Navy Prepping More Prospective Minority Students for NROTC



Senior Chief Damage Controlman Shaun Thompson, a recruit division commander from Officer Training Command, inspects a NJROTC cadet during a personnel inspection at the 2018 NJROTC Nationals Academic, Athletic and Drill Championship at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida. U.S. Navy/Scott A. Thornbloom

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is expanding its program to prepare more minority students for the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps, a senior Navy admiral said, to increase officer accessions of more black officers.

Speaking at a July 2 media roundtable about the Navy's new Task Force One Navy, which was established on June 30 "to address the issues of racism, sexism and other destructive biases and their impact on naval readiness," Vice Adm. John B. Nowell Jr., chief of naval personnel, said the Navy is increasing its efforts to increase the percentages of racial minorities in the officer corps.

Nowell said the Navy has made efforts for years to make the officer ranks more representative of the racial make-up of the U.S. population but has still fallen short.

He said that officers of African-American origin fill 8% to 9% of the officer corps, somewhat less than the 13% of the U.S. population. In the enlisted ranks, the Navy has been much more successful, with African-Americans making up 19% to 20% of the force.

"We want to look like the nation," Nowell said. "If we don't bring enough African-American officers in the front door, then I don't have any hope of the person sitting here talking to

you as CNP being African-American. … How do we mentor them prior to coming in?”

He said the Navy’s past studies of underserved communities that “they just don’t compete as well in getting in the officer corps, for some of the tests that [they] then have to do, for a community like aviation or like the SEALs,” he said.

At the U.S. Naval Academy, the Navy has long had the Naval Academy Preparatory School, “designed for folks who need just a little bit more of a leg up from the academic side, typically based upon the kind of education they received prior to [entering] and then compete for and then do well at the Naval Academy,” he said.

“We didn’t have something like that for ROTC,” Nowell said. “So, three years ago, we started a pilot called our NROTC Prep Program.”

Under the program, universities were asked to provide one year of education, room and board to a student and, if the student succeeds, the Navy would guarantee a four-year NROTC scholarship at the participating university.

“We went from four [students] the first year, to 67 last year, and we’ll have probably between 100 and 150 this coming year,” he said. “The goal is about 200 per year.”

Howell said that “while that certainly will help any underserved community, whether you’re white or African-American, the diversity we see there is one of the ways we’ll try to get more African-American officers into ROTC.”

He also said that sometimes a lack of awareness of opportunities hampers efforts to recruit minorities. “So, we are partnering with the National Naval Officers Association, an African-American affinity group of officers, to help us in those local communities to get that word out,” he said.