

TraCen Cape May Education Update #234

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Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
DC2 Dan George	TraCen (Seamanship)	DC1

Well done PO George!!

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.

Next Weekly Workshop: Tuition Assistance

I'm currently holding a series of informal workshops on the following topics:

- **Education Assessments** – how to find out how many college credits you've acquired through military service
- **Tuition Assistance** – how to apply for the Coast Guard's Tuition Assistance (TA), what it can be used for, etc.
- **ASVAB** – how to find out what schools you currently qualify for, re-taking specific tests, how to study for it
- **Enlisted-to-Officer programs** – learn what programs are available, how to apply, deadlines, etc.
- **Financial assistance for dependents** – learn what's available, how to find it, etc.

We're rotating through the above list. Last week, we covered Education Assessments; next week it'll be Tuition Assistance. After I've covered all five topics, we'll start the rotation over again.

The Education Assessments, Tuition Assistance, and ASVAB workshops will be held in the Learning Resource Center (computer lab) on the first deck of Munro Hall at 1300 on Wednesdays or as announced (if recruits have it booked). The others will be held in the Education & Career Development Center (Admin Bldg, Rm 113) starting at 1130 on Wednesdays. You're welcome to bring your lunch to the 1130 workshops.

These workshops will be open for anyone who's interested in and/or who has questions about the topic. All you have to do is show up. Each workshop will be announced in this newsletter each week.

If you lose track of which workshop is being held in any particular week, you can look at my Outlook calendar. If you're not sure how to do that, open your Outlook calendar and follow this path: File > Open > Other User's Folder

Click on "Name" and find my name, then click OK and you'll see my calendar.

CGMA Supplemental Education Grant Increase

Coast Guard Mutual Assistance (CGMA) has graciously decided to increase the annual amount eligible Coast Guard personnel can receive to help offset the cost of education expenses not covered by tuition assistance (TA). Starting 01 January 2009, the maximum annual reimbursement will be \$250.

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#seg>.

Degrees vs. Certificates

One thing to consider before jumping into a college-level course is whether to get a degree or a certificate.

An academic degree (e.g., an A.A. or B.S.) may be what you need to get the job you're looking for. But it may not. A degree typically requires that you complete a lot of courses not directly related to the field you're interested in. For example, a typical bachelor's degree in criminal justice requires you to earn 120 credits. But only something like 33 of those will specifically be criminal justice courses.

On the other hand, an academic certificate program is less extensive than a degree program (typically between 9 and 18 credits). Paraphrased from the University of Kentucky's web site, a certificate is "an integrated group of courses that is designed to have a very clear and focused academic topic or competency as its subject area." Certificates often "meet a clearly defined educational need of a constituency group (such as continuing education or accreditation for a particular profession), respond to a specific state mandate, or provide a basic competency in an emerging, usually interdisciplinary, area." A certificate provides "the student formal recognition of the mastery of a clearly defined academic topic."

Why earn a certificate rather than a degree? An academic certificate can add a new area of expertise to a degree you already hold or allow you to create a specialty in a field related to your undergraduate major or graduate specialty. Or you can use it to explore a whole new academic field to find out whether you want to get a degree in that field. The courses you'll take to get a certificate would count toward your major courses or electives if you're getting an undergrad degree or might count toward your graduate degree, depending on its requirements.

For example, say you're interested in possibly working toward a undergrad degree in homeland security. But you're not sure it's exactly right for you. So you decide to get an undergraduate certificate in Weapons of Mass Destruction Preparedness (18 credits). When you're done, you'll have the certificate (the courses for which you can apply toward an associate's or bachelor's degree) and quite a bit of knowledge about a specialized field. That should be enough to give you an idea whether you want to take all the rest of the courses necessary to get the homeland security degree or if you'd rather move in another direction.

If you're interested in finding out if a given field is for you (or if the organization you want to work for doesn't require you to have a degree), you might want to consider getting an academic certificate instead of a degree. And in both the civilian world and the military, degrees and certificates are proof of what you've accomplished and, by demonstrating your initiative, set you apart from your peers.

Recently-Arrived College Info

I've recently received literature from schools offering military-friendly undergraduate and graduate distance learning programs.

- **Jones International University** has created a number of degree programs aimed specifically at military personnel. This is a regionally-accredited school. You can check out JIU's Military Advancement Program at <http://www.jiumilitary.com/index.php>.
- **Western Governors University** has a new Spouses to Graduates Scholarship for spouses of Regular and Reserve military personnel. The scholarship applies to its bachelor's and master's degrees in business, information technology, teacher education, and the health professions. This is a regionally-accredited school. For more information, go to <http://www.wgu.edu/spousestograds>.
- **Charter Oak State College's** new distance learning course schedule is available. Charter Oak offers associate's and bachelor's degrees as well as certificates for an extremely affordable tuition. This is a regionally-accredited school. Go to the school's web site is <http://www.charteroak.edu> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up a course schedule.
- **Ashford University** offers bachelor's and master's degree courses at a reasonable price. This is a regionally-accredited school. For more information, go to <http://www.ashfordmilitary.com> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up flyer.
- **Southerwestern College** offers bachelor's and master's degree courses at a reasonable price. This is a regionally-accredited school. For more information, go to <http://www.southerwesterncollege.org/> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up brochure.
- **American Sentinel Univeristy** offers associate's, bachelor's, and master's degree courses at a reasonable price which you can take in 8- or 12-week terms. This is a nationally-accredited school. For more information go to <http://www.americansentinel.edu/> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up brochure.

Have You Got a SOC Agreement Yet?

If you've taken six or more credits toward your degree and your school is a SOC school (a member of the Servicemembers' Opportunity Colleges consortium), you should request a SOC Agreement from the school.

Why? A SOC Agreement lays out exactly how many courses you've completed toward your degree and how many and which courses you still need to complete it. Essentially, it's an official degree plan.

The Agreement is binding on the school, in that the school can't move the goalpost and require you to take courses that aren't on the Agreement. However, you can decide later on to switch to another school if you like – with no penalty. And SOC Agreements are available to your dependents, too.

To find out more about SOCCOAST (pronounced sock-coast) and a link to find out if your school is a SOC school, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/soccoast.asp>.

Coast Guard Academy Scholarship

The CGA Scholarship is targeted at candidates who seek to become Coast Guard officers via the Coast Guard Academy, but who need additional academic development in order to succeed at the Academy.

CGA Scholars are chosen from the Academy applicant pool based on their preparation, leadership potential, motivation, capacity to contribute, and the needs of the service. Approximately 50 to 60 students may be admitted to the CGA scholarship program each year. About 85 percent of scholarship recipients subsequently earn appointments and enroll at the Academy as fourth-class cadets after completing the ten month course of academic, physical, and military instruction at either New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, NM, or Marion Military Institute in Marion, AL.

For more information, see ALCOAST 403/08.

Tuition Assistance for Officers

In accordance with ALCOAST 012/09, starting on 01 April 2009 “active duty officers who participate in the tuition assistance program will . . . incur a 2-year service obligation following the completion of the course(s) for which they are using tuition assistance. Officers of the selected reserve who participate in the Coast Guard tuition assistance program will incur a 4-year service obligation following the completion of the course(s) for which tuition assistance was used.”

Keep this in mind when filling out your tuition assistance application.

A number of questions about this new policy remain to be answered (e.g., whether it applies only to Coast Guard officers, or also to PHS officers, how it applies to officers who are to retire in less than two years or who have been passed over twice for promotion). Please be aware that CG-132 has been apprised of the need for clarification on these questions and will provide it in the fullness of time.

New Tuition Assistance Application Process

If you're using tuition assistance (TA) you know that six other commands in the Coast Guard and TraCen Cape May are now using to a computerized application processing using a Navy web site called eTA. At the moment, ESOs at these seven units are reviewing applications and then submitting them to the Institute for final processing. For info on how to use this system, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp#applying>.

For the last few years, the Institute has required all TA applications be submitted to the Institute at least two weeks before the starting date of courses listed on your application. To submit an application closer than two weeks to your course starting date, you've had to submit a waiver request with your application. The purpose of this two-week requirement was to allow time for the Institute's staff to process TA applications and get authorizations back to students before the course started.

Although the Institute's processing time has not changed, the requirement that a waiver request must be submitted with applications if there's less than two weeks before a course starts has been dropped.

This doesn't mean that you can send me your eTA application the day or the week before your course is to start and expect to get your TA authorization back in a day. Applications received within the two-week window will not receive special or rush treatment by the Institute and will be processed with the other TA applications as they are received. This **only** means that you don't have to request a waiver if you submit it less than 14 days before your course begins.

Because it often takes the Institute longer than two weeks to process a TA application and get the authorization to you, I still **highly** recommend that you submit eTA applications to me as soon as you know which courses you're going to take and when they begin.

I can submit TA applications up to three months (90 days) before courses begin and will hold those I receive more than three months early. If you send your applications to me as soon as you have all the required information, you won't have to think about whether you got it in on time. I'll submit them three months before your chosen course begins and you should have your authorization in plenty of time to register.

Questions about the New GI Bill

If you've logged on to the VONAPP web site (<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>) to activate your MGIB education benefit, you may have seen the following: "The Post 9/11 GI Bill program has not yet been implemented. Do not submit applications for this benefit at this time. Please visit www.gibill.va.gov for the latest information on this program."

Don't panic!! All this is saying is that right now, you can't activate your education benefit under the new GI Bill (Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act). This is because the new GI Bill legislation doesn't take effect until 01 August 2009. You can ignore this if you just want to activate your MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP benefit.

Also a number of people have asked me "If I activate my MGIB education benefit now, will that lock me into the current version of the GI Bill or will the GI Bill change when the program changes (such as if I CG want to get the new GI Bill)?"

The short answer to your question is, "No, it won't lock you into anything". However, if a person now eligible for the MGIB-AD activates her MGIB-AD benefit and after 01 August switches to the new GI Bill, the VA may want her to do something to show she's elected the new GI Bill and rejected the MGIB.

If you're dead sure you're going to be switching to the new GI Bill, my advice would be to hold off on activating your MGIB benefit.

The only reason I urge people to activate it as soon as they're eligible to do so (after two years of active duty) is that most forget to do so until they they're about to leave the Coast Guard and want to start using it for school immediately. Since the VA activation process can take between three and four months, a person who waits may find him/herself not getting reimbursed for some time for money s/he's paid for school.

But if you're not going to be leaving for awhile and don't plan to use Top-up (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-30.asp#topup>), there's no pressing need to activate the MGIB-AD benefit immediately.

Finally, I'm willing to bet that no one will be ineligible for the new GI Bill just because s/he's previously activated his/her MGIB benefit (the MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP) – that would make millions of veterans ineligible for the new GI Bill.

FEEA and Other Scholarships for Civilian Employees and their Dependents

Every year, the Federal Employee Education & Assistance Fund sponsors the only annual, merit-based contest open only to civilian federal and postal employees, their spouses and college-age children. More than 400 awards, ranging from \$500 to \$7,500 for one year, are awarded. From this this pool of 400, the top students in each of 26 regions have the chance to win two additional awards.

Six of these students will win an additional \$5,000 through the FEEA-NTEU Scholarship. And additional money is awarded through the Cooke Memorial Scholarship. The deadline for the FEEA scholarship contest is 27 March 2009.

And students whose parents are members of selected federal management associations, unions, and agencies may also be eligible for additional awards. FEEA accepts applications from more than a dozen partner organizations as if they were our own.

For more information about these scholarships, go to <http://www.feea.org/>.

CG Exchange System Dependent Scholarship

ALCOAST 489/08 announced the 2008 Coast Guard Exchange System Scholarship program for high-school-age dependents of all members of Team Coast Guard. Three scholarships will be awarded: \$1,500, \$750, and \$500.

In addition to the application form, applicants must also submit:

- a high school transcript or, for home schoolers, standardized test results
- SAT or ACT scores
- a short (1-page) essay
- two letters of recommendation

Applications and details are available by selecting "Scholarship Opportunities" at www.uscg.mil/mwr or by sending a pre-addressed and stamped business size (#10) envelope to CGES Scholarship Committee (ATTN: Jana Sias), Coast Guard Exchange System Headquarters, 870 Greenbriar Cir., Suite 502, Chesapeake, VA 23320-2681.

The deadline for submissions is 27 February 2009.

In the Latest Issue of Decision Times...

A new issue of Decision Times (a supplement to the Navy Times) just arrived and is available in the Education & Career Development Center. Here's a list of some of the articles:

- Law enforcement in the 21st century
- Engineers in demand in tough economy
- Designer vs. developer – which web job is right for you
- Online job boards target retirees
- Join the FBI's tactical elite
- Fur-friendly franchises – vets cash in on pet care boom
- Low costs draw more students to public colleges
- Unemployment projected to reach 7 percent in 2009
- December career fairs

Copies of this issue, and many previous issues, are available for the taking. Stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up a copy. When you're done with it, please pass it along to someone else who might find it useful.

Tuition Assistance & Grade Reports

If you're using tuition assistance (TA) to take college courses, remember that you **must** provide the grade report for your courses to the Coast Guard Institute within 60 days of the end of the course. If you don't, you'll receive a series of nastygrams from the Navy (which is the Coast Guard's agent for paying TA to schools) demanding reimbursement for the courses you used TA to pay for.

To avoid this, provide a copy of your grade report (with your full name and SSN on it) to your ESO. Your ESO will then submit it (usually via e-mail) to the Institute. If you're unable to put your SSN on it (e.g., if you print it to a PDF file from your computer screen), provide it to your ESO.

If at all possible (so what the Institute sees is legible), print your on-line grade report to a PDF file. If you're not sure how to do this, here's the process.

- (1) Get the grade report on your computer screen.
- (2) Select "File" and "Print" (or press CTRL and P at the same time)
- (3) Select "Adobe PDF"
- (4) Click on "Preferences"
- (5) Click "Layout" tab
- (6) Select "Landscape"
- (7) Click "OK"
- (8) Click on "Print"
- (9) Click "Save" after deciding where you want to save the file
- (10) Attach the PDF document you just created to an e-mail and send it to me.

And if possible, please include in your e-mail the number of the TA authorization which corresponds to the grade report. The TA authorization number is in the upper right corner of your authorization (CGI_____).

Credit-by-Exam Study Materials

Materials used to study for CLEP tests, DSSTs, and (to a lesser extent) ECEs are no longer be available from the DoD.

Study materials relevant to most of the tests you can take for college credit are now available free through various sources via the Internet. Some of these are:

- Annenberg Media (<http://www.learner.org/>)
- the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.free.ed.gov/>)
- the Public Broadcasting System (<http://www.pbs.org/>)
- the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/>)
- the History Channel (<http://www.history.com/>)
- MSN Encarta (<http://encarta.msn.com/>)
- Navy Knowledge Online (<https://wwwa.nko.navy.mil/portal/home/>)

In the future, a comprehensive DANTES exam study guide will be located on the Coast Guard Learning Portal (<https://learning.uscg.mil/>). It will include the SOC code for each exam, ACE credit recommendation, a practice exam, and links to on-line study aids.

Activate Your GI Bill ASAP

If you're in the regular Coast Guard, didn't turn down the GI Bill during boot camp, and have served for two or more years on active duty you should activate your GI Bill education benefit. The same is true if you're a Reservist and have completed your IADT.

Why? Let me give you an analogy. Do you apply for a new credit card today and expect to have it to use tomorrow? The same is true for using your GI Bill education benefit. The VA can take three or four months to process your activation request and during that time, you can't use your benefit. (Activating your benefit does not start the clock running on your 10- or 14-year expiration period.)

And now, you can complete your activation request completely on-line using the VA's VONAPP web site (<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>). Mr. Waymon Bryant, full-time ESO at ISC New Orleans, provided the following step-by-step directions on how to fill out the activation request.

- Click on "Start VONAPP"
- Click "continue", located at the bottom right of the web page, until you reach the login and Pass screen
- Click on "Sign up now" and create a user name/ Password (with hint)
- Select "Form 22-1990" from the drop down menu located at the top and click continue
- You will be asked a series of questions to create your electronic submission.

Activate your GI Bill education benefits today, even if you don't plan to use them, so you'll be able to when you do want to use them.

Online Student Survival Guide

Western Governors University has a blog with all kinds of comments, tips, and general info about on-line courses. Check it out at <http://onlinestudentsurvival.com/>. NOTE: some of the items in this blog are thinly-veiled ads for Western Governors University, so take those with a grain of salt.

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. 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.

AFCT (ASVAB re-test) Preparation

If you really want to improve your ASVAB math or verbal scores, take a course through your local community college.

For example, Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) has review courses in math and English you can use tuition assistance to pay for. Rather than flounder around trying to study on your own, kill two birds with one stone: get a feel for what college courses are like and brush up on the subjects you need to improve to get to “A” school.

Another option is to use prep materials for the math and English parts of the GED. Much of what you’ll be tested on in the AFCT (the in-service version of the ASVAB) is covered by the GED tests.

And you can find more resources (especially for math) linked to the TraCen Cape May web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/asvab.asp#preparing>.

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.