

## Winning the Retention Wars: The Air Force, Women, Officers, and the Need for Transformation: Fairchild Paper

Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, Laura A. H. DiSilverio



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The Air Force and the national defense mission are the big losers when talented individuals choose to separate early. Although specific separation figures are not available, analysis of the percentage of men and women by commissioned years of service in the Air Force indicates that women separate prior to retirement more frequently than men. The percentages of men and women remain steady through eh first four years, the typical period of post-commissioning commitment. By the fifth year, the number of women drops two percent, and by the following year, the number of women drops an additional four percent, with corresponding increases in the percentage of men. The percentage of women continues to decrease gradually through year twenty, the point of retirement eligibility. Having determined that women separate from the Air Force prior to retirement eligibility more often than men, Lt. Col. Laura DiSilverio wanted to find out why. The only people with the answers were the women who had separated, so the author developed a survey to elicit the reasons for separating. The results of this survey of 1,000 women appear in this paper. The first chapter demonstrates why the Air Force needs women. It makes the demographic case and presents research results showing the value of diversity in general and the value of women leaders in particular. The second chapter presents the survey results, analyzes why women separate from the Air Force, and lists the types of programs that might retain them. The final chapter looks at the feasibility of implementing some programs that might help the Air Force retain more of its talented members.

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