

TraCen Cape May Education Update #397

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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:

Name	Work Site	Test
BM3 Jason Ruffenach	VBST Cape May	DWINTO
SN Blake Berrios	ANT Cape May	E-PME-4
FN Stephen Tucker	CGC Ibis	E-PME-4*

* 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 – Does the Coast Guard have a student loan repayment program for civilians?

Q: I'm a new Coast Guard civilian employee and have a big student loan debt. Does the Coast Guard have a program that could help me with these debts?

A: The Coast Guard does have a program which will “repay certain types of federally insured student loans as recruitment or retention incentive for certain Coast Guard civilian employees paid from appropriated funds.” For more information, see ALCOAST 419/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST419-11.pdf>) and the directive which authorizes the program (COMDTINST 12500.3, http://www.uscg.mil/directives/ci/12000-12999/CI_12500_3.pdf).

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: **Accreditation** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/accreditation.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, **discreet** and **discrete**. (These definitions are taken from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.)

The word **discreet** is an adjective with two completely different meanings. Its primary definition relates to “having or showing discernment or good judgment in conduct and, especially, in speech”, but it's most often used to mean maintaining a prudent silence. Example: “Both tried to be discreet about their romance, but were unable to keep it secret.” Its secondary meaning is unpretentious or modest: “The house had a discreet elegance about it.”

The word **discrete** is also an adjective. It means “constituting a separate entity; consisting of distinct or unconnected elements; non-continuous” as in, “The incidents occurred in three discrete periods.”

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.

Articles of Interest

During the past week, Mr. Brion Newman (full-time ESO at Base Seattle) sent me a *New York Times* op-ed piece that should be of interest to any high school students who are trying to decide where to go to college — and their parents: “The College Rankings Racket” (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/opinion/nocera-the-silly-list-everyone-cares-about.html>). And after you've read it, check out the “College & University Rankings” page on my web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/rankings.asp>).

FY13 Tuition Assistance

Funding for tuition assistance for FY13 is now available for all applicants via eTA (<https://myeducation.netc.navy.mil/consentbanner.html>). As has always been the case, the Institute will only accept applications for courses which begin three months or less after the date you submit your application.

GI Bill Application Processing

If you plan to use GI Bill benefits, make sure you don't wait until just before you plan to start school to submit your application.

Before you can use your GI Bill benefit (under any of the four GI Bill education programs), you **must** activate it by submitting an application (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-o.asp#activate>). Be aware that the usual amount of time the Department of Veterans' Affairs takes to process your application is three to four **months**. Recently, however, the processing time has been even longer.

The bottom line is: PLAN AHEAD if you expect to use GI Bill education benefits to pay for or reimburse you for college.

New GI Bill: Switching vs. Transferring

A lot of people seem to think that to transfer new (Post-9/11) GI Bill benefits to dependents, they first have to switch from the Montgomery GI Bill to the new GI Bill. This is not the case, and could delay your dependents by months from using your new GI Bill education benefit.

If you're enrolled in the Montgomery GI Bill (Active Duty), are eligible for new GI Bill benefits, and want one or more dependents to be able to use those new GI Bill benefits, all you have to do is transfer any or all of your 36 months of entitlement to them. To do so follow the instructions you'll find at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-33c.asp>. You have to use a Coast Guard workstation to do this.

CG Institute Tests Related to Your Rating

In case you're not aware, or had forgotten, you can take end-of-course tests for any course offered by the Coast Guard Institute, regardless of your pay grade or, if you're enlisted, your rating.

BMs, you might want to consider taking the "Maneuvering Boards" and "Basic Radar" courses and tests to solidify skills you're likely to use as well as show your initiative and professional drive.

MEs, you could take the IV2 course and test to deepen your knowledge of use of force, defensive tactics, protective service operations, investigative techniques, and other matters related to law enforcement.

The point is, if you're interested in a particular subject that may or may not be related to your rating, there's nothing preventing you from taking an Institute course that covers that subject. You will have to complete any RPQs which are pre-requisites for some tests (e.g., you'd have to complete the IV2 RPQs before you could take the IV2 test). But if you pass the test, you'll earn ACE credits which may be recognized by colleges and universities.

CLEP's Forgotten Cousin

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 (which are now only available in a computer-based format), 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 tests cover subjects you've mastered during your Coast Guard service, either on-the-job or in training you've received. You may be able to pass the tests below with very little preparation, depending on your rate.

- 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

The first time you take a DSST (like a CLEP test), it's free. If you need to re-take it, you have to pay for it. The waiting period between your tests is 90 days.

Keep in mind 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 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.

New DSST Practice Tests

Prometric, the company which owns DSSTs (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>) has just release new on-line practice tests for the most-taken DSSTs. The latest are for these exams:

- Environment & Humanity: The Race to Save the Planet
- Organizational Behavior
- The Civil War and Reconstruction

For access to these and other practice tests, go to <https://ibt.prometric.com/dsst>. They cost \$5 for each title, but you can take it twice within a 24-hour window.

USMAP

USMAP (United Services Military Apprenticeship Program, <https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss/static/usmap.jsp>), is a program through which active duty enlisted personnel can earn certification for skills learned on-the-job and through related technical instruction.

You can complete apprenticeships in 125 trades through USMAP by documenting work experience you acquire on the job, while performing your regular military duties. No after-hours work is required.

The only extra work you have to do is keep track of hours spent in each category of work, fill out your record sheets, and once a quarter send a report of your accumulated hours to USMAP to receive credit for them.

“USMAP enhances your job skills and shows your motivation for more challenging military assignments.” Once you’ve completed the required work hours in each of the skills listed for the trade, your record will be verified then submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor from which you’ll receive a certification that you’ve completed the specified apprenticeship program. This will be “a definite advantage in getting better civilian jobs since employers know the value of apprenticeships.”

For more information about USMAP, go to <https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss/static/usmap.jsp>.

RPQs, EPQs, and Practical Factors

At your earliest opportunity, you should go to the CGPortal (<https://elearning.uscg.mil>) and download the current version of your RPQs (Rating Performance Qualifications: what used to be called EPQs and, before that, practical factors).

Click on “Course Catalog” then scroll down and click on “Enlisted Advancement” and, finally, find your rating. The RPQs for all pay grades within your rating are available under any of the headings you’ll see. That is, if you’re preparing to advance to BMC, you can find the RPQs for BMC (as well as BM3, BM2, BM1, BMCS, and BMCM) under “000112 Boatswain's Mate, First Class (BM1)”, “000212 Boatswain's Mate, Second Class (BM2)”, or “000312 Boatswain's Mate, Third Class (BM3)”.

EPQs for all ratings have been converted to RPQs within the last few months. **Don’t assume the only thing that’s different is the use of RPQ instead of EPQ.** In some cases, the individual RPQs are identical to the EPQs; in some cases there have been changes. Carefully compare the wording of each RPQ with the corresponding EPQ it replaced, to ensure you have all the current ones completed before the 01 February deadline for the May 2013 servicewide exam.

Servicewide Exams & Your ESO

Confusion lingers over the role of the ESO in the servicewide exam (SWE) process. The ESO’s role is to administer the exams on dates laid out in Coast Guard directives. If you have completed all advancement requirements (and if that information is recorded in DirectAccess) by a specified date, a SWE will automatically be sent by PPC to the Examination Board listed on your PDE. Neither you nor your ESO can request a SWE. If you’re eligible, a SWE will be sent. If you want your exam sent to an exam board other than that listed on your PDE, you must advise your SPO of that fact before the last date PDE corrections may be submitted. All deadlines associated with taking a SWE are listed in the ALCGENL message that announces the SWE.

Below is a table showing the eligibility deadlines (i.e., the dates by which you have to have completed all advancement requirements to take the next SWE) and the when SWEs are administered.

Eligibility Deadline	Servicewide Exam Administration Date
01FEB	AM on first Tuesday in May (exam for advancement to E-5)
01FEB	PM on first Tuesday in May (exam for advancement to E-7)
01FEB	AM on Thursday following the first Tuesday in May (exam for advancement to E-6)
01FEB	PM on Thursday following the first Tuesday in May (exam for advancement to E-8/E-9)
01JUL	AM on third Saturday in October (Reservists exam for advancement to E-5 through E-9)
01AUG	AM on first Thursday in November (exam for advancement to E-5)
01AUG	PM on first Thursday in November (exam for advancement to E-6)

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.

Help Yourself With a SOC Agreement

If you're taking courses from a school that's part of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) consortium, do yourself a favor and get a SOC agreement as soon as you've completed the number of credits your school requires for you to complete its residency requirement. Do so even if you're not in a SOCCOAST program.

Why? Because a SOC agreement (a degree plan and contract with your school) locks in the courses you have to pass to get your degree.

Why is this an issue? Unfortunately, colleges sometimes will change degree requirements while you're working on your degree. (Essentially, they move the goalposts.) If you have a SOC agreement with your school, the school has to honor it – even if the school changes the requirements for completing the degree program you're pursuing.

To find out if your school's a SOC school, go to SOC's web site (http://www.soc.aascu.org/pubfiles/socmisc/SOC_Cnsrtm_Schools_2012-07.pdf).

Coast Guard Institute Deck Watch Officer Course

If you'd like the latest version of the Navigation Rules, International - Inland (COMDTINST M16672.2D) and a set of flash cards, you can order them through your ESO from the Coast Guard Institute. Keep in mind that you are responsible for correcting the NavRules in your book. You can find the most current updates on the NavCen web site at <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=navRulesContent>.

The DWINTR test is an open-book test, but you may only use the corrected NavRules book during the test. The only acceptable markings in the book are official changes and updates from the NavCen web site. Your book cannot contain personalized tabs, indexes, or notes.

Having Trouble Passing the Deck Watch Officer Test?

If you've taken, but haven't passed, the Deck Watch Officer (DWINTO) test and want to improve your chances of doing so – and actually learn the rules while you're at it – you owe it to yourself to check out RulesMaster Pro (<http://www.rulesmaster.com/>). This interactive Australian software provides

- a complete self-paced learning program. Five lessons cover every Rule, with learning goals for each lesson clearly stated and a quiz after each session to assess progress and identify areas for further review;
- FlashCards II (almost 200 flashcards covering all parts of the international Rules and the IALA buoyage system) and QuickQuiz II (hundreds of questions in short-answer format adapted from the US Coast Guard Merchant Marine Deck Exams). These present realistic scenarios for you to identify the correct course of action; and
- an electronic version of the COLREGS, which allows you to search for a word or phrase or go to a specific Rule.

To get a sense of what the software offers, go to <http://www.rulesmaster.com/products/view/1> and <http://www.rulesmaster.com/products/slideshow/1>. It costs just over \$90. You can also make an appointment to use it in the Education Center (Admin/Mission Support Building, Room 113).

Course Dates on Your TA Application

A lot of people don't give much thought to the course starting and ending dates they put on their TA applications. But they can greatly affect you – especially the ending date. The course ending date you put on your application (which ends up on your authorization) determines how soon the Navy will go after you for payment.

If you don't send a grade report for each course listed on a TA authorization, 60 days after the course ending date listed on your authorization, the Navy's computer will automatically send you (by mail) a nastygram demanding either a grade report or payment for the course. (If you don't provide a grade report within 42 days of the course ending date, you'll be locked out of eTA and won't be able to use TA again until you've provided the grade report.) Thirty days after that first nastygram (if you haven't provided your grade report or sent payment for the course), the Navy's computer will send another one – this time, to your CO. If you blow off the second letter, the Navy will send one more thirty days later. It will advise you that the amount of TA paid to your school for the course will be deducted from your pay.

So what dates should you put into your application? The starting date should be the date the school's term starts: not the date orientation is held or the first day of classes. Similarly, the ending date should be the date the school's term ends: not the last day you attend class, the date of your last final, or the date final exams end.

Exercise Your Mind

A lot of us go to the gym or elsewhere at lunch time to get physical exercise. If you work out at some other time, consider spending lunch exercising your mind.

There are a number of thought-provoking videos available on the Internet. Some I'll be showing are Michael Sandel's famous Harvard philosophy course, "Justice" (<http://www.harvardjustice.org/>) and the Fred Friendly seminars "Ethics in America" (<http://www.learner.org/resources/series81.html>) and "The Constitution: That Delicate Balance" (<http://www.learner.org/resources/series72.html>).

Each is just under an hour long. Drop by the Education next Tuesday at 1130 to watch. Feel free to bring your lunch.

Microsoft Home Use Program

Although it hasn't been advertised in an ALCOAST since last year, the Microsoft Home Use Program is still available to Coast Guard personnel. To quote ALCOAST 234/11, "This program is open to active duty, reserve, and civilian employees. Contractors are not eligible because they are not Coast Guard employees."

You can buy a non-transferrable copy of Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010 for \$9.95 plus tax. "The software may be used for as long as the purchaser is employed by the Coast Guard. Upon leaving Coast Guard employment, the software must be removed

from your computer.”

To buy the software, to go <http://hup.microsoft.com> and follow these steps:

- select appropriate country/region
- enter your Coast Guard e-mail address
- click on “Don’t know your program code?”
- follow the instructions which will be sent to your Coast Guard e-mail address.

Giveaways in the Education Center

In addition to for-the-taking booklets on college majors and financing college, the Education Center (Admin/Mission Support Building, Room 113) also many copies of

- *College.edu – Online Resources for the Cyber-Savvy Student*
- *College Success Guide: Top 12 Secrets for Student Success*
- *Best Career and Education Web Sites*
- *Online Learning*
- *DANTES College Career Workbook*
- *College Success Tips for Adult Learners*

Drop by and see what’s available.

College Credit for Some SkillPort Courses

In addition to being free to Coast Guard personnel and dependents, SkillPort courses may also earn you college credits.

“It really depends upon which course you took”, says Sue Riley at the Coast Guard Institute, and whether it was evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE). If it was, “you have to take a test proctored by the ESO and receive a passing score.”

Ms. Riley continues, “There is a form that must be completed and signed by both you and the ESO” which the ESO sends, along with the passing score report, to the Institute. “We will notify ACE that you passed and you can then submit an assessment request” and receive a transcript listing credits earned for the course.

Is Distance Learning for You?

If you’re trying to decide between taking courses in a classroom or via distance learning (aka distance education), you owe it to yourself to use one or more of the on-line assessment tools available from DANTES and various colleges (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#01>). Spending some time with these tools could save you time and a lot of aggravation down the road.

Online Academic Skills Course

Another resource to use both for tests like the AFCT/ASVAB and for college courses is Peterson’s Online Academic Skills Course (OASC). To quote its web site, it’s “designed for individuals who want to build a solid academic foundation by improving their math and verbal skills in order to score well on exams, advance their education, and excel in their careers. . . . OASC is available for free 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the web to service members (regular and Reserve), civilian employees, and their families.”

The course (at <http://www.nelnetsolutions.com/dantes>) includes

- a pre-test (to gauge your strengths and weaknesses)
- a Customized Learning Path™ (a personalized set of lessons based on your pre-test results)
- lessons which include interactive activities, flash cards, quizzes, and practice tests,
- a post-test (to evaluate your progress).

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/oasc-faq.pdf>.

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 AUG 2012 – 30 SEP 2012
01 OCT 2012 – 30 NOV 2012

Scholarship Award Dates

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.

TraCen Cape May Testing Schedule

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

Mondays (0745): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs

Tuesdays (0745): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs

Wednesdays (0745): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs* **or** Defense Language Proficiency Tests (DLPT)

Thursdays (0745): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs; college tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

Fridays (0745): EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs

* If someone has made an appointment to take a DLPT (a 6-hour test), there will be no EOCTs, RATs, and AQEs.

College placement, AFCT, and all other tests will be scheduled on a case-by-case basis.

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 I'm 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 Rating Performance Qualifications (RPQs) for each rate.

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.