Air Force Equal Opportunity Program

Cognitive Lesson Objective:
- Know selected concepts of the Air Force Equal Opportunity Program.

Cognitive Samples of Behavior:
- Describe the AF Equal Opportunity Program.
- Describe the Air Force and Air National Guard policies on Equal Opportunity.
- State the objective of the Military Equal Opportunity Program.
- Identify the five key services of the AF Equal Opportunity Program.
- State the difference between discrimination and prejudice.
- Identify ways a supervisor can diminish the impact of prejudice and discrimination in the Air Force.

Affective Lesson Objectives:
- Respond positively to the role of the Military Equal Opportunity Program.
- Value the supervisor’s role of diminishing discrimination in the Air Force.

Affective Samples of Behavior:
- Explain the importance of the Military Equal Opportunity Program.
- Assert why discriminatory practices cannot be tolerated in the Air Force.
AIR FORCE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

The Department of Defense and the United States Air Force exist to keep the nation secure and at peace. We must always be guided by the principle that each individual has infinite dignity and worth. Since the military is a reflection of society, many of the social issues and problems faced in the civilian sector are reflected in the military. To confront these issues, the Air Force developed an Equal Opportunity (EO) Program. The instructional guidance (AFI 36-2706) for the program implements Air Force policy on Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) and Civilian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and integrates EO Program management for military and civilian personnel. Each Air Force installation has a base EO office which administers and manages the program. The AF EO program has been developed to foster and support equal opportunity, the AF Core Values and Airman’s Creed, and must be carried out in the day-to-day actions of all personnel. The AF will not tolerate unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment or reprisal against individuals who engage in protected activity. Airmen must actively make workplace professionalism a top priority and take proactive steps to prevent, correct and eliminate unlawful discriminatory behavior. This lesson focuses on the MEO aspects of the program, but will reference some of the overall functions of the EO office.

In the Air National Guard, the EO Program relates specifically to military members in military status. Civilians (including Military Technicians in civil service status) fall under the jurisdiction of the State Equal Employment Office (EEO). This is in part because of different regulations relating to civilians, including additional protected categories that do not apply to military members. However, understand this division is primarily administrative; there is zero tolerance in the Air National Guard for unlawful discrimination or sexual harassment regardless of who manages the complaint process, and the EO and EEO offices work hand-in-hand to educate and create a positive climate for all Air National Guard members regardless of status.

MILITARY EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The primary objective of the Military Equal Opportunity Program is to improve mission effectiveness by providing an environment in which service members are ensured an opportunity to rise to the highest level of responsibility possible in the military profession, dependent only on merit, fitness and capability.

The MEO program is designed to counter contemporary problems in society and the military. The scope of MEO includes informing commanders when they become aware of problems that may adversely affect behavior, health, duty performance, or mission.
Although overall program management falls on the commander and MEO personnel, you, as an officer, have a responsibility to abide by and to enforce the provisions of this critical program. We all must be concerned about people problems because we accomplish the mission through our people. MEO isn’t just an Air Force program. The scope of MEO is Department of Defense (DoD) wide, even if you’re located on an Army post, Marine camp, or Naval station.

**Need for MEO**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States went through a very disturbing time in social history. The military went through the same growing pains as the rest of our country and had to adjust as well.

- Specific racial disturbances at Minot AFB, Travis AFB, and Laredo AFB caused military leaders to realize a larger problem existed than earlier thought.
- During and after the Vietnam War, drug and alcohol abuse grew to a service-wide problem. (The Mental Health Clinic at the base hospital is now responsible for the Substance Abuse Control Program.)
- Supervisors failed to take corrective action or simply ignored these problems, and as a result, supervisors became a problem in and of themselves.

Although the country survived those turbulent times, problems in society still persist. Drug and alcohol abuse has risen, and personal prejudicial attitudes will probably always be with us. These societal problems still exist, and we populate our forces from that same society. We must realize people are our most important resource. The mission is only as good as the people—their welfare is essential to mission accomplishment.

**Key Services (EO in general)**

EO services must include, but are not limited to the following:

- MEO formal/informal complaint processing
- Civilian EO informal complaint processing
- Out and about assessments (process used to gather additional EO/human relations information that may impact installation personnel)
- Human relations education (as specifically requested by commanders)
- Quarterly statistical reporting
Equal Opportunity (EO) and Human Relations Education (HRE) Program

The Air Force EO/HRE program is designed to ensure equal opportunity in support of mission readiness for all Air Force personnel. Two elements essential to maintaining the highest degree of mission readiness are the development and use of our people in the most effective manner possible and the promotion of harmonious relations among them.

When there are shortcomings in either of these areas, our ability to complete the mission efficiently is diminished.

The purpose of the EO/HRE program is to support mission readiness by ensuring individuals are provided an equal opportunity to fully use their abilities and talents toward mission accomplishment and enhance morale through fair and just treatment of personnel. Additionally, the EO/HRE program endeavors to ensure harmonious relations among Airmen by promoting open communication, cross-cultural awareness, understanding, and respect. To reach this goal, the EO/HRE program works to identify human relations factors within the organizational and social climate that detract from harmonious relations and helps commanders prevent, eliminate, or neutralize those factors.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE/EVENTS ON THE AIR FORCE CLIMATE

The military environment is, in general, a reflection of society. Simply stated, our military is made up of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, different races, and different religious convictions. Despite all of the differences, these individuals have two things in common: they’re volunteers, and they take an oath to defend the rights and treatment of each other as well as the rights and treatment of people in the United States of America. Furthermore, these individuals represent a “military model” set apart by a strict set of rules and responsibilities--rules obeyed by each and every member and responsibilities carried out to the best of their abilities.

Despite our success in achieving total integration within the military, the daily turmoil in the society at large affects the social contract among service members and between service members and that society. As future Air Force leaders, your responsibility is to be aware of the conflicts which exist in society at large, between the civilian community and the military, and among the diverse personal feelings and attitudes of service members.

Discrimination and Prejudice

When we discuss the subject of prejudice, the word “discrimination” is frequently used in this context. Discrimination and prejudice are not the same.
**Discrimination** is a type of behavior in which people are treated according to a category rather than individual prejudices. For example, “military people can’t be trusted--they’re always moving from place to place, and they don’t pay their bills so they’re not going to live in my apartment complex.” The law can put an end to such discrimination--to how we act--but combating prejudice is another matter.

**Prejudice** is what we feel or believe, and no amount of laws can change this. It's a judgment formed before due examination of the facts and can be favorable or unfavorable towards a person or set of circumstances.

**Effects of Discrimination and Prejudice in the Air Force**

In the Air Force, disruptions can lead to decreased effectiveness of our fighting forces and endanger our national security. Therefore, discipline is necessary, but it must be backed by just treatment of everyone. Airmen who feel their dignity isn’t respected or feel they can’t progress professionally because of their race, color, origin, ethnic group, religion, or sex will more than likely do marginal work with limited quality or no work at all. Our defense capability is weakened anytime we fail to take full advantage of the talents and abilities of each member of the Air Force team.

**Air Force Policy**

It is the policy of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, and the Air Force, not to condone or tolerate unlawful discrimination, to include sexual harassment, of any kind. This Zero Tolerance policy ensures that once unlawful discrimination or sexual harassment is alleged, immediate and appropriate action will be taken to investigate/resolve the allegations and ensure any proven unlawful behavior stops. Further, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against any Airman, military or civilian, who engages in unlawful discriminatory practices. Air Force EO policy compliance is a function of leadership.

It is against Air Force policy for any Airman, military or civilian, to unlawfully discriminate against, harass, intimidate or threaten another Airman on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, reprisal, genetic information or sexual orientation. The use of disparaging terms with respect to a person’s race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or sexual orientation contributes to a hostile work environment and must not be tolerated.

Unlawful harassment also includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature particularly when submission to such conduct is made directly or indirectly as a term or condition of employment, and/or when submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for an employment decision affecting the person.

Commanders and supervisors should ensure all types of harassment are corrected as soon as possible once they are made aware.
Equal Opportunity is the condition under which the participation, treatment, and potential for success of Air Force members in all facets of Air Force life are governed only by individual merit, fitness, and capability. To sum this up—EO is the right of all Airmen, military or civilian, to equal opportunity in employment, free from discrimination.

Among the mission-degrading factors the EO/HRE program strives to eliminate is discrimination. Discrimination is any action that unlawfully or unjustly results in unequal treatment of persons or groups based on age, color, national origin, race, ethnic group, religion, or sex, and for which distinctions aren’t supported by legal or rational considerations. There are four basic types of discrimination:

- **Disparaging Terms.** Disparaging terms are terms used to degrade or infer negative statements pertaining to age, color, national origin, race, ethnic group, religion, or gender. Such terms include insults, printed material, visual material, signs, symbols, posters, or insignia.

- **Personal Discrimination.** This is action taken by an individual to deprive a person or group of a right because of age, color, national origin, race, ethnic group, religion or sex. Such discrimination can occur overtly, covertly, intentionally, or unintentionally.

- **Sexual Harassment.** We will define this for you in “Sexual Harassment Awareness.” This is a form of sex discrimination.

- **Institutional (Systematic) Discrimination.** This is action by an institution (or system), through its policies and procedures that deprives a person or group of a right contrary to Air Force policy. Such discrimination can occur overtly, covertly, intentionally, or unintentionally.

Your Responsibilities. As a supervisor, you must detect and prevent situations which deny equal opportunity and treatment. Critically examine the following in terms of your own supervisory responsibilities:

- **Review your supervisory role.**
  - Promote an environment free from hostility and intimidation.
  - Encourage social interactions that don’t interfere with mission accomplishment.
  - Take preventive or corrective action when required, or implement directed corrective action.
  - Actively support and enforce the standards.

- **Examine your own behavior.**
- Do you contribute to mission accomplishment?
- Do you offend or hurt others through your comments or actions?
- Are you occasionally misinterpreted as intentionally harmful?
- Do you appear to accept harassing behavior from others?

• Develop an awareness of cues in the environment.
  - Be aware of environmental behaviors that may be offensive to others such as inappropriate jokes, language, comments, clothes, posters, magazines, or social behaviors.

• Identify behaviors which require preventive action.
  - Customary and accepted behavior may be offensive to others and therefore become unacceptable.
  - Take preventive measures before the situation deteriorates.

**Reporting Violations**

Should you or your subordinates want to report an EO violation, your first avenue should be through the normal chain-of-command. Unfortunately, this isn’t always possible because a complaint could be against someone in that chain. Each EO office has an EO Director and Specialist who are trained in dealing with these issues, and Air Force members can go directly to them. For additional guidance, consult AFI 36-2706, *Equal Opportunity Program*.

“The leadership required to set and maintain the standards today must be a leadership of firm but sensitive awareness, one that recognizes the individual’s essential personal identity within a necessarily impersonal hierarchy.”

General David C. Jones  
Former Chief of Staff, USAF  
and former Chairman, JCS

**Bibliography:**
CASE STUDIES

Your ability to handle “people” problems will be one of the keys to your success as an Air Force officer. You may become involved in a multitude of situations which will require a cool head and quick reactions. The problems that are presented during this lesson will give you a chance to express your feelings and listen to the views of others concerning various approaches to recognizing and solving group problems.

The cases which follow all come from actual EO case files, however all names have been changed.
CASE #1

MSgt Jackson is NCOIC of the Quality Control Section. He has a staff of five people: three white males, one black male, and a white female, SSgt Smiley. Captain Gibley is the OIC of Quality Control.

SSgt Smiley’s job performance has declined to subpar standards. Her appearance is poor, and her attitude is anti-Air Force. She’s been late twice in one week. She rides to work with Captain Gibley, and rumor has it that they’re living together. SSgt Smiley’s last EPR was an overall 5, influenced by Captain Gibley.

Airman Jones, a black Airman who works in the same section, was 15 minutes late yesterday. MSgt Jackson calls him in, counsels him, and states that repeated tardiness will warrant an Article 15.

Through casual conversation, Airman Jones finds out that nothing was done when SSgt Smiley was late. He approaches MSgt Jackson and asked why he didn’t give the female an Article 15. MSgt Jackson states that “The captain wouldn’t like his girlfriend getting an Article 15, and it might affect my EPR.”

1. What action should Airman Jones take to identify MSgt Jackson’s actions and statement?

2. Should he go to the OIC, Capt Gibley?

3. Would you consider this discrimination in the execution of supervisory responsibilities? Why?

4. What referral agency(ies) would you recommend to Airman Jones?

NOTES:
CASE #2

TSgt Jones is assigned as the chief Military Training Leader (MTL) in a training school squadron. His assistant is a female, junior staff sergeant. He is new to the career field and told his assistant that no changes would be made until he became familiar with the duties of his position.

He noticed that when any problems arose with the students, his assistant confided directly with the First Sergeant. TSgt Jones confronted the First Sergeant and asked that he be given the courtesy to handle the problems within his section. The First Sergeant was not in TSgt Jones’ chain of command, but it appeared he ran the standardization/evaluation program. The First Sergeant was overheard making prejudicial comments about TSgt Jones. The class that TSgt Jones monitored failed a major standardization evaluation. The commander stated that they had never failed a major evaluation until TSgt Jones arrived. TSgt Jones received an EPR of an overall 4 with a 3 in the human relations area, which he feels is not indicative of his performance.

1. What action should TSgt Jones take to identify the alleged discrimination by the First Sergeant?

2. What action should the commander take when he's informed of the First Sergeant's behavior? What about the EPR?

3. Does the commander have managerial problems within his squadron? How can they be corrected?

NOTES:
CASE #3

A young female Airman is assigned to a transportation unit. She and her NCOIC are the only females assigned to the unit. The unit's work force is comprised of both military and civilian personnel. The vehicle maintenance crews consist of two crewmembers and a driver. Sometimes the crew size is cut to one driver and one crewmember.

One evening the female Airman received her assignment, picked up her tools, and proceeded to the assigned vehicle. When she found out she was teamed with a civilian male driver (Mr. Wright) she refused to go. The on-duty supervisor verbally reprimanded the Airman and told her he was going to recommend disciplinary action be taken by the commander.

When questioned, the female Airman said Mr. Wright had made numerous sexual comments about women in her presence. She was made to feel very uncomfortable with Mr. Wright standing around while she was working in the tool room. One of the guys on her shift pulled her aside and explained that Mr. Wright was making sexual motions behind her back as she leaned over a table. In the past, Mr. Wright had been heard to say, "women are like spare tires, you wear one out and pick up another."

1. What could the commander do to prevent this problem from happening?

2. What do you do about the female Airman?

3. What can you do with Mr. Wright?

4. How do you gain control of the situation?

NOTES:
CASE #4

Airman Hurray is a female aircraft mechanic assigned to the Maintenance Squadron. Airman Hurray is a tech school honor graduate. Upon arrival at the new duty station, the NCOIC assigned Airman Hurray to Tech Order Maintenance. Airman Hurray has been working in this section for 12 months and is now a bit depressed with the routine of filing publications, answering the phone, and making coffee. Airman Hurray has failed the five level end-of-course test twice. The NCOIC offers no assistance or time for OJT. Airman Hurray asked the NCOIC to allow time daily to work on the aircraft as a means of familiarization. The NCOIC became irate and stated that “As long as I’m NCOIC of this shop, no female will ever turn a wrench on one of my planes.” Airman Hurray reports the incident to the OIC, Captain Evans.

1. How is sex discrimination displayed in this incident?
2. What should Captain Evans do to resolve the matter?
3. Would you record this incident in the NCOIC’s Enlisted Performance Report (EPR)?

NOTES:
CASE #5

SSgt Juarez is a new arrival to the base and assigned to the Civil Engineering Squadron. He has a wife and two young children. He finds out from his sponsor that the NCOIC, MSgt Otis rents apartments. SSgt Juarez calls the NCOIC and inquires about possible vacancies. MSgt Otis states that all of his apartments are occupied and he doesn’t anticipate any vacancies for 6 months. SSgt Juarez finds a house through the base housing referral office. MSgt Otis has about twelve apartments and has stated publicly that he will not rent to Blacks or Spanish surname Americans. SSgt Juarez is told by his white coworkers that MSgt Otis raises rent prices to discourage minorities from attempting to lease an apartment.

1. What action should SSgt Juarez take to identify MSgt Otis’ rental practice?

2. Is this racial discrimination?

3. Upon being informed, what action should the commander take?

4. What agency is responsible for investigating complaints of discrimination in off-base housing?

NOTES:
CASE #6

Centerville AFS is located near a small town of approximately 18,000 people. The community has a limited number of recreational business establishments, one of them a recreational club. The mayor is the owner of the club and also your friend. You are the station commander. In the past few months, your Equal Opportunity Specialist has received numerous complaints that minority Airmen are having their requests for membership denied, but at the same time, applications from majority Airmen are being accepted.

1. What action would you take regarding these complaints?

2. How do you reconcile your responsibility to maintain equal opportunity and treatment of all personnel with your responsibility to maintain cordial relations with the civilian community?

NOTES:
CASE #7

SSgt Solomon has asked for the upcoming Monday off work since that day is Yom Kippur. His supervisor, MSgt Garland, tells SSgt Solomon that he'll have to take leave. SSgt Solomon claims he doesn't have to take leave since it's a religious holiday. MSgt Garland's response is: "You know the shop closes for Christmas Day. I don't think it's fair that you get 2 days off without having to take leave. The only way I'll let you go is if you take leave."

1. Does SSgt Solomon have any legal basis for his argument? If so, what?

2. What are possible approaches to reconciling the differences between SSgt Solomon and MSgt Garland?

3. How would you, as the supervisor of both NCOs, handle this situation?

NOTES:
CASE #8

Lt Goodrich goes to her boss, a major, to tell him she’ll be gone for an hour the next day getting her hair cut, since it’s getting long in the back and is close to noncompliance with AFI 36-2903 standards. He tells her she may not take “company time for such frivolous female primping,” and she should reschedule the appointment on off-duty time. Later that day, Lt Goodrich is looking for a sergeant who’s helping her with a project and is told he’s over at the base barber shop getting his hair cut.

1. What do you suppose Lt Goodrich’s reaction might be to this news?

2. Do you agree with the major’s reasoning for denying her time-off request? Why?

3. How would you respond to Lt Goodrich if she came to you for advice on what to do next?

4. Where might Lt Goodrich go if she feels she’s been treated unfairly by the major? What would be the basis of her complaint?

NOTES: