



Highlights of [GAO-03-393](#), a report to Congressional Committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) spends more than \$17 billion annually for military schools that offer nearly 30,000 military training courses to almost 3 million military personnel and DOD civilians. DOD is transforming its forces, including the way it trains, to favor more rapid and responsive deployment. DOD's training transformation strategy emphasizes the use of advanced distributed learning (ADL) programs, such as Internet-based training, as critical to achieving its training and overarching transformation goals. ADL is instruction that does not require an instructor's presence; can use more than one media; and emphasizes the use of reusable content, networks, and learning management systems.

Because of ADL's importance to DOD's transformation efforts and pursuant to GAO's basic legislative responsibilities, we initiated this review to create a baseline document that describes the status of DOD's ADL programs. GAO reviewed these programs to determine (1) DOD's expectations for the programs; (2) the implementation status of those programs; and (3) major challenges affecting program implementation. GAO did not assess the programs' effectiveness at this time because most are in the early stages of implementation.

DOD reviewed a draft of this report and concurred with its contents.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-393.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal P. Curtin, at (757) 552-8100 or e-mail curtinn@gao.gov.

MILITARY TRANSFORMATION

Progress and Challenges for DOD's Advanced Distributed Learning Programs

What GAO Found

DOD has set high expectations for ADL. They expect the programs to provide new learning opportunities and technologies across a wide range of training areas. Ultimately, a key benefit of ADL is expected to be improved readiness through reengineering of training and enhancing service members' skills.

DOD, the services, and Joint Staff are generally in the early stages of implementing their ADL programs and have made progress in several areas. OSD, with its three ADL co-laboratories; the services; and the Joint Staff chose an industry-wide ADL standard for content interoperability and collaboration across the services. They promoted experimentation with new technology and working with private industry. The services' programs generally focus on distribution infrastructure and service-specific content development. According to ADL program officials, OSD, the Joint Staff, and the services have achieved some ADL successes. For example, OSD, in collaboration with the co-laboratories, developed successful course content prototypes; and the Army's Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer course resulted in annual savings while maintaining student performance. However, it is too early to fully assess the extent of each program's effectiveness.

DOD faces cultural, technological, policy and financial challenges that affect the ADL programs' ability to fully achieve the benefits of enhanced learning and performance and of improved readiness. Key challenges are summarized below.

Challenges Affecting DOD's ADL Programs

Challenge	Description
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational culture is resistant to change. Senior leadership commitment varies: preference is for the more traditional schoolhouse-focused learning. Service schoolhouses are reluctant to change since funding and infrastructure are closely tied to numbers of in-resident students.
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bandwidth issues and unresolved network security concerns stifle utility. The development, fielding of, and access to military skills-related content is more difficult and costly than anticipated.
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSD is in the early stage of formulating policy that specifically addresses the use of ADL, consequently some of the military services' and 's training and education regulations are outdated and awaiting a definitive policy.
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget and funding issues for the long-term use of ADL are unresolved. Allocated funds—around \$431 million, less than 1.3 percent of its training budget for fiscal years 1999 through 2002—did not always meet requirements. Projected program needs—\$2.2 billion for fiscal years 2003 through 2007—is about \$600 million more than currently programmed.

Source: DOD.

Note: GAO analysis of OSD, Joint Staff and service data.