

## TraCen Cape May Education Update #268

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### Question of the Week

**Q:** Why does it matter if I take courses from a SOC (Servicemembers' Opportunity Colleges) school?

**A:** If you plan to use tuition assistance (TA), you're free to take courses from any school you want as long as (a) it's regionally- or nationally-accredited and (b) the credits you earn can be transferred to another regionally- or nationally-accredited institution. But if you want to save time and frustration, you'd be wise to take your courses from SOC schools (assuming one of the SOCCOAST degree networks interests you).

There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, because not all colleges and universities accept credits transferred from all other colleges and universities. That means that you might take courses at school X because it's near where you're stationed and then find those courses aren't accepted by school Y, near your new duty station, once you transfer. Second, not all colleges and universities accept credits you earned by completing Coast Guard training or various tests you took for credit (e.g., CLEP tests and DSSTs). Third, some schools – for academic and financial reasons – change the courses you have to complete to get your degree.

If you're taking courses from a SOC school that's in one of the SOCCOAST degree networks, you won't have to worry about any of these. Credit from courses taken at what are called "core member institutions" can be transferred to any other core institution without prior approval. (Most institutions in SOCCOAST are core institutions.)

SOCCOAST schools also grant credit for non-traditional education such as from military experience and credit-by-exam program tests. And if you're pursuing a SOCCOAST network degree, you'll get a contract with the school. In it, what's called your home college (the school you plan to get your degree from) agrees not to change your graduation requirements while you're taking courses from it or other SOCCOAST network schools.

In addition, pursuing a SOCCOAST network degree means you only have to take 25% of your credits from your home college (30% if you'll be taking all your courses by distance learning).

For these reasons, getting your degree through a SOCCOAST network is a good idea. You can find more information at <http://www.soc.aascu.org/soccoast/Default.html>.

## Notice of Basic Eligibility (NOBE) Form

The Notice of Basic Eligibility (NOBE, form DD-2384-1) is the form which lays out the criteria which members of the Coast Guard Reserve must meet to be eligible for benefits under the Selected Reserve Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB-SR). It also briefly describes the Reservists' benefits. Most important, though, the NOBE states the date the Reservist first became eligible for MGIB-SR benefits.

The NOBE is a controlled form. In the Coast Guard, the **only** units authorized to issue NOBEs are TraCen Cape May's Recruit SPO and "A" School SPOs. Reservists should **not** ask their ESOs for, and ESOs should **not** provide Reservists with, NOBEs.

If you're a Reservist who never received or who has lost his/her NOBE, or who has questions about MGIB-SR eligibility, send an e-mail to the Reserve Education Program Manager at [reserveVAeducation@uscg.mil](mailto:reserveVAeducation@uscg.mil). Include your name and either the word "NOBE" or "MGIB-SR" (depending on the subject of your question) in the subject line.

## Frequently-Confused Words

The English language includes hundreds of words people are unsure which to use. Over the next several weeks, I'll highlight many of them here. Today: **than** and **then**.

The word *than* is used to compare two things, as in "The water in the pool was colder *than* it usually is."

The word *then* refers to time or a sequence of events: "I went to the exchange, *then* I went home."

## CG Exchange System Scholarships

Applicants are being solicited for the CG Exchange System Scholarship Program. One \$1,500, one \$750, and one \$500 scholarship are available for students who are dependents of Coast Guard personnel (regular and Reserve military, retired military, current civilian NAF and appropriated-funds employees, uniformed PHS personnel, and Auxiliaries.) **The application deadline is 27 February 2010.**

See ALCGPSD 059/09 for details on eligibility criteria and application procedures.

## New EM EPQs

New Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs, formerly called practical factors) have been published for the Electrician's Mate (EM) rate. See ALCOAST 597/09 for details.

Although there is no mandatory date for beginning to use the new EPQs, to be eligible to take the fall 2010 servicewide exams, EMs will need to have completed the new EPQs. That is, Reservists must complete the new EPQs no later than 01 JUL 2010 (for the OCT 2010 SWE) and regulars must complete them no later than 01 AUG 2010 (for the NOV 2010 SWE). You are encouraged to start using the new EPQs ASAP.

The existence of a new set of EPQs doesn't mean you have to demonstrate your proficiency on each one to get them all signed off again. Your supervisor or Professional Development Coach (PDC) may transfer his/her signature from the previous form to the new form for all EPQs which are identical on both. You **will** have to demonstrate proficiency and get signed off any EPQs which are on the new form and were not on the previous form.

Be aware that new EM courses are currently being developed, and that the new EPQs don't coincide exactly with the lessons in the current EM courses. Despite this fact, completion of the existing courses is still required before your ESO can administer the relevant end-of-course test. Your supervisor/PDC is verifying that you've completed both the course and the EPQs when he/she signs the statement to that effect on page 2 of the EPQs.

For more information on how the course (PQG) and EPQs relate to each other, and your supervisor's/PDC's role in each, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/nrt1.asp>.

## E-PME & Rating Sign-Offs & Tests

There are two separate and parallel path enlisted Coast Guard personnel must complete before they can be advanced. One is the occupational specialty or rating path, the other is the professional military education (PME) path. For a description and graphic depiction of the two paths go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/cgmilcareerdev.asp> and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/EASchart.pdf>.

**The rating path** involves demonstrating knowledge and skills learned on the job via Enlisted Professional Qualifications (EPQs, formerly practical factors, which are available for each rating on the Coast Guard Learning Portal, <http://learning.uscg.mil>) and through non-resident training courses (which you order through your ESO). Mastery of EPQs must be demonstrated to a Professional Development Coach appointed by your CO/OIC, who is at least one pay grade senior to and of the same rating as you. (See Personnel Manual, Art. 5.C.7.a.3.) All EPQs must be signed off for the next higher pay grade before you can take the end-of-course test (EOCT) for that pay grade. (See ALCOAST 297/08.)

**The PME path** involves demonstrating knowledge and abilities learned on the job and from the relevant E-PME Study Guide (separate ones for advancement to E-4, E-6, and E-8). Performance Requirements must be demonstrated to a designated supervisor appointed by your CO/OIC (see E-PME Manual, para. 3.D.2.). All Performance Requirements for E-4 must be signed off before you can take the E-PME-4 Advancement Qualification Exam (AQE). All Performance Requirements for the E-5 and E-6 must be signed off before you can take the E-PME-6 AQE. All Performance Requirements for the E-7 and E-8 must be signed off before you can take the E-PME-8 AQE. (See ALCOAST 179/05.) To take the servicewide exams for or otherwise advance to the odd pay grades (E-5, E-7, and E-9) you must first demonstrate mastery of E-PME Performance Requirements for those pay grades.

You do **NOT** have to have your E-PME Performance Requirements signed off before you can take a rating EOCT. You do **NOT** have to have your EPQs signed off before you can take an E-PME AQE.

## New ME "A" School Applications

Applications for the new ME "A" School are now being accepted. For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/psc/epm/ao/nonrate.asp> and <https://cgportal.uscg.mil/lotus/myquickr/me/welcome>.

## Grade Reports & eTA

If you're using tuition assistance (TA) to pay for college courses, you know you do so on the condition that you provide grade reports for those courses when they end. If you're using the on-line TA application process (eTA), be aware that you must provide your grade report **within 42 days** of the date your authorization says the course ends. If you don't or can't provide your grade report during that period, you'll be locked out of eTA.

Should this happen to you through no fault of your own (e.g., the school is late in providing grade reports), you can submit an old-fashioned PDF TA request with your digital signature on it and request a waiver of the grade report requirement. Be aware that TA applications submitted this way will take longer to process and you may not receive your authorization for up to two weeks.

## Provide Your Input on New College Curriculum

Valley Forge Military College (<http://www.vfmac.edu/index.cfm>) "is developing an online degree program **exclusively** for military personnel, including all active duty, National Guard, Reservists, and veterans of any branch of the Armed Forces." Among the college's distinguished alumni are General Norman Schwarzkopf, Senator Warren Rudman, and the current Chief of Naval Operations (equivalent of our Commandant) Admiral Gary Roughead.

"[T]o build an online program that will meet specific needs across the military community, [the college] is launching a military education survey and will use the data gathered in developing ... degree program options, tuition and academic policy."

If you're interested in getting a degree from an institution that's trying to meet your specific needs, help Valley Forge's meet those needs by participating in its free survey at <http://www.vfmconline.com/>. It should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. "[Valley Forge wants] to build a program designed **by** those who serve, **for** those who serve."

## Studying for a CLEP Math or English Test (or ASVAB)?

If you're preparing to take the CLEP College Mathematics or English Composition test, or if you're trying to improve your ASVAB AR, MK, PC, or WK scores, a free on-line study aid is now available to all Coast Guard personnel.

Although it was designed to help people who don't feel quite ready to take college-level courses, Peterson's Online Academic Skills Course (OASC) emphasizes subject areas also tested in numerous CLEP tests, DSSTs, and the ASVAB. It diagnoses your "current level of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math abilities and teaches the concepts and skills needed to increase proficiency in each of these academic areas." Through OASC you have access – via any computer at any time of day – to dozens of lessons and quizzes.

- Pre-tests help you evaluate strengths and weaknesses in each subject area and design customized lessons.
- There are interactive games, lessons, and flashcards as well as practice sets and quizzes.
- There's a post-test to measure end-of-course performance.
- It's self-paced.
- There are different course lengths to fit any schedule and accommodate any time constraints you're under.

In the verbal section are lessons ranging from "Building Your Vocabulary" to "Understanding Difficult Text" to "Understanding the Author's Tone". In the math section are lessons such as "Eliminating Wrong Answers", "Multiplying and Dividing Fractions", and "Percent Increase and Decrease". In addition, there are lessons on "Dealing with Studying Stress", "Wrapping up Your Studying", "Reviewing Math", and "Reviewing Verbal".

And OASC is available to both Coast Guard personnel (military and civilian) and dependents of servicemembers. Check it out at <http://www.petersons.com/dantes/>.

## Vocational Courses & Financial Aid

As you know, the Coast Guard's tuition assistance (TA) program only funds courses which meet two general criteria: (1) offered by nationally- or regionally-accredited institutions and (2) result in credit you can transfer to another nationally- or regionally-accredited institution. Generally, this means TA can't be used for vocational courses and programs.

However, if you're a member of the regular Coast Guard, didn't turn down the Montgomery GI Bill (Active Duty) in boot camp, and had \$1,200 deducted from your pay (or if you're a Reservist) you can use your MGIB benefits for practically any vocational course or program. (To find out for sure if the course you want to take is eligible for GI Bill reimbursement, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-o.asp#saa>.)

And if you decided the new GI Bill was for you and gave up either the MGIB-AD or MGIB-SR to get it, you can use it for the same courses you could have used MGIB benefits for. If you didn't give up MGIB benefits before electing the new GI Bill, you won't be able to use it for anything but courses offered at institutions of higher learning (IHLs). Generally, IHLs are accredited degree-granting institutions, which seldom offer vocational courses.

## Coast Guard Foundation Grants

The Coast Guard Institute has advised ESOs that all funds have been exhausted for the Coast Guard Foundation Education Grants and Vander Putten Education Grants programs.

The Institute will continue to accept applications until 1 December 2009. If you have not received a check by 31 December 2009, you may resubmit a new application to cover unpaid expenses beginning 1 January 2010. Please remember that you must submit your grant request less than a year after the date on your receipt.

## Health Care Certification Exams

Certification exams for more than a dozen clinical and administrative health care career fields are now available through DANTES test sites, including TraCen Cape May. For more information, <http://www.nhanow.com/>.

## Looking for a BM3 or MK3 Course?

If you'd like a copy of the latest BM3 or MK3 course, drop by the TraCen Education Center in the Command & Mission Support (aka Admin) building, room 113 to pick it up. They're on the deck just inside the door.

## New Civilian Transition & Education Web Site

The publisher of *G.I. Jobs* magazine has created a web site (<http://www.gijobs.com/default.aspx>) that provides loads of information helpful during your transition to the civilian job market and before. There, you'll find sections on résumés, job and recruiter interviews, wardrobe, education, job fairs, and franchise opportunities.

I do want to offer one word of caution, though. When reading the info on this site (and many other sites, including [military.com](http://military.com)), keep in mind that the companies and educational institutions described, discussed, or listed on the site will likely have paid the site's publisher to get onto it. **Don't assume** that because a college or university isn't on the site it isn't military friendly. It may be more "military friendly" than others on the site, but just didn't want to pay or have the money to pay to get onto the site.

## Foreign or Puerto Rican Degrees

Did you earn a degree in a country other than the U.S.? Do you want to transfer credits earned in another country to a U.S. school? Do you want to pursue graduate school at a U.S. school based on an undergrad degree earned outside the U.S.? (Unfortunately, if you earned a degree in Puerto Rico, it's considered a foreign country by most U.S. schools.)

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions above, check out the info at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/foreign.asp>.

## Military Times Edge

The current issue of *Edge*, from the publisher of *Navy Times* is available in the Education Center for anyone who wants a copy. The articles in the current issue are:

- Why some online degrees are better than others
- Find the perfect job: researching, networking, and building your personal brand
- College pitfalls
- Ace the interview with responses to 5 likely job interview questions
- Balancing act: TV host doubles as Reservist
- My great new life: Army vet finds happiness as a personal trainer
- From the Corps to the diamond: former Marine on making it to the majors
- 3-year bachelor's degrees
- Film company solicits scripts
- Business cards
- And more ...

## CollegeWeek Live: 04-07 November

If you're the parent of a college-bound student or are otherwise interested in getting good information about college, check out CollegeWeekLive (CWL). CWL is a four-day on-line college fair to help prospective students in their college planning by connecting them with colleges in a live, interactive environment. You'll be able to find information from dozens of colleges and universities on things like admissions, financing, admission test preparation, college visits, and finding the college which best fits your son, daughter, or yourself.

And while it's aimed mainly 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 CWL will be held from **Wednesday, 04 November through Saturday, 07 November** and it's 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 ask questions of speakers and school representatives, you can download information, you can even chat with current students at various colleges.

## ASVAB Do-Overs

If you're trying to qualify for an "A" school or some other Coast Guard program, you may want to improve one or more of your ASVAB scores. Here are some things you should be aware of.

- Coast Guard policy allows you to take any of the individual tests which make up the Armed Forces Classification Test battery (AFCT), which is the in-service version ASVAB. This means you can take as few or as many tests you want during a test session.
- You can take an AFCT 30 days after you took it at MEPS. From then on, you must wait at least six months between testing on the same test. This means that if you took the AFCT "Arithmetic Reasoning" (AR) test after graduating from boot camp, and wanted to take it again, you'd have to wait six months between the two tests. If you took the AR test after graduating from boot camp and wanted to take the Mathematics Knowledge (MK) test, you could take it at any time – you wouldn't have to wait until six months after you took the AR test.
- Each of the DoD services has its own policies for administering AFCTs, but all of them require examinees to take the whole battery – all the tests – at one sitting.
- At the moment, the DoD services are using different versions of the AFCT than the Coast Guard's using. And, in any case, they use different tables from the Coast Guard's to convert your raw scores to scaled scores on the AFCTs. Because of this, if you take the AFCT battery at a DoD facility, whatever scores you receive may be different from the scores you would have received if you'd taken them through the Coast Guard. And, of course, this means that, as a result, you may not qualify for a given Coast Guard program.
- Because the DoD services and Coast Guard use different conversion tables, Coast Guard personnel are **prohibited** from taking AFCTs at DoD facilities.
- Coast Guard ISCs and Training Centers stock AFCT booklets, answer sheets, instruction booklets, scoring templates, etc. They alone score answer sheets and enter converted scores into DirectAccess. They may, however, lend test booklets and provide answer sheets and instruction booklets to other commands for short periods.

So, contact your ESO – not a DoD facility – if you want to re-take one or more ASVAB/AFCT tests.

## On-line Test Scheduling

Training Center Cape May is trying out an Internet-based program for scheduling tests, officer program interviews, and pretty much anything the imagination can come up with.

So, if you'd like to schedule an EOCT or AQE, you can now go to the reservation web site ([http://www.supersaas.com/schedule/TraCen\\_Cape\\_May/EOCTs](http://www.supersaas.com/schedule/TraCen_Cape_May/EOCTs)).

Other ESOs who want to create a similar testing reservation system (it's free!) should contact me for information.

## Thinking of Teaching?

Are you interested in teaching after you leave the Coast Guard? Troops to Teachers also provides counseling and referral services to military personnel interested in beginning a second career in public education as a teacher. And the DANTES Troops to Teachers office will help you identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification, and employment opportunities. The main web site ([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp)) has all kinds of information about the program. Including a new on-line way to determine if you're eligible to participate in Troops to Teachers: [http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes\\_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp).

## Leaving the Coast Guard?

If you're leaving the Coast Guard within the next twelve months (whether through retirement, resignation, or expiration of your enlistment), you should be making plans for what you'll be doing after you take off your uniform for the last time. Check out the information on my web site related to career transition (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/careertrans.asp>).

You should also request an education assessment from the Coast Guard Institute (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/collegefaq.asp>) to get a transcript of college credit you've acquired through your service in the Coast Guard. If you don't request an assessment before you leave active duty, you can't get one later. If you're not planning to go to school right away, you'll probably need to find work. Here are two excellent resources for finding a job – or even a second career. Also, Military.com has a very good series of web pages devoted to veterans (<http://www.military.com/Careers/Home/0,13373,,00.htm>).

And don't discount the idea of working in the public sector. Not only are there thousands of jobs in the federal government, identical to private-sector jobs in which you can put your skills, knowledge, and experience to use while maintaining job security unavailable in the private sector (<http://www.fedjobs.gov/>), governmental entities at all levels – state, county, municipality, school district, port district, etc. – provide similar benefits.

## ACCC's Library Open for Studying

One more thing: the new campus's classrooms, labs, and library are all state-of-the-art. Even if you're not ready to register for classes right away, you should take the opportunity to visit the campus and look around. The Director of Academic and Student Services has extended a personal invitation to anyone who'd like to use the library to study, for research, or for pleasure reading. It's very quiet, well-lit, and has very comfortable furniture.

## Quick Reference Study Guides

The TraCen Education Center also has a binder full of SparkCharts Quick Reference Guides on almost 40 subjects. You're welcome to use these in the Education Center or make copies to take with you. You can check out the subjects available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/books.asp#spark>.

## Education Library

In addition to SparkCharts, the Education Center also has a library of books on leadership, management, Coast Guard history, and other topics. Also in the library are the latest Professional Qualification Guides (PQGs) for each rating.

The Education Center also has dozens of brochures and books on college, financial aid, the officer program application process, and other things. If there are multiple copies, you're welcome to take one.

### **Get It in Writing!**

A recent article on [military.com](http://military-education.military.com/2009/06/new-gi-bill-advice-get-it-in-writing.html) by retired Coast Guard Chief Terry Howell (<http://military-education.military.com/2009/06/new-gi-bill-advice-get-it-in-writing.html>) provides extremely good advice about how to avoid making costly mistakes when dealing with the VA about your education benefits.

The advice is equally applicable to dealing with *any* government or corporate bureaucracy, for that matter.