



RESEARCH SUMMARY

Accession Alternatives for Military Physicians

The Department of Defense (DOD) sources active-duty military physicians to support its medical operations through two primary channels: training students in-house at the Uniformed Services University F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine (USU SoM), and sending students to civilian medical programs through the Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP). To help answer questions about the value of these accession methods, IDA researchers examined the effect of military accession of USU SoM students on years served on active duty.

USU SoM students do not pay tuition or fees; instead, they are obligated to serve seven years in the military. Similarly, HPSP participants have a one-year service obligation for each year (typically four) that they receive a scholarship.

By contrast, graduate medical students who enroll in the financial assistance program, another accession source, serve one year for each year they receive assistance, plus an additional year. Physicians who are already fully licensed to practice medicine when they join the military serve for a minimum of two years.

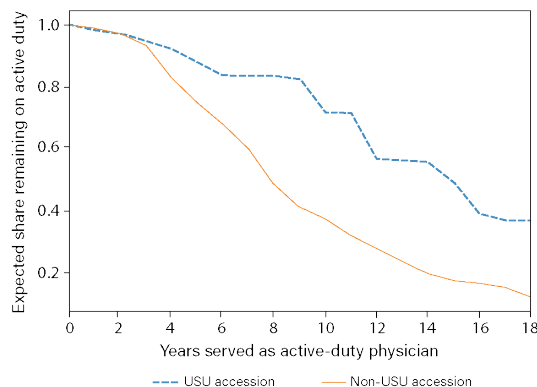
IDA researchers, led by Sarah John, analyzed available data from an 18-year period and found

that, although USU SoM is the most expensive accession source on a cost-per-student basis, graduates serve significantly longer than physicians sourced elsewhere. They served an average of 14.9 years within the 18-year timeframe, whereas physicians from the other accession sources combined served an average of 8.9 years, or six fewer years over the first 18 years of their careers.

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However, the six-year difference likely stems in part from the fact that USU SoM students enter the institution already planning to serve long careers.

Sarah and her team isolated the causal effect of accessing through USU, finding that USU SoM physicians would serve an average of 2.25 fewer years had they been accessed by other means. IDA also recommended avenues for improving the cost-efficiency and value of a USU SoM education and for escalating the mission readiness of its graduates.



Estimated time served by accession source

Although there have been periodic calls to severely reduce funding to USU SoM, IDA’s study contributed to DOD’s and ultimately Congress’ decision to continue funding SoM at constant or higher levels, including an 11% increase in their Operation and Maintenance appropriation from \$188 million in fiscal year 2022 to \$207 million in fiscal year 2023.

For more information, see [IDA Paper P-10815](#).



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University of Kentucky. Sarah’s expertise lies in public and labor economics, the military health care system and Southwest border security.