

# TraCen Cape May Education Update #245

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## Congratulations!!

<b>Name</b>	<b>Work Site</b>	<b>Test</b>
CDR Patrick McMahon	TraCen (Training)	DWINTR

Well done, CDR McMahon!!

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.

## Servicewide Exams

TraCen Cape May has received the May servicewide exams (SWEs) for personnel in the Cape May area.

If you haven't received an e-mail invitation from me I haven't received an exam with your name on it. If I haven't received an exam for you and you were expecting to take the exam, you'll need to check with your SPO to find out why you didn't get an exam.

The exams will be held in the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Building according to the following schedule:

- Tuesday, 05MAY (morning) – tests for advancement to E-5
- Tuesday, 05MAY (afternoon) – tests for advancement to E-7
- Thursday, 07MAY (morning) – tests for advancement to E-6
- Thursday, 07MAY (afternoon) – tests for advancement to E-8 and E-9

Morning sessions will start promptly at 0800; no one will be admitted after 0750  
Afternoon sessions will start promptly at noon; no one will be admitted after 1150

Your e-mail invitation will include all particulars as to attire, what you can and can't bring, etc.

## Direct Commission Engineer (DCE) Program

If you're interested in becoming a Coast Guard officer working in an engineering field, you might be interested in the Direct Commission Engineer (DCE) program. You can find an overview of the program at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/e-oprograms1.asp#dce> and more details at <http://www.gocoastguard.com/find-your-fit/officer-opportunities/programs/direct-commission-programs#engineer>.

Be aware that although the Coast Guard recruiting web site states that applicants need a bachelor's degree to qualify, the Recruiting Manual still states an associate's degree is required. An e-mail from Coast Guard Recruiting Command (CGRC) tells us that the bachelor's degree requirement has been approved, but because the revision to the Recruiting Manual "has not been signed and printed yet, we are still accepting Associate's degrees or higher. We cannot enforce the new standard until it is in writing."

Anyone who's thinking about applying for the DCE program and only has an associate's degree should submit his/her application ASAP. Again quoting CGRC, "Whenever the new Recruiting Manual is released, the new standards will be enforced!"

## Attention Coastline Students!

Coastline Community College (<http://military.coastline.edu>) will be changing its requirements for some degrees this summer. If you want to lock in the courses you're required to take for your chosen major, you'll need to apply for an official SOC evaluation and agreement by 09 June 2009, if you haven't already done so.

If you have an official SOC agreements before 09 June, you won't have to take additional courses, if any the course requirements for your major change. **Getting a SOC agreement could save you from having to take courses you didn't plan to take.**

To get an official evaluation, go to <http://military.coastline.edu> and click on the applicable Coast Guard link. Then, scroll down to "SOC Evaluation Request" and follow directions there. You'll find information on how to get your Coast Guard Institute transcript sent directly to Coastline's Military office. If you have college credit from other institutions, you'll have to order official transcripts to be sent directly to Coastline by those colleges/universities. **DON'T DELAY!!**

## ACCC Summer and Fall Course Guides

If you're taking courses at Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) and want to get a jump on things by submitting TA requests early, the course guides for both summer and fall courses are now available.

You can pick them up

- just inside the outer doors at the Exchange,
- in the Lab waiting area in the Health Services building, and
- just outside the Education & Career Development Center in the Command & Mission Support building.

I try to keep the display racks full, but if you don't find the course guide you're looking for in one of them please let me know so I can restock it. (I store extras at the Education & Career Development Center.)

## 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.

Top-up is *not* the same as Buy-up. For info on both, please go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-30.asp#buyup>. If you have the new GI Bill, you will not be able to use Buy-up as the law currently stands.

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

## Question of the Week

**Q:** What information do I have to provide the interview board members for an OCS interview?

**A:** Contrary to popular belief, you do **not** provide interview board members with the complete contents of your application folder. Under the heading "The Responsibilities of the Interview Board Members", guidelines from the Coast Guard Recruiting Command state that "... interview board members receive ONLY the same items in an application package that a selection panel member receives. This excludes medical, legal, or security checks and other qualification information. Interview board members should conduct their assessments from the information contained in the applicant's narrative, transcripts, and letters of reference and/or command endorsement, as well as from the information obtained from the applicant during the interview." (emphasis in original)

So what, exactly, should you provide? Here's the list:

- résumé,
- narrative memo,
- command endorsement,
- letters of recommendation, and
- transcripts.

You can find more information about the interview on my web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/interview.asp>).

## Study Strategies

(from "Keys to College Success" by BarCharts, Inc.)

- **Attend** as many academic support activities and workshops as possible. They're usually free and always helpful.
- **Study!** This may be a case of stating the obvious but you would be surprised how many students don't bother.
- **Studying with soothing music** in the background (contrary to popular opinion) can enhance your concentration.
- Floral scented candles and mixed floral potpourri facilitate learning (strange but true).
- Studying in a soft chair or on a cushy bed may not be the best strategy.
  - Active learning may require walking around the room or sitting on the edge of a chair.
  - Wake up your body – wake up your mind.
- **Study space:** Your regular study space should be as quiet and comfortable as possible, and large enough to have easy access to everything you need for studying (text and reference books, paper, pencils, rulers, etc.)
  - Libraries, study lounges, or private rooms are ideal.
  - Get rid of clutter. Clear the desk or table of all materials not related to the current project.
- **Tutoring is not a negative thing!** Get help early, before the academic damage is irreversible. Many schools offer free tutoring in a variety of subjects.
- Study groups are great, but in general studying alone is more effective.

## ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores

ACT (the organization with the college admission test of the same name), through working with colleges and universities to develop placement guidelines, has established scores which reflect student success in college courses. (Success, in this case, being defined as “a high probability that a student will earn a grade of C or better in courses most commonly taken by first-year students.)

The benchmark scores are:

18 for English  
22 for Math  
21 for Reading and  
24 for Science

Thus, if you take the ACT and receive these or higher scores, it's likely you'll earn a “C” or better in courses related to these subjects.

Unlike the SAT, you can take an ACT through your ESO at any time of the year. Starting in June, TraCen Cape May will offer four ACT tests on the second Thursday of every other month (February, April, June, August, October, and December). For more information on the ACT (and a comparison with the SAT), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp>.

## 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.

## DWINTR & Open-Book NavRul Tests

If you're preparing to take either the DWINTR or open-book NavRul 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.***

## 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 for 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.

## 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.

## 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/oohrahhome.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.patillmanfoundation.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>.

## 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](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.

## 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!

## 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\_\_\_\_\_).

## 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.