



Will Removing the Bachelor's Degree Requirement Recruit More Junior Leaders?

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JCSP 49 DL

Exercise Solo Flight

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Introduction

What value is there in a university education and why is it required to be an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)? In the late 90s after the Somalia Affair, the Canadian Government, based on a recommendation by the Minister of National Defense (MND), Douglas Young, mandated that all officers, except those commissioned from the ranks, must have a university degree.¹ Given the current state of the CAF with a shortage of junior officers (Officer Cadet – Captain), 6187 positions filled with 6229 positions unfilled², to operate at the tactical level, could there be a better way to recruit and promote young officers without the need for them to have a bachelor's degree? Except of course in certain specialty trades, such as with doctors and lawyers.

There are currently two ways for individuals to join the CAF as an officer. The first method is joining straight from high school with sufficient grades to attend university, where they can immediately attend the Royal Military College (RMC) or a Canadian Civilian University for four years to obtain their bachelor's degree through the Regular Officer Training Program (ROTP) prior to training and employment in their trade. The second method is for those who have already completed university and join at the point where they immediately start training in their trade. They are called the Direct Entry Officers (DEO). ROTP students are subsidized for their education but must serve a period of obligatory service so that the CAF can benefit from their education and training. The calculation for obligatory service is done based on two months of service for every month of education or training.³ Therefore, those who are subsidized for their university education, approximately 4 years with 8 months of study per year, would have to serve 64 months of obligatory service before they could be released without financial penalties. Committing to such a long timeframe without knowing if the military is right for them, may act as a barrier to enrollment.

The ROTP students, during their summer months, are sent to a training establishment to learn the basic military organization, drill, and leadership skills in smaller chunks to fit around the university schedule. DEOs who receive their commission upon enrollment complete all the basic training consecutively and then move directly on to their trades training. The time for a DEO to reach the rank of Captain (Capt) after enrollment is faster than that of the ROTP officers because schooling is removed from the timeline. However, if we could take an 18-year-old straight out of high school, and train them in these basic military skills followed immediately by trades training then they could reach the rank of Capt within less than the four years that it took for them to complete university. The benefit of this to the CAF is that more people would reach Occupational Function Point (OFP) faster.

¹ Wakelam, Colonel R.T. 2003. So What's in a Degree? (Canadian Military Journal)

² MCS Database, Personnel. (DWAN)

³ Government of Canada. DAOD 5049-1, Obligatory Service.

Military service is more than just a profession; it's a distinct form of education that surpasses textbooks and classrooms. Veterans underwent extensive training programs that train a robust work ethic, leadership abilities, and a sense of accountability.⁴ The practical experience they acquire in leadership roles, from platoon commanders to commanding officers, provides a level of practical knowledge that is difficult to replicate in a conventional academic or classroom setting. It is known that leadership is taught and is not an inherent trait.⁵ In the past, there was more focus on leadership training than what junior officers receive today during their military service. If the CAF were to remove the Bachelor's requirement, then it could refocus more time on leadership, ethics and trades training to develop stronger junior leaders in all aspects of their roles.

Basic officer training teaches basic leadership skills, military ethos, problem-solving with critical thinking on how to complete small-party tasks with more than one option, and military culture. In this proposed method, the initial training would have to emphasize the importance of leadership, teach the required skills and identify those who may lack the potential to progress from the tactical to operational levels. If we could shorten the initial training requirements by removing university and focusing on leadership skills, then the CAF could have people reach their OFP sooner and potentially better prepared with the relevant knowledge and skills for a junior officer instead of just a person with a bachelor's degree.

For an officer to be able to assume a position in the trade they joined to fulfill, they must reach the OFP. Currently, this occurs once they have completed their degree and met all of their occupational training requirements. These occupational training lengths vary between trades but can take a Second Lieutenant (2Lt) upwards of a year, sometimes more, to complete. Upon completion, they are then promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (Lt). So, between the four years of university as an Officer Cadet (OCdt), and the trades training as a 2Lt, this could take a member five to six years to reach the rank of Lt. By this time, the CAF has now invested time and money into someone for five years before they are deemed effective in their role. The level of effectiveness at this point is still minimal as the junior officer is still learning their specific role after completing their general training and gaining experience on how the non-commissioned levels of the organization function. By removing the bachelor's requirement, the junior officer could be trained and employed in these roles up to three years earlier, reducing overall cost and time, and meeting the CDS reconstitution directive of having individuals reach OFP in a timelier manner.

This essay will look at the potential to increase officer recruiting and earlier employment for junior officers by removing the education requirement for military officers and how it could enhance diversity, flexibility, and operational effectiveness for the CAF.

⁴ Orion Insights Blog. 2024. *Bachelor's Degree vs. Military Experience - Why Military Experience is a Valuable Asset in the Professional World.*

⁵ Finkelstein, Stan. 2014. *Leadership: An Inherent or an Acquired Skill?*

Historical Context

Before the Second World War, there were a limited number of Canadian officers who attended the British Imperial Staff College for military and staff training.⁶ Then in 1940 when there was a shortage of vacancies at the staff college, the Canadian Army created a short wartime course to educate officers on the function of staff and leaders in an expanding organization.⁷ From then, professional military courses were conducted at RMC and Fort Frontenac. Then in 1966, the Canadian Forces College expanded to Toronto which was a precursor for the unification of the three services into a single entity.⁸ Prior to this, RMC was not an official university, it was a tri-service institution which had two separate two-year colleges that fed into it. One of these colleges was from the Navy and the other from the Air Force on Canada's west coast. RMC did not reach degree-granting status until 1959.⁹ In addition to RMC, there was also the National Defence College of Canada, which was used to discuss national defence issues among military members, public service employees and business leaders.¹⁰ These schools were established to develop officers to have the military professionalism to operate at their required levels. The Canadian Army Staff College (CASC) conducted training to educate junior and mid-level officers in the competencies required for commanding and administering army organizations.¹¹

After the Somalia Affair in 1993, where a Somali was held captive for sneaking into the Canadian compound where he was caught, detained, and eventually beaten to death by two Canadian Airborne soldiers, the investigation found that the Airborne Regiment contained weak junior officers, apathetic senior leadership, rogue soldiers, and also uncovered other incidents of unethical behaviour, both on prior deployments and in Canada.¹² These incidents prompted a large investigation into the military's leadership as many junior and senior officers were found to be involved in these cover-ups.¹³ This investigation led to the MND recommending the requirement for all officers to obtain professional development through a formal degree, which was implemented in 1997.¹⁴

The lack of action taken by the junior officers, those in the ranks, and senior leadership during these incidents was not because of the lack of academic education, but the lack of leadership and ethics training. Since the Somalia Affair and the CAF's requirement to have all officers obtain a university education, there has not been another

⁶ Coombs, Howard G. 2011. The Evolution Of Canadian Forces Staff Education And Operating In A Post-Cold War World. (Canadian Military Journal)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bercuson, David J. 2009. Up From The Ashes: The Re-Professionalization Of The Canadian Forces After The Somalia Affair. (Canadian Military Journal)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Coombs, Howard G. 2011. The Evolution Of Canadian Forces Staff Education And Operating In A Post-Cold War World. (Canadian Military Journal)

¹² Bercuson, David J. 2009. Up From The Ashes: The Re-Professionalization Of The Canadian Forces After The Somalia Affair. (Canadian Military Journal)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Coombs, Howard G. 2011. The Evolution Of Canadian Forces Staff Education And Operating In A Post-Cold War World. (Canadian Military Journal)

incident as severe as what occurred in Somalia, however, there have recently been issues of sexual misconduct that were covered up by officers at all levels up to and including the Chief of Defence Staff. Even with these officers being educated academically, they all still aided in coverups to protect someone who did something wrong, which is still making unethical decisions.

Diversity and Inclusion

Educational requirements are sometimes barriers for individuals. Opening the doors for anyone who wishes to be an officer may allow more diverse individuals into the CAF should they not have to go to university. These barriers can include financial support, available time, location of education, credentials, selection bias, and skills mismatch. The CAF tried to remove some of those barriers for individuals by providing subsidized education, rations and quarters, and a salary to attend university for those enrolled in the regular force. The CAF's preference for officers is to attend RMC, however, where all of the tuition and associated fees are covered, the member must commit to working a minimum of five years after they graduate to avoid a financial penalty for leaving the regular force. This can be considered a huge barrier to today's society as this equates to a commitment of nine years as part of your enrollment via a contractual agreement. If they decide that military life is not for them in the first few years, they will have to repay the government for expenses incurred.

Additionally, the knowledge acquired through formal education may not align with the knowledge required to perform in an officer's trade. For example, an officer in combat arms requires an in-depth understanding of the tactics to be employed in their branch of combat arms as well as those used by other units in the formation. In such cases, a bachelor's degree in Arts, Science, or Engineering will not be directly applicable but are all considered an acceptable pre-requisite. Therefore, it is not worth the investment for someone to study a topic for so long since it does not provide any value in their role as a junior officer. The only difference between applying to be a Non-Commissioned Member (NCM) or an officer is the educational requirement. When phrased like that, it seems like the only use for university is a bias barrier used as a selection tool. Some individuals who choose not to attend university may possess the characteristics to become great leaders with a vision to shape the CAF organization.

If we look to the civilian industry we can find occupations, equivalent to the military, that do not require a bachelor's degree but are trained specifically for the occupation. An example is an Air traffic controller or pilot who undergoes specific training to fulfill the roles. Air traffic controllers with NavCan only require a grade 12 education.¹⁵ Those who choose to be a pilot must meet the university entry requirements, but they will be specifically educated at pilot school where they learn to fly. Military pilots first need a bachelor's degree and then they must still spend months going through pilot school (military lead) to learn to fly. If you remove the educational degree requirement for these two trades, you could still produce quality officers but in a shorter

¹⁵ NAV Canada. 2023. How to Become an Air Traffic Controller or Flight Service Specialist: Essential Tips for Aspiring Candidates.

timeframe at less cost. There is no equivalency in industry to the combat arms trades (Infantry, Artillery, Armoured, and Combat Engineers) as they are unique to the military. These trades have a unique role only in the military where they must learn and understand ground tactics. Since there is no civilian equivalency, there is no need for these officers to learn at a civilian institution, and no need for a bachelor's degree to prepare them to perform these functions. The skills necessary for combat officers should be taught through military institutional training focused on military organizational needs. Thus, reducing overall costs, increasing diversity, and reducing training time for officers to meet OFP.

If you look at some of the wealthiest individuals in the world today who have developed and led large organizations to success, you can see that several of them did not have a bachelor's degree and were still able to succeed to a very high level. For example Bill Gates (Microsoft), Steve Jobs (Apple), Jack Dorsey (Twitter), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Dick Cheney (United States Vice President), and Travis Kalanick (Uber), just to name a few.¹⁶ Some of these successful individuals who dropped out of school early to pursue their career later went on to complete their university degree, but that was after they were established in their company and ready for further growth.

Today, people have more education than they did 25+ years ago. Some individuals who join as NCMs have higher levels of education than their superiors because of today's ability to access information and the multiple avenues of education. Some individuals opt not to pursue formal recognition through the traditional education system because they are more interested in the subject matter rather than following a structured system. This is also contributed to those who can learn on their own, at their own pace without the additional pressures of sitting in a classroom context. Additionally, with the new policy where permanent residents of Canada can now join, some of those who have already obtained their degree from another country and want to join the CAF as an officer, must provide proof that the education is equivalent to one received in Canada to meet the requirements and pay the associated costs with obtaining this recognition. Additionally, other Canadian organizations will assess foreign post-secondary education to verify, creating long wait times with no guarantee of it being granted creating another barrier and delay to recruiting a potential leader.¹⁷

Changing the culture of the CAF to be more diverse by changing the requirements for education may remove barriers increasing the number of individuals who apply. Not everyone may be interested in attending university but still possess the characteristics and skills of a great leader. Reducing the erroneous requirements to become an officer in the CAF would allow for a greater ability to build a larger cadre of junior officers who can perform at these ranks and will allow the system to have a selection of those Capts who show the competencies and capabilities to perform at the higher level. This could also help promote the ability of those who do become senior officers and who have these competencies, to produce better leadership in the CAF.

¹⁶ Ryan, Joal. 2021. 50 Super Successful College Dropouts.

¹⁷ Government of Canada. 2018. *Frequently Asked Questions*.

Operational Flexibility

It is common for some NCMs who want to become an officer, to take their commission from the rank of Sergeant to Lieutenant, where they skip the basic military officer training but must attend the officer trades training. This trade training is necessary as their roles are different between the NCM and the officer ranks. However, the impact of this is that those who Commission From the Ranks (CFR) do not generally make it past the rank of Capt or Major as they do not always have a bachelor's degree. To progress to more senior levels, a Bachelor's and Master's degree are necessary to be competitive which can limit the quality and diversity of individuals selected for higher ranks. Given that CFRs who had previous years of experiential learning in the organization can perform the same role as those junior officers who have that university degree, does prove that those military professional roles can be learned integral to the CAF and not as a result of having a Bachelor's degree to be functional.

There are many benefits of promoting officers based on their demonstrated skills and leadership competencies rather than their educational credentials. The CFR who does not have a bachelor's degree can still perform equal to or above those who have a secondary education, however, they may be limited to the rank they achieve. With the removal of the educational requirement, the ability to increase the number of junior officers would grow. This would allow an ability to observe and select more qualified candidates for specific positions or promotions.

Cost Considerations

The cost of tuition for a candidate to attend RMC is between \$3020 and \$4140 per term, depending on if they are studying arts or engineering, respectively. That equates to \$24 160 and \$33 120 for the eight semesters over the four years, respectively. Assuming there are 50/50 arts and engineering students at the school. This would give an average tuition of \$28,640 for each student. At any point, approximately 1200 students attend RMC each year.¹⁸ This does not include the cost of the trades training. With an average salary of \$2,655 per month¹⁹; between year one and year four, or \$31,860 annually, this equates to \$38.23 million in salary and \$34.68 million in tuition costs. If the education was removed and more focused training was provided, this cost could be reduced by half enabling 600 junior officers to be employed within their trade faster.

During the summer months between years of school and waiting for trades training, some OCdts/2Lts are posted to units to conduct On the Job Training (OJT). Most times, with the lack of experience and trades training, these individuals end up tasked with meaningless jobs like cleaning out old filing cabinets, or organizing small projects that someone else did not have the time to complete, providing no extra value to the unit or the member. This is a waste of resources whereas if the training system was more focused on the institution, then they could be employed in a more productive role.

¹⁸ Government of Canada. 2023. *What is RMC?*

¹⁹ Government of Canada. 2024. CBI 204 - Pay of Officers & Non-Commissioned Members.

Conclusion

In conclusion, removing the requirement for a bachelor's degree could potentially increase recruiting and employ junior officers sooner in their trade while enhancing the diversity, flexibility, and operational effectiveness of the CAF. There is no direct correlation between the academic degree that the junior officer obtains, and the roles and tasks performed by them. Removing the enrolment requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree for officers could allow more individuals to enroll and reduce the overall cost, time and financial commitment of training junior officers. Suppose the CAF wants to improve its future leaders. In that case, there is a need to re-evaluate if the requirements for military officers to have an education for their trade is relevant, as a Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Engineering may not provide any additional value to the individual or the institution.

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