

## TraCen Cape May Education Update #323

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### Congratulations!!

The following personnel in the Cape May area passed Coast Guard Institute end-of-course, AQEs, and other tests since the last update:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Work Site</b>	<b>Test</b>
FN Conrad Norton	TraCen (Firehouse)	CLEP Natural Sciences*
SN Trevor Lambrou	CGC Mako	E-PME-4*
LT Adam Disque	CGC Vigorous	DWINTR*

\* First attempt

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.

### Question of the Week

**Q:** I recently got an education assessment done by the Coast Guard Institute. The transcript I got back shows that I've earned an associate's degree, since it shows I've got 85 credits from Coast Guard service. How do I go about getting my associate's degree?

**A:** I think you're confusing your transcript with a degree plan. A transcript from the Coast Guard Institute shows the college equivalent of courses you've taken and things you've learned or achieved in the Coast Guard. That is, if you had taken college courses that covered the material you covered in MK "A" School, you could have earned the following lower-level credits: 3 credits in hydraulics and pump systems; 3 in plumbing systems; 3 in electricity basics; and 3 in internal combustion engine maintenance and repair.

The question then becomes, "How can I apply those credits toward a degree?" A degree plan shows which courses are necessary to earn a degree in a specific major, which credits you've already completed, and which you still have to complete. Every college in the United States has its own criteria for determining which credits you earned elsewhere it will accept toward a degree in each specific major. Some schools are more liberal in accepting these credits than others. Some won't accept them at all, some will accept them but not at full value (e.g., they will accept only 2 of the 3 credits earned in plumbing systems), some will accept all credits except duplicates.

So the only way to know how close you are to earning a degree is to have degree plans for each college or university you're interested in and compare them to see which looks most attractive to you. Base your decision as to which looks best for you not just on the number of credits you still have to complete, but on how courses are conducted, whether other colleges and universities will accept credits or a degree earned at your chosen school, how much it costs, etc.

If you're interested in getting an associate's degree at College X, for example, and then getting a bachelor's at College Y, you need to know if College Y will accept all the credits you earned in your associate's program at College X. If it doesn't, you'll have to repeat courses at College Y that you took at College X, even though you already have an associate's degree.

Unfortunately, the Coast Guard Institute stopped preparing degree plans a little over a year ago. This means you'll need to contact individual schools, have an official transcript sent from the Institute, and request degree plans from each before you can compare them to see which school is best for you.

Before diving in head first, however, check out <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/starting.asp> and follow the steps outlined there.

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](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil).

## Web Pages 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 **Studying & Test-taking Skills** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studying.asp>).

## Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused words. This week, the often-confused words are *explain/explanation* and *explicate/explication*. (These definitions are from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.)

**Explain** is a verb meaning to make known, to make plain or understandable ("Mother explained why she didn't want me to go to the movie, but that didn't make me like her decision any better."); to give the reason or cause of ("His father demanded that he explain his actions"). It implies a making plain or intelligible what is not immediately obvious or entirely known.

**Explicate** is a verb meaning to give a detailed explanation of something, to develop the implications of or analyze logically. "Her master's thesis explicated the many layers of meaning in *Paradise Lost*." *Explicate* adds to the word *explain* the idea of a developed or detailed analysis.

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](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil).

## National Internship Program: Deadline 25 February 2011

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) has a program which places talented Hispanic and other minority students in paid summer internships in Washington, DC and elsewhere around the country. These 10-week internships are with federal agencies and corporations and give students an opportunity to develop their career and professional skills and receive financial support to help motivate them through graduation.

The deadline for applying is Friday, 25 February 2011. For more information, go to [http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HNIP\\_EN.asp](http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HNIP_EN.asp).

## 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>).

Also, stop by the Education Center to check out the (small) supply of booklets related to rejoining the civilian work force. Here's are the topics of the booklets:

- Jobs With a Future
- How to Develop Job Resources
- The Resume
- The Cover Letter: A Resume Should Never Stand Alone
- The Mature Resume: The Resume with Experience
- The Follow-up Letter
- The Interview
- How to Choose a Career: A Guide to Self-Assessment
- Civilian Again
- Leaving the Service ... and Beginning Your Next Career
- Military to Civilian: Your Resume and Job Hunt
- Effective Goal Setting: How to Reach the Goals You Set for Yourself

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.

## 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.

## Advanced Computer, Engineering & Technology (ACET) Program

Be aware that although the deadline for applications for the ACET program has not yet been set, it will be earlier this year than in previous years – mostly likely in late April 2011.

For information about the program, go to the CGPortal (<https://cgportal.uscg.mil>), then select “Training & Education” from the blue menu bar. From the menu on the left, select “Education”, then “Advanced Education Programs”, and (finally) “DCMS-81 Advanced Computer, Engineering & Technology (ACET)”.

Note that part of the application process is providing current scores on the SAT or ACT (current = less than 5 years old). For more information about these tests (including a comparison of subjects covered), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/education/act.asp>, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/education/sat.asp>, and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/education/comparison.asp>.

While many ESOs can administer ACTs and SATs, they need to order tests a month before the scheduled test date. And be aware that ACT normally mails score reports to examinees within 4 weeks (usually less) after receiving answer sheets and SAT official score reports are delivered about five weeks after answer sheets have been received.

Contact your ESO to see if s/he can administer these tests and, if so, to arrange a test date.

## TA & Income Tax Deduction/Credit

If you used TA to pay for one or more courses in calendar year 2010, you may receive from your school an official-looking statement showing how much you and the Coast Guard paid to your school for tuition. This form (IRS form 1098-T) 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 such deductions and credits. 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 the IRS publication which goes into depth about these deductions and credits is at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf>.

## Out-of-Pocket College Fees: Another Source of Funding

“As you know colleges and universities charge fees for tuition, admissions applications, enrollment, books, technical support, labs, transcripts — the list goes on. What you may not know is that if you don't use military tuition assistance, you, not [Coast Guard] or VA, are responsible for paying all of these fees. The schools hold you responsible for paying these fees because the GI Bill is paid directly to you, the student, not the school. This means the school has no guarantee that they are going to be paid.”

So begins Military.com's very informative article on finding money to pay for college fees. And the same is true of tuition assistance: it only pays for fees directly connected with the course you're taking (e.g., an Internet fee for an on-line course or a lab fee for a chemistry or biology course).

One thing to keep in mind, though: don't let *anyone* talk you into taking out a loan to pay for school – particularly an undergraduate degree. There's no reason in the world you should have to do that while you're in the Coast Guard.

Check out the whole article (which includes links to the Federal Student Aid application) at <http://education.military.com/money-for-school/avoid-out-of-pocket-fees>.

## How to Go to College Almost for Free

Whether you'd like more money for your own education (even if you're using TA or receiving GI Bill benefits) or for a dependent, you should check out <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/scholarships.asp#strategy>. You'll see that finding money for college *is* possible using a logical, linear (and not all that daunting) methodology devised by Ben Kaplan.

Also, the Education Center recently acquired Mr. Kaplan's video, “Finding College Cash in Tough Times” (<http://www.cityofcollegedreams.org/store/finding-college-cash-in-tough-times>). After a short introduction it covers the following topics:

Part I: Exploding 3 Myths about Paying for College

Part II: 3 Strategies for Maximizing Need-based Financial Aid  
 Part III: 3 Steps for Finding Merit Scholarships  
 Part IV: 3 Components of a Winning Scholarship Game Plan  
 Part V: 3 Strategies for Making Your Application Shine  
 Part VI: Concluding Thoughts & Final Quiz

Although I can't lend out the video, you can watch it in the Education Center. Please contact me ([andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil)) if you're interested in seeing it. The total running time is 71 minutes. If there's enough interest to warrant it, we'll show it in the auditorium; otherwise, in the Education Center.

## DANTES-Sponsored Test Fees

Don't forget, when planning to take DANTES-sponsored tests (i.e., CLEP tests, DSSTs, ECEs) you can probably take it free of charge the first time (see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/edbenefits.pdf>). But if you don't get a passing score the first time, you will have to pay for any re-tests yourself.

For details go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/clep.asp#costs> (for CLEP tests), <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp#costs> (for DSSTs), or <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ece.asp#costs> (for ECEs).

## CLEP (and Other) Tests for College Credit

Most military personnel have heard of CLEP tests. And, unfortunately, most labor under the myth that CLEP tests (along with DSSTs and ECEs) are easy ways to get college credit. The phrase "I want to CLEP out of [insert your best subject here]" is on the lips of practically everyone who visits a Coast Guard education center. They've been led to believe that all they have to do is walk into an exam room, take a test, and earn college credit.

But earning credit by taking exams is not for everyone and, for most, is not easy. To see how difficult most military personnel have found these tests to pass, check out the FY10 pass rates for paper-based tests ([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/library/docs/examinations/paper\\_based\\_exams.pdf](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/library/docs/examinations/paper_based_exams.pdf)) and for computer-based tests ([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/library/docs/examinations/computer\\_based\\_exams.pdf](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/library/docs/examinations/computer_based_exams.pdf)).

The truth about these exams is that they all require solid preparation – which makes sense: they're the equivalent of college final exams. And because you have to study completely on your own, with no deadlines or milestones, many people find preparing adequately for them difficult.

Still, if you're a self-starter, good at budgeting your time and studying effectively on your own, these tests *are* a great way to earn college credit without having to take college courses.

However, even if you pass credit-by-exam tests keep in mind that every college in the US decides for itself whether it will accept credit earned elsewhere (including through these tests) and how much credit it will accept for credits earned elsewhere. Before you dive into the pool of over a hundred credit-by-exam tests, do some research: contact the school you want to earn your degree from to see if it will accept scores from the tests you're thinking of taking.

And for more information about the tests (including links to study materials), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/tests.asp>.

## New Enlisted Rating Advancement Training System

ALCOAST 033/11 (published on 04 February 2011) announced the transition from the current way enlisted personnel demonstrate their qualification for advancement to a new way. As noted in the message, "The basic advancement requirements listed in [the Personnel Manual] remain unchanged, though certain training resources have been renamed to more accurately reflect their intent."

The new system (which, of course, will have its own acronym – ERATS) will include three components:

- **Rating Performance Qualifications (RPQs)** will replace Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs, formerly known as practical factors or pracs). RPQs will be the basis for all rate-specific training: the “A” school curriculum, rating courses, and advancement exams. RPQs will “provide more specific guidance and direction to both the performer and the supervisor than . . . EPQs. In addition to the task to be performed, the RPQ includes required steps to perform the task, conditions under which the task must be performed, and the standard to which the task must be performed. References required are linked to each step of each task.”
- **Rating Courses** will, as noted above, be based on the RPQs and will reflect the tasks and performance for demonstrating mastery of each task called for by each RPQ. “Rating courses . . . will undergo a significant transformation as part of ERATS, becoming more relevant and making better use of available technology, including real-time performance support via online delivery. . . . It must be strongly emphasized that the best way to prepare for the RAT is to perform the RPQs as indicated, using the references associated with each enabling objective.”
- **Rating Advancement Tests (RATs)** will replace end-of-course tests (EOCTs) and will incorporate four major changes:
  - Tests will be based directly on the RPQs, not the course. If you can successfully perform the RPQs for the next higher pay grade, you should be able to accurately answer the questions on the RAT.
  - When new RPQs are published, a corresponding replacement RAT will be published and distributed to ESOs.
  - When taking a RAT, you may use references you normally use to perform an RPQ (task) on-the-job.
  - RATs will be administered on-line using a completely new system than the one currently in use.

As is currently the case with EPQs and EOCTs, you must complete all RPQs before you will be eligible to take a RAT.

This new format will be put into effect this FY for the MST rating, as detailed in ALCOAST 033/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST033-11.pdf>).

## More Scholarship Opportunities

- The Jersey Cape Military Spouse’s Club is offering four \$1,000 scholarships to deserving dependents of Cape May-area uniformed personnel. Its purpose is to help meet post-secondary educational expenses. The award will be made on the basis of scholastic abilities, character, leadership, and extracurricular activities.

Eligibility requirements and the application are available from <http://coastie2coastie.net/jcmsc/index.xhtml>. Don’t be surprised if you’re asked to complete a survey. The survey is just the gateway to the application form. ***The deadline for submitting applications via this web site is 31 March 2011.***

- The Wildwood chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is offering a \$500 scholarship for seniors at Wildwood High School or Wildwood Catholic High School.

For more information, contact Mr. John Burgin (TraCen Cape May Facilities Engineering) at 609-898-6948 or 609-536-2754.

- Also, the director of the Tillman Foundation is hoping more eligible Guardians will apply for the Tillman Military Scholarship program this year than in the past. So far, no Guardians have been chosen to receive one of these scholarships. Applications for the 2011-2012 academic year open on 07 March 2011. Check out the foundation’s web site for eligibility criteria and other application information: <http://www.patillmanfoundation.org/tillman-military-scholars/apply/>.

## Updated New (Post-9/11) GI Bill Pages on TraCen Cape May Web Site

I’ve completely revised the pages on the TraCen Cape May web site that pertain to the new GI Bill and changes to it which were signed into law on 04 January (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-33o.asp>). Please check it out and let me know if you have trouble navigating it.

## May Servicewide Exams

If you met all the qualifications for advancement by 01 February 2011, PSC will automatically send a SWE for you to the ESO at the examination board listed on the Personal Data Extract (PDE). **Your ESO has nothing to do with PDEs and you cannot request a SWE.**

When your PDE is made available (on DirectAccess in the next few weeks, in hard-copy format a few weeks later via your SPO), make sure you check **everything** on it carefully – including your examination board name and OPFAC.

- Are you going to be on leave or TAD on the date of your SWE?
- Will you be in-transit due to a PCS move on the date of your SWE?
- Are you going to be away from the unit listed on your PDE for any other reason on the date of your SWE?

If so (and if you want to take the SWE), do the following:

- find a unit you know you'll be geographically near on your SWE date,
- contact the ESO at that unit and ask if it's OK to take your SWE there,
- assuming the ESO says "yes", ask for the unit's OPFAC,
- let your SPO know what the name and OPFAC of that unit so the info on your PDE is changed.

PSC will automatically send your exam to the unit list as your exam board on your PDE.

**Substitute exams are authorized ONLY in emergencies.** Regular leave (even if you scheduled a Caribbean cruise six months ago) is not an emergency. A wedding – even your own – is not an emergency. For more information on just what circumstances justify requesting a substitute exam, see Article 5.D.3. of the *Personnel Manual*.

If you change the Exam Board on your PDE and later find out you won't be able to take your SWE at that location, let your ESO know immediately.

For info on studying and test-taking skills, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studying.asp>.

## Excelsior College Exams

Excelsior College Exams (ECEs, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ece.asp>) have long been available to uniformed personnel (regulars and Reservists) in paper-and-pencil format through many ESOs free of charge.

As of the beginning of FY12 (01 October 2011), DANTES will no longer pay for ECEs. Also on that date, paper-based tests will become a thing of the past and all ECEs will be administered only in a computer-based format.

If you want to take an ECE, your DANTES Test Control Officer must request it before Wednesday, 01 September 2011 and it must be returned for scoring no later than Friday, 30 September 2011.

## Reservists & Tuition Assistance

Reservists may be unaware that they may use Coast Guard tuition assistance (TA) to pay for courses which meet the eligibility and use rules laid out in the Performance, Training, & Education Manual (COMDTINST M1500.10 (series)). These rules are summarized at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp#eligibility>.

The PT&E Manual states that "TA is not authorized for reservists who have not met participation standards for the 12 months immediately prior to application or for reservists who are more than six months out of compliance for readiness metrics." However, Reservists who have not served for a year are presumed to be in compliance with the readiness criteria set forth in the Reserve Policy Manual (COMDTINST M1001.28 (series)). That means that Reservists who just graduated from boot camp may apply for TA.

## Re-taking ASVAB Tests

Are you interested in going to “A” school for a particular rate, but realize your ASVAB scores aren’t high enough? You may be unaware that at any time you can re-take one or more of the tests which comprise the AFCT (Armed Forces Classification Test) – the version of the ASVAB available only to military personnel.

Before you pick up the phone to call your ESO to schedule a test, however, keep in mind two things. First, whatever score you get on the re-test (higher, lower, or the same) it becomes your new official score. Second, if you’re unsatisfied with the score you get on a re-test, you must wait six months to take that test again.

### Other Considerations

- The VE score represents a scaled composite of the scores on two separate tests: PC and WK. You can’t take a single test to improve your VE score.
- The WK test is a vocabulary test and, as such, is virtually impossible to prepare for. If you’ve become an avid reader since you took the ASVAB at a MEP Station or have memorized a dictionary, you may improve your WK score greatly. But if not, you should think twice about re-taking it – especially if your existing score is relatively high.
- You can qualify for five ratings’ “A” schools (AET, AMT, AST, ET, IT) either by getting the required composite score or by getting an AFQT score of at least 65. (Your AFQT score is equal to AR + MK + (2 x VE).) To qualify for these schools via the AFQT score, you do *not* have to have a minimum AR score of 52.

For more information about the AFCT/ASVAB, each of its tests, and how to prepare for them, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/asvab.asp>.

## TraCen Cape May Testing Calendar

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

Mondays (0800): Defense Language Proficiency Tests

Tuesdays (0800): EOCTs and AQEs\*

Thursdays (0745): college tests, CLEP tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

- \* If operations or your work schedule make it impossible for you to take an EOCT 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 Wednesdays, 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 Mondays, 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.

## Thinking of Teaching?

Are you interested in teaching after you leave the Coast Guard? Troops to Teachers also provides counseling and referral services to military personnel interested in beginning a second career in public education as a teacher. And the DANTES Troops to Teachers office will help you identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification, and employment opportunities. The main web site

([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp)) has all kinds of information about the program.

Including a new on-line way to determine if you’re eligible to participate in Troops to Teachers:

[http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp).

## **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.

## **Quick Reference Study Guides**

The TraCen Education Center also 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>.

## **Education Center Library**

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) 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.