

TraCen Cape May Education Update #244

In this Update:

- Congratulations!
- SAT at TraCen Cape May
- CG transcript & degree plans
- Correction
- Question of the week
- Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT)
- Preparing for a SWE
- Income tax deduction/credit & TA
- Thinking about taking college courses?
- 15 April deadline: scholarships for military women
- 24 April deadline: scholarships for dependent children of military personnel
- 14 May deadline: scholarships for military personnel & their dependents
- 15 May deadline: scholarships for dependents of military personnel
- Reservist eligibility for MGIB-SR
- Thinking about getting a captain's license?
- Operator of uninspected passenger vessel course
- DWINTR & Open-book NavRul tests
- Studying for CLEP tests or DSSTs?
- Ethics in America videos on-line for free
- Boost your GPA with CLEP tests, DSSTs, and ECEs
- SN/FN Courses & EPQs
- Deploying?
- National Career Readiness Certificate
- Tuition Assistance & grade reports
- Leaving the Coast Guard?
- Free on-line language lessons
- Miscellaneous

Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
BM2 Jeremy Snyder	TraCen (Security)	DWINTO
BMCM John diCave	CGC Ibis	DWINTR
PS2 Jon LaKose`	TraCen (Gym)	E-PME-6*
YN2 Dawn Evans	TraCen (ISB)	E-PME-6*
HS3 Shoawn Andaluz	TraCen (Health Services)	HS2

* First time taking test

Well done, all of you!!

And if you've just finished a degree program or have any other noteworthy academic achievement to brag about, please let me know so I can recognize you for it.

SAT at TraCen Cape May

The SAT Reasoning test (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/sat.asp>) will be administered at TraCen Cape May starting at 0800 on Friday, 17 April 2009.

If you need to take the SAT to qualify for a Coast Guard program, please let me know ASAP. The first three people to get in touch with me (first come, first served) will get a seat.

ESOs can administer the SAT only between 01 October and 30 June, so please take this into account if you need to have a current SAT score. (ESOs may administer the ACT at any time of the year. You can see a comparison of the SAT and ACT at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/comparison.asp>.)

CG Transcript and Degree Plans

Once the Coast Guard Institute has completed its assessment of your military training and previous education, it will publish your transcript and degree plans on its "Coast Guard Education Center" web site (<http://education.uscg.mil/index.htm>).

At the moment, this site is working but the software that creates your degree plans isn't. So if you log in and find that all your degree plans are blank, relax and check back later. To fix this problem, the Institute is working with the contractor whose software it uses for this purpose.

Also, if you've recently submitted a request to the Coast Guard Institute for an education assessment (form CGI-1561), you may be getting antsy to see your degree plans and unofficial transcript. Due to an unexpectedly large number of requests, the processing time for assessment requests is currently 4 to 5 weeks. You'll receive an e-mail from the Institute when your request has been processed.

Correction

In previous Education Updates, I incorrectly stated that Top-up will not be available under the new GI Bill. Top-up **will** be available if you elect education benefits under the new GI Bill starting on 01 August 2009.

Please accept my apologies for any anxiety my incorrect information may have caused.

Question of the Week

Q: It's been 5 years since I passed my NavRul test, when I take it again is it an open-book test?

A: The first time you take the NavRul test, it's a closed-book test. Once you've passed, however, all subsequent NavRul tests you take are open-book.

There is a requirement that boat coxswains take the NavRul test at least every five years. This has nothing to do with whether the test is an open- or closed-book test.

The DWINTO (the original Deck Watch Officer) test is taken without the book. You have five years after passing it to take the open-book renewal test (DWINTR). If it's been more than five years since you passed the DWINTO or a DWINTR test, it will be a closed-book test.

Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT)

TraCen Cape May can now administer two Defense Language Proficiency Tests at the same time.

Tests are administered on Mondays, starting at 0800 (earlier if that's convenient to examinees). The reason for the early starting time is that the test consists of two parts – Reading and Listening. Three hours are allowed for each part and there's a mandatory break of at least an hour between the two parts.

If you're currently or will soon be assigned to a billet designated as an interpreter or linguist billet and want to take the test, check my calendar to see which dates are not already booked then e-mail me to let me know your preferred date. If you're not sure how to do that, open your Outlook calendar and follow this path:

File > Open > Other User's Folder

Click on "Name" and find my name, then click OK and you'll see my calendar directly beside yours.

Although anyone (including dependents) is welcome to take one or more DLPTs, precedence is given to those who are now in an interpreter or linguist billet or soon will be.

Preparing for a SWE

If you've never taken a servicewide exam before, you may be a bit confused as to just what the exam covers and, maybe, why you have to take one after passing an end-of-course test (EOCT). EOCTs separate those who don't know the knowledge, procedures, policies, etc. for each rating (pay grades E-4 through E-6) from those who do. The purpose of servicewide exams (SWEs) is to rank order enlisted personnel (pay grades E-5 through E-9) for purposes of advancement.

Everyone who takes a SWE is assumed to be qualified for the next higher pay grade in his/her rating. That's why there are so many requirements to fulfill before you can take a SWE. These requirements are spelled out on your PDE.

TraCen Petaluma's web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/TracenPetaluma/TPF/SWE/SWE2-MainPage.asp>) has extensive information on the SWE process. TraCen Cape May's web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/swe.asp#preparing>) has information on preparing for a SWE and tips on how to study and take tests efficiently and effectively.

Income Tax Deduction/Credit & TA

If you used TA to pay for one or more courses in calendar year 2008, you may receive from your school an official-looking statement showing how much you and the Coast Guard paid to your school for tuition (IRS form 1098-T). This is provided in case you're eligible for education-related deductions from and credits to your income tax. Be aware that only money you personally paid to the school can be used to determine if you qualify for one of them. That is, tuition assistance (and GI Bill funds) can't be included, since that money was an education benefit, not part of your earned income.

You can find an overview of these deductions and credits at <http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/taxbenefitsguide.html>. And the IRS publication which goes into depth about them is at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf>.

Thinking About Taking College Courses? Check out College 101

So you're thinking you'd like to start taking college courses, but don't really know where to start. What should you do? First you should go through the brand new Coast Guard Institute on-line presentation, *College 101*.

College 101 is intended to provide essential information to anyone who's just starting on the path to a college certificate or degree. It should be your first step on that path and you should view the whole thing before making an appointment with your ESO to talk about your educational options.

This extremely informative presentation started out in the Marine Corps and was brought to the Coast Guard by Mr. Bob Bothel, now the head of Voluntary Education at the Coast Guard Institute. Ms. Robin King (also at the Institute) designed it, and many IT and other people had a hand in making it available.

You can find *College 101* on the Coast Guard Learning Portal (<http://learning.uscg.mil/>). After you've logged in, follow this path: Course Catalog > Education > College 101.

15 April Deadline: Scholarships for Military Women

The Alliance for National Defense (AND), will award two \$2,500 scholarships to current and future military women in 2009. The deadline for applications is 15 April 2009.

The Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing powerful advocacy and a positive voice for military women. AND encourages and promotes the vital role of military women and men in our nation's defense. AND directors, national council members, and supporters include active duty military personnel and concerned veterans working alongside civilians interested in military issues to provide factual, thoughtful, objective information on military personnel issues to policymakers, legislators, and the public.

Honoring Brigadier General Evelyn P. Foote, USA, Ret., the Foote Scholarship is reserved for a currently serving enlisted woman who is enrolled for at least six credit hours at an accredited college or university. The Sadler Scholarship, named for Captain Georgia Sadler, USN, Ret., is intended for a woman enrolled in her second year in an accredited ROTC program.

Scholarship winners will be chosen from among applicants representing any branch or component of the armed forces based on merit, academic potential, community service and need. Winners will be announced in July 2009.

For more information, go to http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_information.pdf. For an application, go to http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_Application.pdf.

24 April Deadline: Scholarships for Dependent Children of Military Personnel

An organization called Homefront America is offering a total of twenty-five individual \$1,000 scholarships to dependent children of military service members between the ages of 17 and 21 who will be pursuing a postsecondary educational degree at a fully accredited college, university, technical, or vocation institution in the fall of 2009 or spring of 2010.

Applications must be postmarked by Friday, 24 April 2009.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.homefrontamerica.org/oohrahome.htm>.

14 May Deadline: Scholarships for Military Personnel & their Dependents

The Pat Tillman Foundation offers need-based scholarships for military personnel and their dependents to ensure they "have every opportunity to pursue broader educational goals. The Tillman Military Scholarships are intended to cover direct study-related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, and room and board as well as other needs such as child care."

Applications must be postmarked by Thursday, 14 May 2009.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.pattillmanfoundation.org/>.

15 May Deadline: Scholarships for Dependents of Military Personnel

The organization ThanksUSA is offering 500 \$3,000 undergraduate scholarships to spouses and dependent children (up to age 24) of military personnel who have served on active duty for at least 180 days since 11 September 2001, including all those who have been killed or wounded in action.

The application period is now open and will close when 10,000 applications have been received or on 15 May 2009, whichever comes first.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.thanksusa.org/main/scholarships.html>.

Reservist Eligibility for MGIB-SR

There seems to be some confusion about when Reservists become eligible to use the Reserve GI Bill (aka MGIB-SR or chapter 1606). Unlike regulars, Reservists do not sign any document to verify that they want to have the MGIB-SR or to refuse it. They do, however, have to finish their IADT (usually "A" school) before they're eligible to use their benefit. At that time, they have to sign what's called a "Notice of Basic Eligibility (NOBE)" (DD form 2384-1).

To activate their benefit, Reservists submit a copy of their NOBE and VA form 22-1990 ("Application for VA Education Benefits") to the VA Regional Office nearest to their school.

Thinking About Getting a Captain's License?

(courtesy of LTJG Ryan Henebery via Monty Mathis, full-time ESO at Sector St. Petersburg)

If you're considering applying for a merchant marine license of any kind, you'll need to get what's called a transcript of sea service (TOSS). What follows applies only to sea service in the Coast Guard. (Former Navy personnel who wish to obtain a TOSS for their Navy at-sea time will need to contact the Navy.)

The Coast Guard's Pay & Personnel Center (PPC) provides TOSSs. It chronicles the vessels you served aboard during your career. This sea duty may have been on either a sea-pay or non-sea-pay eligible vessels but must have been documented.

To request a TOSS, you or your SPO should contact PPC Customer Service via P&PC's web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hr/psc/ccb/>). You can either submit a trouble-ticket or sending an email to CustomerCare.PSC@uscg.mil. When you do, provide the following information:

- Your full name
- Your employee ID number (or, if you don't have one, your SSN)
- Your approximate period(s) of service
- The desired manner and address to have the TOSS sent to you (e.g., e-mail or Postal Service)

If at all possible, also include a rough list of the vessels you served on and which you think should be included on the TOSS.

Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessel Course

(courtesy of Monty Mathis, full-time ESO at Sector St. Petersburg)

A lot of people want to know if they can use tuition assistance (TA) or the GI Bill to pay for a vessel captain's license course. The general rule for TA is that the course has to be offered by a nationally- or regionally-accredited institution AND must yield transferable credit (i.e., credit you can apply at another accredited school toward a degree program).

As to the GI Bill, it all depends on whether the state in which the course is offered has approved the course for GI Bill funding. For more info about whether a particular course is covered by the GI Bill, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-o.asp#saa>.

There's only one college ESOs have discovered which offers a course like this you can get college credit for (i.e., which is covered by TA). It's offered by Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (<http://www.nwtc.edu/PublicSafety/Default.htm>); scroll down to "Coast Guard Full OUPV". This is a distance-learning course.

DWINTR & Open-Book NavRul Tests

If you're preparing to take either the open-book NavRul or DWINTR test, be aware that the **only** reference material you can use during either test is a corrected-to-date, copy of the *Navigation Rules (International – Inland)* (COMDTINST M16672.2(series)). No highlighting, diagrams, drawings, comments, personalized tabs, indexes, notes, or anything else is allowed. You can find the current corrections to the Nav Rules book by going to <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/> and following this path: Nav Rules > Download > Changes and Typographical Errors.

This is consistent with COMDTINST 16672.5A, which sets policy for deck watch officer testing. Those who created the NavRul course book know that this policy is contrary to what's written in the course book. ***The information in the NavRul course book is incorrect.***

Studying for CLEP Tests or DSSTs?

A new web site is aimed at people who are studying on their own for self-improvement, going more into depth in their college courses, or taking credit-by-exam tests (e.g., CLEP tests, DSSTs, or ECEs). It's called Self-Made Scholar (<http://selfmadescholar.com/b/>) and it includes: links to free courses, a blog on self-education, links to dozens of self-education resources, essays and tips on self-study, and much more.

And you absolutely must check out Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>) – even if you're not studying for a college course or a test of some kind – a “not-for-profit organization with the mission of providing a high quality education to anyone, anywhere.” There you'll find more than 700 10-minute videos covering physics and all levels of math as well as SAT preparation, the current credit, banking, and financial crises.

Ethics in America Videos On-line for Free

If you're preparing for the “Ethics in America” DSST (http://www.getcollegecredit.com/downloads/factsheets/Ethics%20in%20America_20080509.pdf), two excellent series of videos of the same name are available free on-line through Annenberg Media's web site. The “Ethics in America” series is at <http://www.learner.org/resources/series81.html> and “Ethics in America II” videos are at <http://www.learner.org/resources/series207.html>.

Each video is on a timely subject and is about 55-minutes long. They're very thought-provoking and are recommended for those preparing for this test.

Boost Your GPA with CLEP Tests, DSSTs, and ECEs

One of the little-recognized bonuses that comes from taking CLEP tests, DSSTs, and/or ECEs for college credit is they can help you increase your GPA. If you're thinking about applying for graduate school or a professional degree program (e.g., physician, lawyer, MBA) this could be a big help.

Say you've got a degree plan for a 120-credit bachelor's at State U. And suppose State U will accept all credit-by-exam scores as credit toward its undergraduate degrees. Suppose, further, that your degree plan includes ten courses you know you'll do OK on if you take them through the school, but will likely only get a C or, at best, a B. If you're good at studying on your own and can pass the tests which equate to those courses, you should consider taking tests rather than the courses.

Why? Because you either pass these tests or you fail them; no letter grades are given. That means their scores aren't counted by State U when it calculates your GPA. Assuming you do well in all courses you take through the school, and that you probably wouldn't have done so well on the CLEP/DSST/ECE subjects if you'd taken them as State U courses rather than as tests, your GPA will be higher than if it included the grades you would have received if you'd taken those subjects as State U courses.

SN/FN Courses & EPQs Long Gone

There seems to be a persistent belief that E-2s have to complete a seaman (SN) or fireman (FN) course to advance to E-3. ***This is not the case.*** The SN and FN courses old-timers may remember were done away with via ALCOAST 222/00 (dated 23 May 2000).

Similarly, the separate EPQs (formerly practical factors) became obsolete on 30 April 2005 for regulars and on 30 June 2005 for Reservists (via ALCOAST 179/05).

E-2s now must complete only the E-3 E-PME Performance and Knowledge Requirements (which replaced MRN requirements).

For complete information on what E-2s must do to advance to E-3, see the first section of Tab Six ("Enlisted IDP E-2 to E-3 Advancement Checklist") to enclosure (2) to COMDTINST 5357.1A ("Coast Guard Individual Development Plan (IDP)").

Deploying?

If you know you're going to be deploying for some length of time – whether to the Persian Gulf or somewhere here at home – and want to use tuition assistance (TA) to pay for a college course, submit your TA request to your ESO as soon as possible.

The Coast Guard Institute will accept TA requests up to three months before a course begins. But your ESO may be willing to accept them at any time, and then submit them to the Institute as soon as that three-month window opens.

Don't wait until a few days before you're due to sail to submit your TA request. Even if it comes back quickly, if you don't have Internet connectivity you won't be able to download the TA authorization and may not be able to get it to your school by its deadline. The bottom line is: PLAN AHEAD!

National Career Readiness Certificate

ACT – the independent, not-for-profit organization which developed and owns the national college admissions examination of the same name – has recently developed a new tool (called the National Career Readiness Certificate) employers are increasingly asking for when screening applicants and making hiring decisions.

"The Certificate", to quote from ACT's web site, "is designed to complement other traditional credentials, such as a high school diploma, community college degree, or college degree. While these education credentials mark the fulfillment of your classroom learning experiences, The Certificate proves you have the workplace skills needed to succeed at your new job. The Certificate offers individuals, employers, and educators an easily understood and nationally valued credential certifying essential workplace skills."

If you're looking for a way to make your job application stand out from all the others, you might want to consider taking the tests which make up this certificate program. For more information, go to <http://www.act.org/certificate/index.html>.

Tuition Assistance & Grade Reports

If you're using tuition assistance (TA) to take college courses, remember that you **must** provide the grade report for your courses to the Coast Guard Institute within 60 days of the end of the course. If you don't, you'll receive a series of nastygrams from the Navy (which is the Coast Guard's agent for paying TA to schools) demanding reimbursement for the courses you used TA to pay for.

To avoid this, provide a copy of your grade report (with your full name and SSN on it) to your ESO. Your ESO will then submit it (usually via e-mail) to the Institute. If you're unable to put your SSN on it (e.g., if you print it to a PDF file from your computer screen), provide it to your ESO.

If at all possible (so what the Institute sees is legible), print your on-line grade report to a PDF file. If you're not sure how to do this, here's the process.

- (1) Get the grade report on your computer screen.
- (2) Select "File" and "Print" (or press CTRL and P at the same time)
- (3) Select "Adobe PDF"
- (4) Click on "Preferences"
- (5) Click "Layout" tab
- (6) Select "Landscape"

- (7) Click "OK"
- (8) Click on "Print"
- (9) Click "Save" after deciding where you want to save the file
- (10) Attach the PDF document you just created to an e-mail and send it to me.

And if possible, please include in your e-mail the number of the TA authorization which corresponds to the grade report. The TA authorization number is in the upper right corner of your authorization (CGI_____).

Free On-line Language Lessons

If you have a library card for the Cape May County Library system and Internet access, you can use Mango Languages. This is a system similar to Rosetta Stone, which was previously available through the libraries' web site. Through Mango, you can learn Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese. Also available are English for Polish, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese speakers.

To check it out, go to http://www.cape-may.county.lib.nj.us/online_databases.asp#Language and find "Mango Languages" in the menu on the left side of the page under "Authorized Links".

Leaving the Coast Guard?

If you're leaving the Coast Guard within the next twelve months (whether through retirement, resignation, or expiration of your enlistment), you should be making plans for what you'll be doing after you take off your uniform for the last time. Check out the information on my web site related to career transition (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/careertrans.asp>).

You should also request an education assessment from the Coast Guard Institute (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/collegefaq.asp>) to get a transcript of college credit you've acquired through your service in the Coast Guard. If you don't request an assessment before you leave active duty, you can't get one later.

If you're not planning to go to school right away, you'll probably need to find work. Here are two excellent resources for finding a job – or even a second career. Also, Military.com has a very good series of web pages devoted to veterans (<http://www.military.com/Careers/Home/0,13373,,00.htm>).

And don't discount the idea of working in the public sector. Not only are there thousands of jobs in the federal government, identical to private-sector jobs in which you can put your skills, knowledge, and experience to use while maintaining job security unavailable in the private sector (<http://www.fedjobs.gov/>), governmental entities at all levels – state, county, municipality, school district, port district, etc. – provide similar benefits.

A Word to the Wise

Any time you're using any educational services (whether through the Coast Guard, the VA, a private organization, or a college/university), be smart and save ALL correspondence.

This may seem an unnecessary waste of time. But if you have a problem with tuition assistance or GI Bill payments or grades, having a paper trail (or e-mail trail) could save you a lot of scrambling to re-create the chain of events which led to the problem.

And if you're using tuition assistance, save a copy of each TA authorization you receive – either electronically or in hard-copy format. You'd be surprised how many people need a copy long after they use TA to pay for a course.

ACCC's Library Open for Studying

One more thing: the new campus's classrooms, labs, and library are all state-of-the-art. Even if you're not ready to register for classes right away, you should take the opportunity to visit the campus and look around. The Director of Academic and Student Services has extended a personal invitation to anyone who'd like to use the library to study, for research, or for pleasure reading. It's very quiet, well-lit, and has very comfortable furniture.