

TraCen Cape May Education Update #381

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Congratulations!!

CWO2 (INF) Donnie Brzuska (TraCen Cape May's public affairs officer) recently completed a Master of Arts degree in Public Relations from Webster University.

Well done, Mr. Brzuska!!!

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 – Why did I get a letter from the Navy when I provided my grade report?

- Q:** I got a computer-generated letter from the Navy about tuition assistance indebtedness. Apparently the grade report I sent to my ESO for a course I used TA to pay for didn't get where it needed to get and the Navy's saying I have to either provide one or send a money order for the amount TA paid for the course. How do I avoid this kind of thing in the future?
- A:** The easiest way is to submit to your ESO your grade report for the courses listed on your TA authorization. Then, a couple days later, click on "My History" in eTA and verify that your grade for each course listed on the TA authorization is recorded in the Navy's computer in the "Grd" column on the "View History" page. If you submitted it to your ESO, but it's not showing up in eTA, contact your ESO immediately to find out what happened and to remedy it.

Remember: you have 42 days from the “End Date” listed on your TA authorization to provide your grade report before you’ll be locked out of eTA. And if you don’t provide your grade report within 60 days, the Navy’s computer will automatically generate that letter you got.

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: **Career Development for Enlisted Military Personnel** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/cgmilcareerdev.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, **your** and **you’re**. (These definitions are from *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.)

Your is the possessive form of the pronoun “you”: “Is this your book?” (“Does this book belong to you?”) or “Your dog did his business on my lawn!”

You’re is a contraction or joining of two words. In this case, the words are “you” and “are”: “You’re going to the movie, right?” or “You’re right about that!”

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.

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>).

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>.

Computer-based CLEP Testing: Thursday, 12 July

If you're interested in (and will be prepared to take) a CLEP test at 0930 on Thursday, 12 July, go to http://www.supersaas.com/schedule/TraCen_Cape_May/CLEP_tests_at_TraCen_Cape_May to sign up for the last available seat. (Because of limited Internet access at the moment, we can only test two people. We hope to be able to expand our capacity to nine in the near future.) Before signing up, check out what each test covers by clicking on the test title at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/clep.asp>.

Military personnel (regular and Reserve), their spouses, and Coast Guard civilian employees are all eligible to take any of the 34 CLEP tests. DANTES pays both the \$77 exam fee and the \$20 registration fee.

NOTE that if you fail a CLEP test and want to re-take it later, you will have to pay both the registration fee and the exam fee.

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>.

ACT at TraCen Cape May

I'll be administering the **ACT Assessment** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp>) on **Thursday, 07 June starting at 0730**.

Seats will be reserved for you on a first come, first served basis so let me know ASAP if you want to take one of these tests.

DANTES Test Control Officers (ESOs who've been specifically designated) may administer these tests only for uniformed personnel. In general, military personnel are authorized to take one ACT **or** one SAT paid for by DANTES. So if you want to take both, one would be free and you'd likely have to pay for the other. The ACT costs \$34; the SAT costs \$49.

ESOs may administer the ACT at any time of the year, and can administer the SAT during all months except July, August, and September. You can see a comparison of the SAT and ACT at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/comparison.asp>.

Be aware that in almost all cases military personnel don't need to take either the ACT or SAT to take college courses.

You can read/download *Preparing for the ACT* (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/PreparingACT.pdf>) and *Taking the ACT* (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/TakingACT.pdf>) for more information about the test. As for actual preparation materials, check out <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html> and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp#prep>.

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.

Preparing for the ACT Assessment & SAT Reasoning Test

Free eKnowledge ACT and SAT preparation software is available through contributions from NFL and MLB players, as well as many other organizations (<http://www.eknowledge.com/USCG>).

If you received the software last year, you'll need to get a free upgrade. While the software is free (retail price \$200), you must pay \$13.84, which covers the cost of technical and customer support, registration, licensing, processing, handling, and worldwide shipping.

Other resources, include the web sites of the ACT Assessment (<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html>) and SAT Reasoning Test (<http://sat.collegeboard.org/practice>) and

- ePrep (<http://www.eprep.com/>)
- Grockit (<http://grockit.com/>)
- Number2.com (<http://www.number2.com/>).

8 Ways to Boost Your ACT and SAT Scores

This article, on the blog "The College Solution" (<http://www.thecollegesolution.com/8-ways-to-boost-your-act-and-sat-scores>), actually provides five tips to help you prepare to take an ACT or SAT and three about what to do with the scores you receive. The on-line preparation resources alone make the article worth reading, but there's sound advice throughout the short article.

CLEP Test & DSST Prep Resources

(courtesy of full-time ESO Joe Bloomquist, St. Louis)

If you're looking for a way to prepare for a DSST or CLEP test, check out Pass Your Class (<http://www.passyourclass.com/index.html>). Although the company seems not to know that DANTES has had nothing to do with DSSTs for about 20 years, its study guides may be just what you need to pass one of these tests and save the time and expense of taking specific college courses. And, the company has a money-back guarantee: if you use one of its study guides and don't pass the corresponding test, you'll get a 100% refund.

Another resource, which also has a 100% guarantee that you'll pass, is SpeedyPrep (<http://www.speedyprep.com/>). And you can find links to many other prep resources at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studymaterials.asp>.

Don't Forget About DSSTs!

In addition to CLEP (the College Level Examination Program) tests, which most people have heard about, there are also DSSTs. Like CLEP tests, DSSTs are essentially final exams for college courses. They earn you 3 credits, which means that unlike the five most popular CLEP tests (which earn you 6 credits each), there's less material covered in each of DSST.

And, unlike CLEP tests, you can take paper-based DSSTs through many ESOs.

For a complete list of DSSTs that are available, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>. A number of these cover subjects you've mastered during your Coast Guard service, either on-the-job or in training you've received. These are tests you may be able to pass with very little preparation, depending on your rate. These include:

- Introduction to Computing
- Principles of Finance
- Principles of Financial Accounting
- Management Information Systems
- Organizational Behavior
- Personal Finance
- Human Resource Management
- Principles of Supervision
- Ethics in America
- Fundamentals of Counseling
- Drug & Alcohol Abuse
- Here's to Your Health
- Principles of Public Speaking
- Technical Writing
- Criminal Justice
- Introduction to Law Enforcement

Keep in mind, though, that these are tests – not courses. The links to each exam you'll find at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp> take you to that exam's very short fact sheet which outlines the topics covered on the test, provides suggested references to study to prepare for the test, and a number of sample questions. But, on the whole, you have to find study materials that will work for you and study without a curriculum or instructor.

Need Help Choosing a College/University?

(courtesy of Brion Newman, full-time ESO at Base Seattle)

The US Department of Education has recently overhauled one of its web sites. The College Navigator page (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>) includes a search engine that allows you to plug in criteria you want your ideal school to possess, and then gives you a list of schools which meet those criteria.

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.

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.

On-line Professional Development Courses

Excelsior College's Center for Professional Development recently sent out its 2012 Online Program Catalog. It describes more than a hundred non-credit courses in business, education, health care, investigative science, skilled trades, sustainable and green energy, technology & design. For more information about these courses, go to <http://www.excelsior.edu/cpd> and <http://www.excelsior.edu/cpddemo>.

And Thomas Edison State College also offers "professional certificates and other noncredit programs that prepare students for a wide variety of professions in the fastest growing industries and meet the needs of large and small organizations through customized training." Most recently added to its professional certificates are Electronic Health

Records and Counterterrorism Intelligence. And its newest non-credit courses are “Leadership through Governance – The Role of Nonprofit Boards” and “General Building Code”. For a list of them all, go to <http://www.tesc.edu/watson/Find-Noncredit-Program.cfm>.

Because you will not earn college credit for these courses, tuition assistance won't pay for them. But the courses are approved for GI Bill education benefits. And, if a course is related to your job, your unit may decide it's worth using training funds to pay for it.

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.

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.