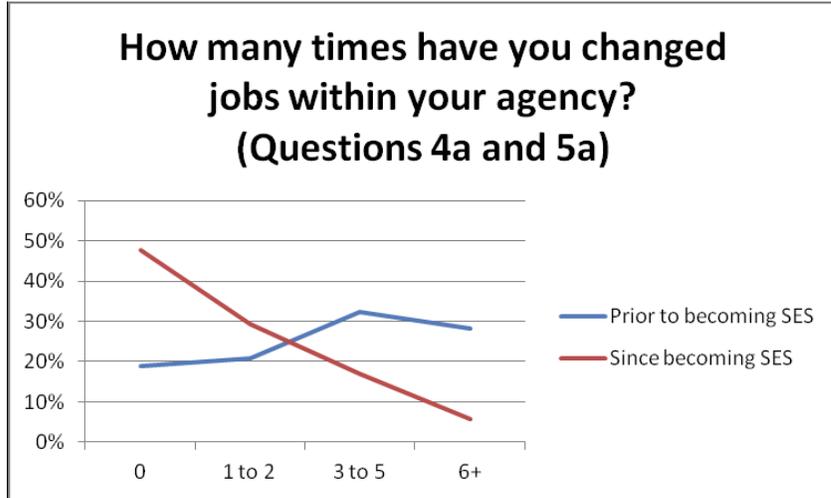
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Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

AEP	Army Enterprise Positions
APG	Aberdeen Proving Ground
ASA	Assistant Secretary of the Army
ASA M&RA ..	Assistant Secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs
BRAC.....	Base Realignment and Closure
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CES	Civilian Education System
CSLMO.....	Civilian Senior Leader Management Office
DA.....	Department of the Army
DAU.....	Defense Acquisition University
DCGS-A.....	Distributed Common Ground System - Army
DoD.....	Department of Defense
ECQ	Executive Core Qualification
ERB.....	Executive Resources Board
ESP.....	Executive and Senior Professional
GO.....	General Officer
GS	General Schedule
HQ.....	Headquarters
KSA	Knowledge Skills and Abilities
MARSS.....	Medium Altitude Reconnaissance and Surveillance
NH.....	Business Management and Technical Management Professional
OPM.....	Office of Personnel Management
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PD	Position Description
PdM.....	Product Manager
PME	Professional Military Education
QRB	Qualification Review Board
RDEC.....	Research Development and Engineering Center
SA	Secretary of the Army
SEC	Software Engineering Center

SES.....Senior Executive Service
SSCSenior Service College
SSCFSenior Service College Fellowship
TSMB.....Talent Succession Management Board
U.S.C.....United States Code

Appendix A—Results of 2011 OPM SES Survey Mobility Questions



Appendix B—Survey Comments

Concerns that Influence Interested Participants to Pursue the SES

Work-life balance

As difficult as it is to make an appointment with the SESs that I work for, I can't imagine they spend much time at home. That would be very frustrating for me, and I would need to consider that heavily before accepting any assignment.

The pay decrease while putting my children through college is a close second place to work/life balance.

For myself—and senior GS-15s in general—promotion to the SES entitles a fairly significant cut in pay and a fairly substantial increase in travel and time away from the family.

Lack of “right people” network

Need a mentor for SES

I would like to apply for an SES program. Need a Mentor. I have a lot of experience (Military, Gov't contractor, and now NH-04/GS-15). Was a Division Chief in CECOM SEC and Deputy to PdM DCGS-A and now a Deputy PdM MARSS.

Mobility

Already made to BRAC for the Army, family most likely not willing to do it again.

Not sure I want to move my family around and that seems to be what is required to be an SES.

Politics

I have noticed that some people do not like you to move ahead of them.

I worked in OSD for 11 years, operating at a very senior level and directing activities at SES/GO levels on behalf of my SES first-line supervisor and my political appointee second line supervisor. When I transferred back into the Army, it appears that experience counts for naught in the Army's perspective. As OSD does not require training for the GS-15s, I did not take any of the training (CES, etc.) that the Army requires for advancement. There should be a mechanism for my experience to count. SES is very political and unless you are circulating in the correct crowd, you will not be considered.

It is not what you know or what you can do; it is about who likes you.

If there was a choice of lack of “access” to applicable training, that would be a better choice. The training is available however if your supervisor/manager is shortsighted and not interested in helping you get into the training classes/programs you are banging your head against the wall. I say shortsighted because the individual is not doing justice to Department of the Army or Federal Government.

Big concern is that the selection process for most if not ALL jobs in DoD go through a word

search and are biased based upon false Position Descriptions that leadership rarely update. So one may have great KSAs that are nullified by artificial or meaningless PDs because most government workers worth anything do MUCH more and have MUCH more experience than is reflected in their official PD ... make sense? Also, most GS-15 and SES positions are PRE-selected, regardless of the fantasy of advertisement or open competition.

Lack of applicable training

Lack of support, coaching, mentoring, etc., from within my organization.

My organization does not support participation in the SSCF. Leadership has told us that if we attend the school, it is a requirement to leave our organization. Therefore the return on investment to this specific group is non-existent. As an experienced GS-15 (and female), I believe I am fully qualified and have a lot to offer the Army as I enter my final decade of service.

Not enough information about the SES program

Seriously—information about “how-to” get into an SES track simply isn’t available.

Does not seem to be any reliable source for information on how to apply correctly and what training needed to build up to SES.

It is difficult to pursue the SES application process, because all other positions in the Government. (GS-15 and below) follow the standard application process. For SES, there are board selections and stages to the application process which are not self-evident.

Lack of Experience

Lack of experience is more “Lack of opportunity” to vary career assignments to build broader base of experience.

Lack of correct education. Working under waiver, over the past 2 years, I have held a Branch position and a Division Chief position while supporting my organization through MS C and FDD decisions. Additionally, as PSM for my organization, all readiness and sustainment are under my direct supervision. Time has not been on my side to fulfill my obligation. I have secured a branch chief to backfill my old position. My intent is to finish my degree and seek acceptance to Senior Service College.

It seems in today’s environment, SES advancements have an emphasis on breadth of career. This translates into how times you moved around in government. I have not moved around, but chose to grow in my organization.

Time Commitment

I understand the time commitment from my mentor’s feedback and my firsthand experience of SES work demands and responsibilities at AMCHQ.

Time commitment. I barely have enough time now to meet the responsibilities I have now in my current position. I am currently trying to become ACQ Level III and am having difficulty finding

the time for that training. I am in graduate school at ISU and had to put that on hold (two semesters now) to get meet my ACQ training responsibilities and duty responsibilities.

Competition

The number of “DAC” slots available for DoD SSC is very limited. The DAU SSC slots are only available to those GS14/15s that are located at Huntsville, Warren, or APG. For all others, Commands will not pay for TDY expenses and have to compete for the DoD SSCs slots.

Lack of military experience may put me at a disadvantage.

Not enough pay

SES’s are undercompensated compared to commercial positions of equivalent responsibility, at least in acquisition and engineering.

Other

Cumbersome and long application, i.e., ECQs, too time-consuming to prepare application
No central management of civilian talent by the Army G1.

The amount of work required to submit for the position(s).

Cumbersome and long application—i.e., ECQs.

Opportunities to prepare core competencies, lack of veteran’s preference; no central management of civilian talent by the Army G1; available time to prepare application package; demanding specific technical skills and knowledge over leadership.

Selection Process Length of Time

Concerns of Participants Who Are Undecided About Pursuing the SES

Work-Life Balance

I have several friends that are in the SES community and to see how little control they have over their schedule is concerning to me. I have a child in high school and watching the family life of those SES friends with their children is at time disturbing as they’re constantly pulled away for travel or some other meeting/function they are required to attend. For this reason, I won’t consider the SES until he graduates.

I have a 5-month-old baby and am just really starting my family, so family is my No. 1 priority right now.

I had the desire a few years ago. I applied a couple of times and never received feedback. Since then I have settled into a DB-04 with supervisory differential and figured the extra stress and impact on work/life balance is probably not worth the small increase in pay I would receive at the SES level.

Lack of “Right People” Network

I don't network well. And I don't see many senior Army “leaders.” Most of them are managers who have never been called on to exhibit, or felt the passion to exhibit, leadership. At ICAF, they told me my scores were similar to those of officers who typically retired at LTGs. But that was in 1997, so I'm obviously an underachiever.

Having been matrixed out of the RDEC to PM shop's for my career hasn't helped with the right network.

Politics

I can't be thinking about the responsibilities of higher echelons, when the unit I am responsible and accountable for is under mission identification distress. I believe it's my responsibility to first address unit mission definition and expectations. Currently, based on work conditions, I am more concerned with assuring that unit core services and responsibilities remain in place where required and that if necessary, they are reshaped or enhanced based on current mission developments. I believe that part of the SES program should not only exist to promote employee career development to higher echelons, but that in the process, it also ensures to the organization that those that are actively pursuing it, and moving ahead, have in fact assured to the organization that what they leave behind is an improved and stable mission definition at their current level of responsibility and that in fact they don't leave behind a void that would lead to instability or redevelopment of unit mission or expertise. Probably something along these lines ought to be a measurement of acceptance to the SES program that the student is prepared to participate in the SES program by demonstrating through this indicator that he/she is fit to pursue higher levels of accountability and responsibilities. Instead of the current general expectation that all GS-14s and GS-15s are suitable candidates to this program.

There is a tendency to choose people for the higher-level jobs based on who they know instead of what they know. What is the point of gaining one qualification after another if the selection process is not fair?

Not sure that I really have the right support within the organization.

The politics seem to get worse the higher one goes up in an organization. I have no problem with fair competition, but have no way to become the “inside” candidate.

Mobility

Currently, want to stabilize family geographically until all children graduate from high school. Then, husband's DoD/DAC career (first career) takes priority; if circumstances then permit, would possibly pursue SES to finish out my second career.

Right now it may be work-life balance, but I will always have to be concerned with Mobility Agreement due to my husband's DoD/DAC career.

You have to go where Army tells you. Had enough of that in the Army.

I moved around a lot in the army, finally got settled with kids in school and I'm about to pay off my house. Picking up again to move to Fort XYZ doesn't have the appeal it used to.

While both I and my wife (who is also a GS14) have given consideration to becoming SESes, it hasn't motivated us enough move from a location in which we have lived for the past 26 years.

Lack of Information About the SES Program

Require a better assessment of our environment to lead the decision.

There is no obvious or well-known path to groom GS-14s/GS-15s for SES positions. Greater guidance from the Army would help generate interest.

Time Commitment

I have spent most of my career, 25 plus years, working more than the normal 40-hour week. It has taken a toll on my family and myself.

Other

Lack of positions locally.

Many comments especially work life balance, bulls-eye, scapegoat and personal network constraints were significant enough to cause my pause.

SESes seem to have to just sit there and listen. They then have to convince the commander and send a response down the staffed chain of command. Most of their problems seem like funding.

Do not view SES Corps as true professional senior executives.

Unit has been impacted by several reorganizations. It is my belief that hinting that I am ready to move on will convey a poor leadership message that could leave the unit more unstable than when I was assigned to it.

Concerns of Participants Who Are Not Interested in Pursuing the SES

Work-Life Balance

While not knowing much about the SES, it always appeared to me to be a high-pressure job situation requiring much personal sacrifice.

At this point in my career with three teenagers, I do have concern about family. Once the last one is driving, may consider pursuing an SES position but an information session would be nice.

Prioritized raising a family in the years I should have been working in positions of increased responsibility.

I have younger children that require my time at home and with activities.

Given all the questions, the one I selected here (concern for work/life balance) is influenced by almost all of the others I selected in question No. 9.

Politics

You don't seek SES. Someone high the organization raises you up; you apply for the job they have already approved you to get.

Not interested in putting up with the nonsense meetings and the political play—I don't have the patience to be an SES.

SES positions seem to be about “reading the tea leaves” and supporting the latest GO fad.

SES field has become diluted, is no longer considered elite. Performance/merit less important than being the “politically correct” candidate in selection and assessments. Candor/honesty valued less—don't rock the boat/“yes sir” preferred.

Much of the confusion and inefficiency present in government today stems from the incompetence, lack of trust, and control issues that senior leaders bring to jobs in which they have little, if any, relevant experience. Their success is based upon investing their careers in ladder climbing and the box-checking that facilitates their advancement, not upon doing their jobs well. Having seen far more failures of this nature than successes, I made a conscious decision to not play the games and focus instead on doing what I enjoy, being good at what I do, having respect for myself, valuing my peers and subordinates, and accepting the limited career potential that comes with it.

Mobility

I live in the Southwestern U.S. and do not want to relocate away from family to the Eastern U.S., especially the DC area, where most of the SES positions are concentrated.

Would probably have to move to East Coast. Like what I am doing now and location. Have moved and changed jobs many times over career to include OCONUS. Already have a diverse career background and graduate level education.

Need to change job and location.

Lack of Applicable Training

Getting the training. ... Senior Service College.

I don't see the extra salary making up for the extreme effort required to reach SES. I also don't feel that I have what it takes to be effective as a senior leader.

I would assume that the bar to reach SES consideration is very high—right movement in and among organizations, long hours on the job, extensive training.

Even though I may not ever be mentored to be an SES, I would still like to have the training just so I could do a better job.

Lack of Information about the SES

Although I've known of the SES program for nearly 20 years and have been working closely with one for 12, none have discussed the program with me. One CG explained that Senior Service College is an education requirement. He also told me that other than SSC the only other requirement is a resume with endorsements from other GOs and SESes. I'm not sure of the process other than that.

Time Commitment

In my current job, I get in the neighborhood of 150 to 200 e-mails a day + I review numerous written docs. Good, bad, or indifferent, I tend to work 10- to 14-hour (or more) days. If I was an SES, I would feel compelled to read from cover-to-cover every TEMP, SEP, Assessment, etc. that I would be recommending to my GO boss they sign.

Spouse's health does not allow for the time commitment pursuing this type of training would require.

The real concern is rate of return for the extra hours required.

Other

I am an active experimental test pilot and flight test engineer and entering the SES program would take me away from flying. The Department of the Army spent a lot of time and money giving me the training and skill to accomplish my current job. There are only a handful of individuals with this skill set, and I feel my staying in my current position is the best way for me to serve my country.

Placement priority and recognition of SSCF as a MEL equivalent.

Very limited SES billets available at field locations. Unless one wishes to work in DC, very limited potential for selection to SES pool.

I'm not impressed with the leadership, credibility, and competence of those SESes I've known. My experience with SESes: Most are self-serving, lack backbone, lack vision, [are] close-minded, and are bureaucratic. I know it sounds harsh, but that's what I've observed and experienced.

The myth that a General Officer or SES is capable of leading any organization, without regard to their experience with the subject matter of the organization is disproven daily.

Too political, and I have a life outside of work. When are you going to address the issues such as SESs not moving around to different jobs and gaining insights and experience?

Good luck with your research. I hope the assessment of this important program does not exclude the impact it has in other critical functional areas of the organization. Employee career development is an important investment of any organization but it should contribute to improving the stability of the organization's current mission and services, as employees move on under this program.

Mentoring

I have several informal mentors that have encouraged me to pursue SES. However, I do not have buy-in from my immediate supervisor. My personal feeling is that since he was denied pursuing Senior Service School, he passes that same sentiment on to his subordinates. I have discussed/requested several senior leadership courses/training that I feel would provide requisite training and give me a competitive edge; however, all have been denied, i.e. Competitive Development Group/Acquisition Fellow as GS-13, ICAF, War College (resident & nonresident), and Excellence in Government Fellowship. He has not given me a valid reason. It is always something going on that he needs me in the office. At my last performance review, he says, “You know I’m not going to let you go to any of the schools”. He made little comments like that, and also that I’m overeducated. I have not attended any training outside the organization since FY09 (AMSC/CES Advance Course). I feel that anyone that request training that is denied should be given valid reasons as to why not. If the supervisor feels you are not capable, he or she should come out and say that, and offer up reasons/rationale for the opinion. Ultimately it is incumbent on the employee to take responsibility and pursue and excel in opportunities that are visible to supervisors/management/senior leadership etc., to gain their buy-in and support of career aspirations. Those opportunities are slim and few as you climb in grade.

More than one, but yes I have been fairly well impressed by the cadre of SESes I have worked for, for the most part. But one or two have provided a good model and good information toward aspiring to be an SES.

I have had many informal mentors, all of whom have encouraged me to pursue the SES path, including attendance at a Senior Service College.

Helped me understand the path to accomplish career advancement.

Lane Collie mentored some of the AMC Fellows for some time and provided a view into what life was like as an SES. Working at AMC HQ, also allowed me the opportunity to gain a firsthand view of the demands and levels of responsibility associated with being an SES.

No Mentor, but people have encouraged/suggested the path.

Encouraged, but clearly stated it’s something I “have to want”.

Last mentor I had was too early in my career to be talking SES.

My informal mentor was earlier on in my career. Could use one now!

The issue never came up— he said he thought I’d be the youngest SES, but it was never a discussion point.

I had people who work for me suggest I went to SES.

Other than during SSCF, I had no mentor throughout my 30-year career.

I have had random, position or geographically time-limited informal mentoring but no long-term or career-spanning mentor.

While at SSCF, I was assigned a mentor.

I had two SES mentors help me put together my SES package. However, they left federal service and I have not pursued getting a new mentor.

I have not pursued the topic with any of my informal or formal mentors.

My mentor(s) provided information about the SES, they supported whatever I would decide either to pursue SES or not.

Senior Service College

Interaction at the SSC with future leaders within the Army that exhibited the leadership skills and dedication to the Army influenced my decision to pursue a career in the Senior Executive Service.

SSC teaches attendees to place their experience and future vision on strategic thinking and viewing the world through a strategic lens. Many rewarding and critical skills are taught and developed during SSC attendance.

It provided me the opportunity to prepare an SES package.

My intent to pursue an SES influenced my decision to attend an SSC equivalent (SSCF).

Many SESs lamented about the work life balance, the fact that their calendars were not their own, and that their employees made more than they did.

During SSC I interacted with many SES members. Some of them confessed, and from others I could tell, they were required to put in many more hours than they ever expected.

I was still on the “fence” when I went to SSC. When the decision time came, I decided that I would give up too much (from a family perspective) to accept a job away from them.

I was on the fence, leaning toward not pursuing SES prior to SSC. Information received during SSC confirmed SES is not for me.

General Comments

By “politics” I do not mean the politics that may be involved to enter training or actually land a position. I mean the politics involved once you are actually in the job. Too often, I do not see SES members making real, hard decisions. It seems like they are parrots repeating what their higher-ups have deemed appropriate. It just does not seem like a real “leadership” position. I would say that about anything at the O-6 level and above.

The government is not set up for personnel who exceed the requirement. I have only a few years in the government, but have had a distinguished career in this field as a contractor to include selection as employee of the year out of 80,000 people for my initiative. The government does not have venues to take this into consideration.

In my opinion, a lot of talented individuals leave government service without reaching their highest potential, due to lack of good leadership and a formal mentorship program that recognizes and encourages subordinates to take on challenges and pursue opportunities for greater responsibility. We don't formally assess and identify strengths/weaknesses of our employees, nurture and guide those that want to pursue greater responsibility in a meaningful way. If we used tools like Gallop's Strength Finder or some other instrument to baseline employees, it would provide a basis for guidance and direction toward accomplishing personal goals, establishing a pool of highly qualified personnel within the workforce to transition into SES positions.

A lot of unknowns about SES, how to apply what expectations are and how you would go about applying.

I applaud your effort toward making future SESes more competent and effective. However, I find it unusual that a survey request would be sent to the workforce and only to have senior management declare that taking the survey is MANDATORY. This will no doubt confound your results.

I would like to attend a senior service college (a War College preferred). I was told by manager that is where they "get rid of" civilians they want out of the organization and has no bearing on promotions and that they did not want to risk me being gone that long

I feel more directly productive as Senior Engineer and Scientist, never was a fan of politics; not my personality.

I would not avoid SES if requested to consider it. Otherwise, I will most likely retire in 18 months and seek another job.

The perception is to get an SES position you have to be in the right network of people; it's not what you know it's who you know.

With regard to mentoring, I never had a formal mentor. However it is fair to say that I've received a great deal of mentoring and learned much from the senior GS15 & SES leaders I've worked for and interacted with over the years.

I would strongly like to pursue a path to SES, but I do not have an SES mentor who can coach me through the process. Looking for a Mentor. Thanks!

I have had several senior-level managers encourage me to apply for SES. However, I have watched members of the SES Corps, their requirements, and their ability to interact with the

workforce. Many times the politics and power get in the way of their decision—so I have chosen to retire in the next few years as a GS-15, where I can make a greater impact to the workforce.

It would be extremely advantageous to retain a mentor in one's pursuit of an SES position. The reason is all of the politics and inside data which are really mandatory for one pursuing this position. A lot of people don't even know where to start and don't have enough time to pursue if they are a productive worker in their daily routine. If I were younger and had someone take interest in my career and at least get me started, I would have definitely pursue a SES career path. Thanks.

I have personally witnessed the lives of several SES members. It's not worth it. I do just as much for the soldier during my daily duties as I could as an SES. In fact, I think I do more. The politics is nasty and I have seen the requirements of that level turn good, caring, open-minded, and talented people into harbingers of paranoia and scavengers of resources. They spend at least half of their time with Congressional Inquiries, budget infighting, and trips to the Pentagon or the Hill to justify everything ad nauseam. One poorly written and extremely inaccurate article in the NYT paper and 3 months in the life of an SES are gone simply to address it through his chain. And what does that do for our soldiers? Nothing. No, thanks. I've got all the medals and accolades I need.. I'll spend the last 15 years of my career developing those that aspire to replace me in the senior management of a very technical organization.

The Army seems to have many good programs designed around building leaders for the SES.

Work-Life balance is a touchy issue and relative to a person's priorities. Some people don't think twice about working 60 to 80 hours per week and being TDY all the time. I personally think they don't have much of a personal/family life, and work is all that matters to them. Some SES members are actually insecure in this way and feel they are making up for their shortfalls by being an SES. There also are others who don't feel they should ever have to work more than 8 hours per day and can't figure out why they haven't been promoted to SES. They just don't realize the dedication required to succeed. I personally am fully aware of the dedication required to become an SES. That is why I have not gone that route. I realize I probably won't be a successful SES due to the workload requirements. If I didn't work the necessary hours, I know I wouldn't be successful and my bosses will be disappointed. On the other hand, if I did go the SES route and I see how much time I am spending at work, I won't be happy and will eventually want to quit. I simply choose to be happy as a NH-IV and being able to go home at a reasonable time and attending all of my family activities. It's all about your priorities. Some people's priorities in life are screwed up and I'm not in a position fix anyone else. Just me.

Most SES members I have encountered are impressive and have my respect. However, it seems that they sacrifice family time for the demands of their job.

Good luck with your survey. With most of the SES positions on the East Coast, it is difficult for those elsewhere in CONUS to be seriously considered for SES positions.

I would be interested in the SES if there were more information available about positions, placement, rotational requirements, overseas opportunities, and pay differences. Everything I know

I researched on my own effort and time. The distribution of information on the program seems to be focused at the National Capital Region, which is a shame.

Expectation of SES is to dedicate 24-7 commitment which is more than I am willing to sacrifice — time is your most valuable asset.

If I had came into Civil Service in my early 20s vice going into the military, I would probably have been interested in going to a SSC and competing for an SES position in my 40s. As a retired military officer, that did not fit my post-military/family goal of settling down in one place.

At this time in my life with family and young kids, I don't think I would be interested.

No SES positions near where I live.

I am looking to attend ICAF next CY. I am currently a GS14. However, I am noticing that to get to GS15 is almost a political game of who you know. Nevertheless, my goal is to become and SES within the next 4 years. I am level 3 certified in Acquisition in both Program Management and Life-Cycle Logistics, and working on my Program Management Professional certification. I am available if you would like more info for your project or want to mentor someone.

I applied for SSC last year and did not get in. I received the recommendation to gain more experience, "tenure in place." I will be applying again this next cycle.

I have applied to Senior Service College and not made it past the selection board. In addition the training requirements under CES limit a person's eligibility to attend Senior leadership schools. The first three CES schools should be waived for personnel that have been on active duty and 10 years of Service, and the grade of 14/15.

Good luck. These survey efforts seldom have much effect. See a recent Atlantic article on the abysmal quality of Army military leadership. The Army civilians are their junior partners.

I feel that SES was an elite ranking that only the select few made it into. I am satisfied with the level I have reached in my career in the Acquisition Logistics field. I participated in the CLDP at CECOM, which was a very rewarding program for my career. Becoming an SES was never on my radar or goal. This year I have 35 years of service.

In my opinion, SES jobs aren't worth it, the money isn't that much more and in order to attain that level one must play the politics game and the job determines how you live your life.

I feel that I am very qualified to be an SES but the work-life balance is not worth the minimal jump in salary. I would be motivated to apply for an SES position IF the compensation was there as it is in private industry.

My current organization does not have a program to develop leaders. There is little internal upward mobility and as such, little professional development beyond Acquisition Certification and

Continuous Learning Points. Without this focus on individual development, quality people must leave the organization to advance and they are not challenged to plan a career path toward SES.

I believe, rightly or wrongly, that people who pursue the SES level are overachievers with a will to power. I don't believe they have a true interest in making positive changes ... because I've never seen any positive change come from any SES.

When I look at the number of misfits and malcontents that have been selected from my organization to go to Senior Service Colleges, it gives the impression that preparation for the Senior Executive Service is not a reward for our highest-caliber employees or an investment in the organization's future, but a nonconfrontational mechanism to make our problems someone else's. For those high performers we would expect to advance and take on greater responsibilities after Senior Service Colleges, we have seen little benefit or career impact from the program. Either way, it's a high-cost, low-yield effort.

My work/life balance strongly supports me not moving out of the local area where all our children and grandchildren live.

I have had a very rewarding career with significant responsibilities. Will be retiring within the next 18 months.

My organization has not consistently support personal professional development at this level. Three years ago, my application was supported and endorsed by our command. For the past 2 years, they have not supported any candidate. Our organization also has an unofficial vetting of candidates at lower level. This is the gate that I have not gotten through for the past 2 years. I believe my organization's command element does not believe there is a good return on investment for the organization.

I hear the SES is shrinking? That knowledge also affects my decision to pursue a "shrinking" career field. Good luck with your course.

Completed Excellence in Government Fellowship program—absolutely no post-course utilization. Organizations talk about succession planning but do not follow through.

I've add brief glimpses into the life of an SES. I still wonder what they do and how success is measured for them. Good luck with your studies.

SES jobs are decreasing in numbers. There is something to be said for being happy and being very good at the position that you're in, instead of always wanting more.

Would be interested but understand the commitment and dedication. Maybe too much at this point as we reduce manpower and most have to do more.

I would like to see ATEC/DA take more interest in the younger senior leaders to mentor us so that we will be prepared if offered the opportunity to go this direction.

In my experience and view, and I can only speak to Army, accession to higher levels of leadership depends more on personalities, politics, and "good old boys' network" than capability and adherence to Army values. The Army would do well to support a mentor program for employees that integrate training for those who have long-range goals to assess to SES through exchange between agencies. I found an SES mentor on my own and he was supportive and provided good insight. An organization that supports career growth in terms of metrics may be simply meeting metrics—this does mean an agency or organization is promoting career growth and accession to higher levels of leadership. They just look good on paper. The SES does not appear to be geared to attracting career level employees, but rather looks all too often to retired military officers or political connections for filling positions. It appears that being a retired officer provides more credence to ability than actual ability. Two general comments: Leaders and managers need to “really” be graded on their ability to grow organizations and people; meeting metrics is not a good descriptor that leaders and managers are doing their jobs. Agencies that want to generate a desire in the SES, at least in the DoD arena, need to recognize, not just in words but in action, that civilians have dedicated careers to the service of our country just as our military have, and promotions should be reflective of actual performance.

I think the SES is foreign to most people at the “Installation” level. They just want good-paying, satisfying jobs. SES seems to be more visible and desirable to those within the Beltway or at higher-level commands.

After spending my last 4 years on the Army and Joint Staff, I realized I can do more for the warfighter in my current position than anything I could do in a big desk in the Pentagon. My mission, once I was no longer a warfighter, is and will always be to support them in the best way I can.

When I think about the SESes I’ve been exposed to, why on earth would I want to become one? Total politics; no integrity; self-serving.

I’ve essentially worked in the same organization my entire career (BRL then ARL) so I’ve learned through experience (technical and political) and can’t point to any one mentor.

Too much crap to put up with in SES world.

I have been considering a Senior Service college, but I’m waiting until my youngest graduates high school.

Overall, it has been my experience that the Army Senior Talent Management Office and SES program lack any real presence in the field. Resultantly, SES recruitment seems to become a circular and rather closed-network affair.

I aspired to be an SES for many years because I had a very energetic supervisor and mentor who encouraged me (from my earliest years in federal service) to take leadership training, pursue development assignments, and attend SSC. I believe this is the right model for supervisors. Only a select few individuals will ever be SES members. But like any coach, you want to train your employees to ensure they are postured for SES positions. When anyone asked if I wanted to be an

SES, I always said “yes.” Inside, I really wasn’t sure but I knew that by saying “no,” it might stifle my opportunities and the way others looked at me. It wasn’t until I really took an introspective look at myself that I was willing and able to tell others that I did NOT want to pursue an SES position. SES members have a huge burden to have technical competence, business acumen, and truly lead people. But most challenging and taxing seems to be their limited ability to truly influence change. The many layers within the government bureaucracy minimize even a SES’ influence, while many also must report to ever-changing military GOs. Ultimately, I realized that I enjoyed the job I had, felt I had the expertise and leadership skills to effectively contribute to the organization in my current position, and I was HAPPY. I didn’t need an SES position that would take from my family with extensive travel, would burden me with the variety of personnel and political headaches with little more money and not enough authority to truly influence change.

