

TraCen Cape May Education Update #383

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ESO on Leave; Education Center Closed

TraCen Cape May's ESO will be on leave and the Education Center will be closed **from Monday, 23 July through Monday, 30 July** (open again on Tuesday, 31 July). Please make your testing plans and submit your TA requests accordingly.

Question of the Week – Is TA available to civilian Coast Guard employees?

Q: Is tuition assistance available to civilian Coast Guard employees and, if so, what is the starting point?

A: The short answer is, "Yes!" TA is available to anyone receiving a Coast Guard pay check. I think you'll find answers to all your questions about it (from how much it pays to how to apply for it to what your responsibilities are when using TA) at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp>. Also check out <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/edbenefits.pdf>.

Be aware, however, that changes are likely in store – changes which will likely reduce the amount the Coast Guard pays for TA overall. These changes, ESOs are led to believe, will take place on 01OCT2012. We have zero idea what these changes will entail or who they will affect, however. So don't make long-term plans based on TA being as it is now.

If you have a question you'd like answered as a Question of the Week, e-mail it to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Web Page in the Spotlight

There's a lot of stuff on the TraCen Cape May web site you might not check out if you didn't know it was there. So this week, I'm spotlighting three pages: **Civilian Employees** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/civilians.asp>).

Grammar & Usage Corner

A number of people have asked that I expand my weekly "Frequently-Confused/Misused Words" entry to cover grammar and usage questions other than confused/misused words as well. This week, **affect vs effect**.

The word *affect* is a verb: "Coast Guard modernization won't directly affect my unit" and "Supply and demand affect gas prices."

The word *effect* is most often used as a noun: "Her personal life has no effect on me" and "The effects of the war in Afghanistan are tragic." **However**, *effect* can also be used as a verb: "The new OIC effected many changes when she took charge."

Keep in mind this memory aid: the word *cause* is often paired with the word *effect*; the final letter of the word *cause* is the first letter of *effect*.

If there are any word usage, grammar, or similar issues you've encountered, please e-mail them to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Good News for MST2s

According to MSTCM Jeffrey Lang (the MSTs Rating Force Master Chief), there was an inadvertent omission in ALCOAST 578/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST578-11.pdf>) concerning the need for MST2s to pass the MST1 Rating Advancement Test (RAT) to be eligible to take servicewide exams.

The ALCOAST stated that passing the MST1 RAT is necessary to qualify for the May and October 2012 SWEs. It neglected to say that MST2s who had previously passed the MST1 end-of-course test (EOCT) were to be exempt from the RAT requirement for all SWEs administered after the ALCOAST was published.

However, MST2s who passed an MST1 EOCT are also required to complete MST1 RPQs and necessary competencies to qualify for future MST1 SWEs. Put another way, to qualify for the MST1 SWE, MST2s have to have passed either the MST1 EOCT or MST1 RAT *and* complete MST1 RPQs and necessary competencies.

New College Info

Periodically, the TraCen Cape May's Education Center receives flyers, brochures, posters, and other information from colleges and universities around the country. This material is available any time during working hours (including lunch time). **The fact that this information is printed here does not constitute an endorsement of the corresponding schools or programs.**

Fisher College (a regionally-accredited not-for-profit college in Boston) offers a bachelor of science in management with concentrations in either leadership or public administration. (Public administration is to government agencies what business administration is to corporations.) The tuition for military personnel for either of these programs is \$250/credit. If you're interested, check out <http://learnonline.fisher.edu/> or drop by the Education Center for a brochure. And for more detailed military-specific information, go to <http://www.fisher.edu/continuing-education/active-military-veterans.html>.

The school also has degree completion programs in management, communications, and human services which enable you to transfer up to 90 credits from elsewhere (<http://www.fisher.edu/continuing-education/degree-completion-program.html>). And if you're just starting out, Fisher has many complete associate's, bachelor's, and certificate programs (<http://www.fisher.edu/continuing-education/dce-academics/academic-programs-dce.html>). All courses for all programs but the Medical Assisting Certificate can be completed on-line. The tuition cost for courses in these programs is \$300/credit, but military personnel and their dependents are eligible for a 10% discount.

Marketing Yourself for a Second Career

Between 0900 and 1130 on Wednesday, 08 August 2012, a lecture/Q&A session on making the transition from the Coast Guard to the civilian work force will be held in the Constantine classroom of the MCPOCG building. If you plan to leave the Coast Guard in the next five years, you and your spouse are strongly encouraged to attend. Topics covered will include:

- Competition in the job hunt
- Civilian employers' perceptions about military personnel
- Planning your job search
- Résumés, cover letters, broadcast letters, etc.
- How employers read your résumé
- Networking & the hidden job market
- Preparing for and conducting a successful interview
- Salary negotiations and benefits

To sign up, contact Mr. Gary Adams at ronald.g.adams@uscg.mil or 202-372-4089.

Aviation Ratings ERATS Implementation Update

According to ALCOAST 262/12 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST262-12.pdf>), transition of the aviation ratings from the current enlisted professional development system to ERATS (Enlisted Rating Advancement Training System) is ahead of schedule.

Originally, these ratings weren't scheduled to fall under ERATS until May 2013. But as of 02 August 2012 AET, AMT and AST Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs), Performance Qualification Guides (PQGs), and end-of-course tests will be replaced by Rating Performance Qualifications (RPQs) and Rating Advancement Tests (RATs).

For complete information on what ERATS is and how it works, ALCOAST 577/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST577-11.pdf>).

Check Out a Career in the Health Information Technology Field

Estimates from government agencies and independent studies indicate a need for 50,000 to 80,000 more health IT workers so health care facilities can implement and maintain electronic health records (EHRs) and meet meaningful use requirements.

Included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 were grants to community colleges to be used to train "health information technology professionals": people qualified to support information exchange among health care providers and public health authorities and to redesign of workflows within the health care settings to gain the quality and efficiency benefits of EHRs.

If you're interested in finding out more about opportunities these grants create, information on colleges providing this training, their admission criteria, their tuition structures, etc. check out the fact sheet from Region D at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/HIT.pdf>. (The info on this fact sheet applies to all five regions.) And to

find a community college in the region nearest you that's offering courses as part of the health IT program, go to http://healthit.hhs.gov/portal/server.pt/community/healthit_hhs_gov_community_college_program/1804.

Reserve Servicewide Exam Deadline Approaching

01 July is the deadline for Reservists to have completed all requirements if they want to take the October servicewide exam. Requirements include passing an EOCT and, for those seeking advancement to E-6 or E-8, an E-PME Advancement Qualification Exam (AQE).

Remember: to take an EOCT you have to have completed your EPQs, and to take an AQE you have to have completed the relevant E-PME Performance Requirements.

Special Student Loan Consolidation Deadline: 30 June

The Department of Education is currently offering a short-term consolidation opportunity, but it ends on 30 June 2012.

For more information, go to <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/specialconsolidation.jsp>.

Student Loan Payments Getting You Down?

If you're having problems repaying federal student loans, you owe it to yourself to check out the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) program (<http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/IBRPlan.jsp>). In a nutshell, the program "caps your required monthly payment at an amount intended to be affordable based on your income and family size." The program applies to all Stafford, PLUS, and Consolidation Loans made under either the Direct Loan or FFEL Program with a few exceptions. Those are:

- loans which are currently in default,
- parent PLUS Loans (PLUS Loans that were made to parent borrowers),
- Consolidation Loans that repaid parent PLUS Loans.

For complete information, go to <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/IBRPlan.jsp>.

Other Student Loan Repayment Options

For information on other loan repayment options, check out <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/loans.asp#repayment>.

Alternatives to Fixed-Term College Courses

Have you thought about taking CLEP tests as a way to earn college credit, but then rejected the idea because studying on your own doesn't work for you? Or have you thought about taking college courses, but rejected that idea because they take too much time or because you're concerned ops may get in the way of completing a course? If so, check out self-paced college courses (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/schools.asp#self-paced>).

They have the benefit of being quicker to complete than semester- or quarter-based college courses (most schools allow you to complete them in as few as six weeks) while they're structured so you learn the material in digestible chunks rather than being left completely on your own.

These courses have the added benefit of not being tied to a traditional term: you can start at any time. They also give you a huge amount of flexibility: you can take almost as long as you want to complete the course (up to 12 months in most cases) and there are no set dates for lessons or tests. And some schools offer whole degree programs this way.

Check out some of the many reputable schools which offer self-paced (or independent study) courses at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/schools.asp#self-paced>.

Learning Another Language & Foreign Language Testing

There are a number of software applications that help you learn a foreign language. “Tell Me More” (http://us.tellemore.com/free_demo) and “Rosetta Stone” (<http://www.rosettastone.com/>, which everyone’s seen on TV) are but two of these.

But don’t go out and buy one just because everyone’s talking about it. Before you order the software, do some research, including <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/LanguageLearning.pdf>.

- **Check the price.** The only direct Coast Guard-related funding available to reimburse you language software you buy on your own is the Coast Guard Foundation grant – which is only available to regular Coast Guard enlisted personnel and Reserve enlistees on active duty (i.e., not drilling Reservists or officers).
- **Ask around; see if you can find others who have it.** Find out if it helped them learn what they need to know to talk about Coast Guard-related matters (e.g., law enforcement) in the target language. Unless you just want to learn another language for fun, if the software doesn’t help you learn what you need to learn it’s probably not worth buying.
- **Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP).** If you want to earn FLPP as one of your unit’s designated interpreters, it’s highly unlikely a commercially-available language course will give you the proficiency needed to get the necessary rating on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT, see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>). And keep in mind that even if it does, your unit has to have designated interpreter billets *and* you have to be formally assigned to one of those billets. (Most operational units have only two or three interpreter billets.)

If you really need to know a second language for work, the Coast Guard will probably pay for you to learn it. But a method other than software may be more effective. That is, if all you can do after months of using a computer program is make small talk that helps you locate a good restaurant, it’s probably not worthwhile for Coast Guard purposes.

Check around to see if there are any intensive language training courses available in your area through a college/university, a commercial language school, or a government agency. For example, now that the Coast Guard and the Customs and Border Protection agency work for the same cabinet secretary, you may find that you can get into a CBP language training program that either the Department or Coast Guard will pay for.

And, of course, you can always take college courses in the target language. Tuition assistance will pay for them and you’ll also earn college credit from them.

You can also find loads of (mostly) free resources for learning and/or practicing foreign languages at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/languages.asp>.

SOCOAST Degrees & Majors

An underused benefit available to all Coast Guard personnel, and dependents of military personnel, is SOCCOAST. What is SOCCOAST? Well, the name is an acronym for an association of colleges and universities called Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, Coast Guard (pronounced sock-coast). Essentially, the schools in a given SOCCOAST degree network agree to abide by a number of principles which guarantee that the courses you need to complete a degree at school X will be the same courses you need to complete the same degree if you have to transfer to school Y. Those principles also allow you to take courses from any SOCCOAST school in your degree network and apply

the credits earned to your degree no matter which school in the network you end up getting your degree from. This can mean you have more courses available to choose from when deciding which course to take to fulfill a requirement for your degree.

How does this work? After completing six semester credits, you can (and should) get a “student agreement” from the school you plan to get your degree from (called your “home college”). The student agreement is a degree plan, laying out exactly which courses you need to complete to get your degree. It serves as a contract between you and your home college, locking in the courses needed to complete your degree.

Even if the school changes its degree requirements, you only have to take the courses listed on the student agreement, which remains in effect even after you leave the military.

For more information about what SOCCOAST is and how to take advantage of it, go to <http://www.soc.aascu.org/soccoast/ForStudentsFAQCG.html>. And for a spreadsheet showing all current SOCCOAST degrees and majors (along with degree network they're in), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/SOCCOASTdegrees.xlsx>. You can sort the data on the spreadsheet any way that's useful to you.

What Happens After I Submit a TA Request?

Many first-time users of tuition assistance (TA) don't know what to do after they've submitted a request for TA. First, after receiving notification that your request has been approved, download it and review it carefully to make sure there are no errors.

If there aren't you provide the authorization to your school (the cashier, bursar, or whomever the official is who takes your money) after putting your SSN on it and signing it.

After you finish the course, you have to provide a grade report to your ESO for every course listed on the authorization. Do this as soon as your grade report becomes available.

For more detailed information about what to expect after submitting your TA request and about your responsibilities while taking a TA-funded course and afterward, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta-b.asp>.

College Success Tips for Adult Learners

If you're taking college courses or thinking about doing so, please stop by the Education Center (Mission Support/Admin Building, Room 113) to get a copy of *College Success Tips for Adult Learners*. Here are a few chapter titles:

- Top 10 Reasons to Continue Your Education
- Selecting the Right Distance Learning Program
- Credit by Examination
- Choosing Classes
- Study Tactics
- How to Manage Time Well
- Writing a Research Paper

Even if you've been taking college courses for awhile, I think you'll find something useful in it.

And for more information on improving your studying and test-taking skills, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studying.asp>.

How Much Would You Need to Earn Outside the Military to Equal Your Military Income?

Even in the current economy, a lot of people are thinking of leaving the Coast Guard for a civilian career. If you're one of them, check out the military-to-civilian pay calculator on the G.I. Jobs web site (<http://calculator.gijobs.com/paycalculator.aspx>). What you learn may surprise you.

Occupational Certification & Apprenticeship Programs

A number of occupational certification programs are available through your ESO. The United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP - <https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss/static/usmap.jsp>) is a program that allows regular Coast Guard members to earn apprenticeship certification in any of 125 skills learned through work experience and related technical instruction. All you have to do is document the experience you gain while performing your regular military duties; no after-hours work is required.

You can also get a credential (certification or license) in dozens of different occupational fields (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/cert.asp>) through a large number of nationally-recognized certification organizations. Here's a small sampling of the fields in which you can get certified:

- automotive service professional
- dental assistant
- contract manager
- medical technologist
- personal trainer
- human resources specialist
- computer networking professional
- project management
- facilities management.

And if you're eligible for GI Bill benefits, you can likely get reimbursed up to \$2,000 for the cost of each certification or licensing exam.

Scholarships

Below are descriptions of a number of scholarships open to military personnel, their dependents, or both. ***Be aware, however, that these are just a few of thousands of scholarships you or your dependents may be eligible for.*** They're the low-hanging fruit, the ones most often publicized and (as a result) the ones that have the most applicants. If you really want some serious money from scholarships, you'll apply to all you're eligible for – especially those not widely known. For more about scholarships (including how to find and apply for them in a systematic manner), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/scholarships.asp>.

Waldorf College

(courtesy of Mr. Marc Fagenbaum, full-time ESO at Base Miami)

To recognize the sacrifices made by the family members of military servicemembers and public safety personnel (firefighters, law enforcement officers, EMTs & dispatchers) Waldorf College in Iowa will award eight scholarships for on-line students and two for residential students in 2012 through the Hero Behind the Hero Scholarship Program.

Two scholarships (one for the military spouse or dependent and one for the firefighters/law enforcement officer spouse or dependent) will be presented on the award dates listed. Applicants not selected may continue to apply for a maximum of five scholarship award dates.

Scholarship Application Periods

01 JUN 2012 – 31 JUL 2012
 01 AUG 2012 – 30 SEP 2012
 01 OCT 2012 – 30 NOV 2012

Scholarship Award Dates

August 2012 (on-line)
 October 2012 (on-line)
 December 2012 (on-line)

Go to <http://www.waldorf.edu/Online/Tuition---Financing/Scholarships/Hero-Behind-the-Hero> for more information and a link to an on-line application. Or you can e-mail hero@waldorf.edu or call 877-267-2157.

Thinking About Taking College Courses?

If you're interested in taking college courses, but are unsure where to start or what to do first, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/starting.asp>. The seven steps provided there will help you

- understand terminology and how you progress toward a degree,
- figure out whether you need a degree to enter the field you want to work in,
- if a degree will be helpful, determine what you want to major in,
- find colleges/universities which offer degrees in your desired major,
- request degree plans from your chosen school(s),
- submit a request to the Coast Guard Institute for an education assessment and to have official transcripts of your assessment sent to colleges you've identified, and
- pick your first course.

This is the hardest part of the process. Once you've done this, it's just a matter of deciding which type of funding to use (tuition assistance, GI Bill, scholarships, loans, or a combination of these) and applying for it. Tuition assistance (TA) and GI Bill funding is easy to use and readily available. You've got to plan ahead if you want to get scholarships because applications are usually due at specific times of the year that might not coincide with dates your courses begin. And loans, while they're readily available, should be your last recourse.

Career & Education Planning Tools

Many people in the Coast Guard – military and civilians alike – are unsure of what career fields best match their personal interests and abilities. While you might be extremely competent at what you're doing in the Coast Guard, you might have skills you'd rather put to use in some other field. ESOs throughout the Coast Guard (including TraCen Cape May's) have access to many different tools you can use to assess your interests and possible ways to earn a living while pursuing those interests.

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/discover.asp> and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/sitestest.asp>.

TraCen Cape May Testing Calendar

Tests at TraCen Cape May are administered by appointment according to the following schedule:

Tuesdays (0730): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs*
 Wednesdays (0800): Defense Language Proficiency Tests
 Thursdays (0745): college tests, CLEP tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

* If operations or your work schedule make it impossible for you to take an EOCT, RAT, or AQE on a Tuesday morning, you can take it on a Thursday morning.

This schedule leaves most of the day on Tuesdays, as well as all day on Mondays and Fridays available for other occasional tests, counseling, and other face-to-face interactions with you. When no one is taking a language test, the doors to the Education Center are open on Wednesdays, as well.

If you call and I don't answer the phone, I'm usually administering a test (and, because of the noise, can't talk on the phone) or otherwise busy with someone in the office. E-mail is the best way to get in touch with me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Education Center Library

The TraCen Education Center has a binder full of SparkCharts Quick Reference Guides on almost 40 subjects. You're welcome to use these in the Education Center or make copies to take with you. You can check out the subjects available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/books.asp#spark>.

In addition to SparkCharts, the Education Center also has a library of books on leadership, management, Coast Guard history, and other topics. Also in the library are the latest Professional Qualification Guides (PQGs) and Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs) for each rating.

The Education Center also has dozens of brochures and books on college, financial aid, the officer program application process, and other things. If there are multiple copies, you're welcome to take one.