

TraCen Cape May Education Update #238

In this Update:

- Congratulations!!
- Next weekly workshop: education assessments
- GI Bill benefit comparison chart
- New advanced education program for DCs
- Free on-line language lessons
- Boatswain's mate testing & advancement
- Free on-line college lecture videos
- Opportunites for ambitious high school students
- College discussion board
- Free on-line college fair: 25-26 March
- Question of the week
- Income tax deduction/credit & TA
- MGIB-AD Buy-up option & the new GI Bill
- Don't assume you have to pay all college fees
- E-PME AQEs & E-PME parts of the SWE
- Scholarships for military women
- Don't wait to submit TA applications
- CG Exchange System dependent scholarship
- Scholarships for civilian employees and their dependents
- DSSTs
- Credit-by-exam study materials
- Degrees vs. certificates
- Tuition Assistance & grade reports
- Online student survival guide
- Leaving the Coast Guard?
- Miscellaneous

Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
FN James Arnold	TraCen (UPH)	E-PME-4
MK2 Jayson Moran	ANT Cape May	E-PME-6
BMCS Shawn Hoefling	OIC Station Maui	DWINTR

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.

Next Weekly Workshop: Education Assessments

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 Tuition Assistance; next week it'll be re-taking ASVAB tests. 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 elsewhere (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.

GI Bill Benefit Comparison Chart

The Department of Veterans Affairs has just published on its web site a new page comparing the benefits you can receive under each of the existing GI Bill education benefit programs: MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, REAP, and the new Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. Included on this page is a table showing these side-by-side. You can find this information at http://www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_Info/CH33/Benefit_Comparison_Chart.htm.

New Advanced Education Program for DCs

The Damage Control Industrial Technology (DCIT) program is a long-term program with the goal of building a high level of both technical and managerial competency among senior petty officers. This program provides senior enlisted personnel up to 24 months of full time college education to achieve a degree in fire science, industrial technology, or civil engineering technology.

If selected for this program, you will be required to achieve a minimum of an associate's degree upon completion.

The initial solicitation for applicants to the DCIT program is in ALCOAST 101/09

(<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST101-09.pdf>).

Selectees will be obligated to serve for three months per month of instruction for the first twelve months, and one month per month of instruction thereafter. If you fail to complete the entire course of study you will still be obligated to serve for each month of education they complete according to the formula described above.

The program is open only to Regular Coast Guard DC1s, DCCs, and DCCSs who have at least six years of military service (two of which has been in the Coast Guard) as of 01 June 2009.

Free On-line Language Lessons

If you have a library card for the Cape May County Library system and Internet access, you can use Mango Languages. This is a system similar to Rosetta Stone, which was previously available through the libraries' web site. Through Mango, you can learn Brazilian Portugues, Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese. Also available are English for Polish, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese speakers.

To check it out, go to http://www.cape-may.county.lib.nj.us/online_databases.asp#Language and find "Mango Languages" in the menu on the left side of the page under "Authorized Links".

Boatswain's Mate Testing & Advancement

Last week, under this heading, I published information LCDR Mark Pesnell (CO at Station Cape May) graciously gave me. It was 99% correct. But, as numerous BMCs have let me know, the bullet on advancement to BMC had some incorrect information in it. Below is the corrected info, thanks to the sharp eyes of BMC Kenneth Seebeck and BMC William Schroeder. The definitive word on these things is in articles 5.C.15.c and 5.C.15.d.1. of the Personnel Manual.

Boatswain's Mates are the most tested and examined rating I've ever seen. Here's the road ahead for them, assuming they're recommended for advancement at all ranks.

- For a Striker to make BM3 he/she must pass the BM3 and E-PME-4 AQE, complete the BM3 EPQs and further successfully pass the NAVRUL or DWINTO EOCT (closed book, 90% passing score).
- To make BM2 the candidate must have a Coxswain letter on a standard CG boat, an underway cutter OOD letter, QMOW qualification and complete pass the BM2 EOCT (after completing the BM2 EPQs).
- To make BM1 they must pass E-PME-6 AQE and BM1 EOCT (after completing the BM1 EPQs), take the SWE, and complete LAMS. (During the E-4 to E-6 timeframe it is absolutely non-negotiable that BMs pass the DWINTO test, go afloat, and earn a coxswain or underway OOD certification.)
- The testing requirement for BMC only involves passing a SWE. But the candidate must have had 12 months of sea time as a rated BM in any pay grade before being eligible for the SWE.
- Here's the hardest one of all: To make BMCS and BMCM, they must pass the E-PME-8 AQE, score above the cut on the SWE, and hold Officer in Charge Certifications (afloat and ashore, multi-mission or ATON) as determined by a District Officer in Charge Review Board. Sometimes candidates appear 8+ times before Sector pre-boards and 4-5 or more times at District boards. Some never earn both certifications and either (a) retire as a BMC; or, (b) put apply for CWO. An OinC's OinC certification may be removed if he/she is relieved for cause or other legitimate reasons, which delays further advancement for 2 years before he/she can earn it back.

Free On-line College Lecture Videos

(from *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* Wired Campus; 02 February 2009)

"A new company called 'Academic Earth' (<http://www.academicearth.org/>) offers free online videos of lectures from some of the world's most renowned scholars teaching at leading universities. . . .

"The Academic Earth site notes that it features lectures from Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale Universities, as well as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of California at Berkeley. The company has no connection to the universities, however. . . ."

These videos and others are available directly from many universities' web sites. What Academic Earth does is make many of them available from one web site.

Ambitious High School Students: Check Out These Opportunities

Every year, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate choose a few high school junior to serve as pages. Pages are young people who are hired to serve as support staff in both houses of Congress. A page's duties consist primarily of delivering correspondence and legislative material in the Capitol and congressional office buildings. Other duties include preparing the chamber for sessions and carrying bills and amendments to the desk. Pages also attend classes in the early morning at the House or Senate Page School.

Pages earn just over \$20,000 annually with automatic deductions made for federal and state taxes, social security, and the residence hall fee. (House and Senate page salaries and resident hall fees vary slightly.)

This is an amazing opportunity for highly motivated young people. For application procedures and more information, go to <http://pageprogram.house.gov/> and http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Pages_vrd.htm.

Also, the White House Internship Program provides an opportunity to experience day-to-day life at the White House while working on a variety of tasks and projects.

In addition to normal office duties, interns attend weekly lectures, volunteer at special events, participate in tours, and contribute to a community service project in the Washington, D.C. area. White House Internships are unpaid positions and participants are responsible for arranging their own transportation and housing.

Approximately 100 interns are chosen each spring, summer, and fall to participate in this highly competitive program. For more information, go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/internships/>.

College Discussion Board

College Confidential is a discussion forum for college admissions, financial aid, SAT prep, and any other topic related to applying for and attending college. By joining this free community you will be able to post topics, communicate privately with other members, respond to polls, etc. Registration is fast, simple, and free. Check it out at <http://talk.collegeconfidential.com/>.

Free On-line College Fair: 25-26 March

If you're the parent of a college-bound student or are otherwise interested in getting good information about college (including admissions, financing, admission test preparation, college visits, finding the college which best fits your son, daughter, or yourself), register for CollegeWeekLive (CWL).

CWL is a two-day on-line college fair to help prospective students in their college planning by connecting them with colleges in a live, interactive environment. While it's aimed at students, parents and counselors are also welcome. And you can register for free (as well as check out the speakers, their topics, the schedule, and many other things) at <http://www.collegeweeklive.com/>.

The next CollegeWeekLive takes place on 25 and 26 March from noon to 2300 EST.

This is a really fantastic tool. You can do everything you can do at a physical college fair except physically pick up brochures and shake people's hands. You can listen to and ask questions of speakers and school representatives, you can download information, you can even chat with current students at participating colleges.

Question of the Week

Q: I've heard I can now transfer my GI Bill education benefit to my dependents. How do I do this?

A: Unfortunately, what you've heard isn't correct. The "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008" or "New GI Bill" was signed into law on 30 June 2008. However, only one of its provisions (raising the monthly rates for the Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty education benefit) has taken effect. The remaining provisions – including one which may allow you to transfer your benefit to dependents – will not take effect until 01 August 2009.

Federal Regulations and an ALCOAST and/or COMDTINST which explain in more detail what the new law provides and how it will be implemented have not yet been published. When they are, I'll make sure everyone knows about it.

Income Tax Deduction/Credit & TA

If you used TA to pay for one or more courses in calendar year 2008, you may receive from your school an official-looking statement showing how much you and the Coast Guard paid to your school for tuition (IRS form 1098-T). This 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 one of them. 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 an overview of these deductions and credits at <http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/taxbenefitsguide.html>. And the IRS publication which goes into depth about them is at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf>.

MGIB-AD Buy-up Option & the New GI Bill

If you're one of the many far-sighted people who took advantage of the Montgomery GI Bill's Buy-up option, you need to know that at the moment there's no legislation in the works which would let you use the extra money you contributed (or the Coast Guard's 8-to-1 matching funds) if you decide to convert to the new GI Bill's benefits. That is, the money you've contributed under Buy-up will be lost if you convert to the new GI Bill.

What does that mean to you? Only you can decide if you should continue making Buy-up contributions. But if you're absolutely sure you're going to elect to go with the new GI Bill when that option's available (sometime this summer), you should probably stop making your Buy-up contributions.

You can still use your additional Buy-up money if you stay with the MGIB-AD. But if you want to use it *and* convert to the new GI Bill, I highly recommend you contact your senators and representative in Congress to let them know your feelings. (If you need help composing your letter/e-mail, feel free to contact me.)

Don't Assume You Have to Pay All College Fees

When you're admitted to college or register for courses, chances are you'll be given a bill in which all kinds of fees are bundled together with your tuition. Don't assume, however, that just because all those fees are listed you have to pay them. Look over the itemized list of fees and see if all of them actually apply to you and ask that those which don't be waived.

An example is the student health insurance fee. If you have health coverage from another source (e.g., you're still your parents' dependent and are covered by their health insurance or you're on active duty in the Coast Guard) your school should have a procedure for getting that fee waived. Ask about it and don't take "no" for an answer.

E-PME AQEs & E-PME Parts of the SWE

The on-line version of the E-PME Study Guide has been deleted from the Coast Guard Learning Portal. For the most up-to-date E-PME information, go to <http://www.tracenetalumna.com/e-pme/>.

You can also order the Study Guide in hard-copy or on a CD-ROM. To do this, provide your ESO with your employee ID number and the version of the Study Guide you'd like sent to you.

Scholarships for Military Women

The Alliance for National Defense (AND), will award two \$2,500 scholarships to current and future military women in 2009.

The Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing powerful advocacy and a positive voice for military women. AND encourages and promotes the vital role of military women and men in our nation's defense. AND directors, national council members, and supporters include active duty military personnel and concerned veterans working alongside civilians interested in military issues to provide factual, thoughtful, objective information on military personnel issues to policymakers, legislators, and the public.

Honoring Brigadier General Evelyn P. Foote, USA, Ret., the Foote Scholarship is reserved for a currently serving enlisted woman who is enrolled for at least six credit hours at an accredited college or university. The Sadler Scholarship, named for Captain Georgia Sadler, USN, Ret., is intended for a woman enrolled in her second year in an accredited ROTC program.

Scholarship winners will be chosen from among applicants representing any branch or component of the armed forces based on merit, academic potential, community service and need. Winners will be announced in July 2009.

For more information, go to http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_information.pdf. For an application, go to http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_Application.pdf.

Don't Wait to Submit TA Applications

The Coast Guard Institute takes approximately two weeks (sometimes more) to process tuition assistance (TA) requests. What does that mean? First, it means that from the time you submit your application to the time you receive an e-mail with your TA authorization attached it may be two or more weeks.

Second, if you have to register for a course a month before the course starts, you need to submit your TA application at least six weeks before the course starts.

REMEMBER: TA is *not* a reimbursement program. TA is paid directly to the school. If you pay for a course when you register for it, your school has what it wants. As far as it's concerned, the books are closed on that transaction. If you later show up with a TA authorization, you're likely to get a blank look from the person you give it to because the school's under no obligation to reimburse you in exchange for the TA authorization.

Put yourself in the school's shoes. It takes time and effort for the school to bill the Navy (which is the Coast Guard's agent for paying TA reimbursement bills). Then it has to wait up to 30 days to receive the money. Then it has to reimburse you. Each of these transactions costs the school money.

To avoid blank looks or, worse, refusal to give you a reimbursement at the very least you should talk with the school's representative *at the time you register* about getting reimbursed when you later present your authorization. The best bet, though, is to submit your TA request to your ESO as soon as you know what course you're going to take and what the beginning and ending dates are. This will almost certainly guarantee you have your authorization in hand before it's time to register.

An added bonus will be that you'll be more likely to get into the courses you want to take instead of finding all seats taken.

Deadline in Two Weeks: 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.

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 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/>.

DSSTs

Most everyone in the military has heard someone talk about CLEP tests. CLEP (College Level Examination Program) tests are a way to earn up to 12 college credits for taking a test – the equivalent to one or more college final exams. Few people know about another series of tests from which you can earn college credit: DSSTs.

CLEP is owned and run by the CollegeBoard, the same people who bring you and your kids the PSAT and SAT. The DSST program is owned and run by another testing organization (Prometric) which specializes in licensing and certification tests (e.g., the NREMT exams). DSSTs are offered in a number of subjects and are evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE) as the equivalent of 3 college credits (including some upper division credits).

The nice thing about DSSTs is that a number of them test knowledge of material most Guardians have acquired in their first year or two of service (e.g., ***Drug and Alcohol Abuse*** and ***Here's to Your Health***). By the time you've advanced to PO2, you'll most likely also have received training in or (from personal experience learned) subjects like ***Personal Finance, Principles of Supervision***, and (depending on experience and rating) ***Introduction to Law Enforcement*** and ***Criminal Justice***. Anyone who's gone through a LAMS course, Chiefs and PO1s can probably add ***Fundamentals of Counseling*** and maybe ***Organizational Behavior*** to the list.

What I'm saying is that the tests listed above could be relatively easy college credit for you who have paid attention in classes and presentations most of you have had to attend. I'm not saying you won't have to brush up on the subject matter, but you most likely won't have to spend weeks studying \$150 text books to pass the test.

For more information on the subjects covered by DSSTs and links to the fact sheets which describe each test in detail, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>.

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.

In addition to study guides for specific tests, available from bookstores, other study materials relevant to most of these are also 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://wwa.nko.navy.mil/portal/home/>)

If you're studying for the CLEP Western Civilization I and II tests, you may want to check out a 52-part series of videos called "The Western Tradition". These half-hour lectures are presented by Professor Eugen Weber, who taught history at the University of California, Los Angeles for many years. You can get an idea of what these lectures are about and see an outline of the whole course at <http://www.learner.org/resources/series58.html>.

The Education & Career Development Center recently acquired this whole series (VCR, not DVD) and you can check them out for a week at a time.

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.

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 certificate program is less extensive than a degree program (typically between 9 and 18 credits, rather than 60 for an associate's degree or 120 for a bachelor's degree). As stated on 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.

For more on degrees and certificates, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/degreedesc.asp>.

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_____).

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.

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.