

TraCen Cape May Education Update #252

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Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
BM1 William Williamson	ANT Cape May	DWINTR
SN Adam Carr	TraCen (Gym)	E-PME-4
YN2 Bridgette Cooper	TraCen (Recruit PersRU)	YN1

Well done, everyone!

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

Q: I asked the VA if I can use my GI Bill benefits and tuition assistance at the same time and they said "Yes". But when I went to do that, the Coast Guard said using both at the same time is not allowed. What gives?

A: The VA is responsible for administering GI Bill education benefits and there's nothing in the GI Bill statutes which prohibits GI Bill benefits from being used with tuition assistance (TA) at the same time.

But the VA doesn't have any control over TA. The individual services (including the Coast Guard) own TA. That means they can set rules on when and under what conditions TA can be used. That's why the five services each have slightly different TA rules. (For two examples, Navy personnel can only use TA for 16 semester credits or 24 quarter credits per year and Coast Guard civilians are authorized to use TA, while civilian employees of the other services are not.)

This being the case, the Coast Guard has decided to restrict its personnel from using TA for the same courses they're receiving GI Bill education benefits for. The VA can say whatever it wants about using TA and GI Bill benefits at the same time, but the Coast Guard (and other services) have the final word on when, how, and for what TA can be used.

Passing Score for New DC2 EOCT

DC3s, note that the passing score on the latest DC2 end-of-course test is 80, rather than 76. Until 01 August, you can take either of the two DC2 EOCTs (editions 1 or 2). On and after 01 August, you can only take edition 2.

If you're using the edition 1 course, you should only take the edition 1 test since some information you'll find on the test is included in edition 1 of the course but not in edition 2. Edition 2 reflects the current EPQs and current policy and procedures. So you shouldn't take the edition 1 EOCT if you're studying the edition 2 course.

Foreign Language Tests

If you're thinking about taking a Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT), there are a few things you should know. For the basic facts, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>.

Also keep in mind that this is NOT an easy test for anyone. A lot of native speakers of non-English languages think that just because they grew up speaking the language in the home they'll do well. This seldom turns out to be the case. Those who do the best either studied the language in college or in an intensive language program and then lived in a country where that language is spoken (e.g., Mormon missionaries) or grew up speaking the language *and* went to school where that was the only language used. Americans who only speak it at home or on the street tend not to do well.

Also, there seems to be a misconception that if you do well on this test you'll automatically get FLPP (foreign language proficiency pay). That's not true. Only if you're filling a billet specified in one of the two ALCOASTs referenced on my DLPT web page (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>) can you receive FLPP.

Yellow Ribbon Provision of the New GI Bill

One of the lesser-known provisions of the new GI Bill is called the Yellow Ribbon program.

As you know, the new GI Bill will pay tuition at any college or university up to the maximum undergraduate tuition and fees charged by the most expensive publicly-funded university in each state. The Yellow Ribbon program authorizes the VA to enter into agreements with schools who charge more than the maximum tuition and fees. Under these agreements, the school can contribute up to 50% of the difference between the actual charges and what the GI Bill will cover. For every dollar the school contributes (or waives), the VA will contribute a dollar.

So, let's say you want to attend a private school in Alabama which charges \$353/credit. In Alabama, the maximum tuition payable under the new GI Bill is \$243/credit and the maximum fees payable is \$12,612. This means the difference between the actual tuition and the max payable by the GI Bill is \$110. If your school has signed a Yellow Ribbon agreement to pay half that difference, it will pay (or waive) \$55 of it and the VA will pay \$55. The net result is that you won't have to pay anything for tuition and fees. If the school said it will waive a quarter of the difference, the VA will pay a quarter of the difference leaving you to pick up what the school and VA won't cover.

Reimbursement for Language Software

If you're considering buying one of the numerous computer-based programs to learn a second language, I have good news and not-so-good news. The good news is that Coast Guard Foundation education grants can be used to reimburse you for the cost of the software.

All you need is a receipt and your grant application. NOTE: your receipt must show both the cost and what you paid for; a receipt for \$450 but no indication what it was for is worthless. For more information and an application form, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#cgf>.

The not-so-good news is that reimbursements can take months to get to you. This is because the Coast Guard Foundation (which provides the funds) does not disburse them to the Coast Guard Institute (which administers the program) on a fixed schedule. The Institute can only provide reimbursement checks when there are funds in the grant

account and there are no set dates when funds are deposited into the account. Also, there's no guarantee that your grant request will be approved, since funds may run out before your request is considered.

So if you can't afford to get the software without knowing you'll be reimbursed, you should probably think twice about buying it.

Coast Guard Foundation and Vander Putten Grants Update

The Coast Guard Institute has received funding for the Coast Guard Foundation Education Grant and Vander Putten Education Grant programs. If you have any grant applications pending, you should receive a check in the next week or two. You'll receive an e-mail the day before prior checks are mailed out.

Keep in mind that the funds which make these grants possible are gifts from the Coast Guard Foundation and Mr. Roy Vander Putten. That being the case, the amount of funds given to the grant programs may or may not equal the amount of money requested by applicants like you.

For more information on these grants, see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#cgf>.

What Education Benefits are Available to My dependents?

While there are few monetary benefits available to spouses of military personnel through the Coast Guard, many other educational services are available. You can find info about services, programs, and benefits and links to more info at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dependents.asp>.

New SOCCOAST School

Jones International University (JIU) has been accepted as a member of SOCCOAST and its Bachelors of Business Administration degree has been added to the SOCCOAST business administration degree network.

JIU is a regionally-accredited distance learning school. Undergraduate tuition is \$250/credit and graduate tuition is \$447/credit. JIU also offers scholarships to Coast Guard civilians and spouses. These rates apply to the full range of degree programs up to the doctorate level. For more information, go to <http://www.jiu.edu/>.

And for more information about SOCCOAST and how it can help you more quickly complete a degree, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/soccoast.asp>.

SOC Agreements

Are you getting your degree from a SOCCOAST school? If so, and if you've completed six credits, you should ask the school for a SOC agreement. This evaluation of completed and remaining degree requirements serves as a contract between the school and you and remains in effect even after you leave the Coast Guard.

With a SOC agreement in place, the school can change its graduation requirements and you won't have to worry about having to take courses to meet the new requirements.

More Scholarships!

Every year, the Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) offers scholarships to United States service members and their spouses who are working towards the completion of higher education degrees. Each award is in the amount of \$500 and may be used for tuition, fees, books and other expenses encountered by the student pursuing educational goals. The application deadline is 01 September.

For more information, go to <http://www.ccmeonline.org/nashville10.aspx?session=scholarships>.

New GI Bill & California

If you're a California resident and thinking about getting an undergraduate or graduate degree at a private school in California or a graduate degree at a UC or CSU campus, you need to be aware of something that may make that difficult.

As you know, the new GI Bill will pay tuition up to those charged for an undergraduate degree by the most expensive publicly-funded college or university in the state. Years ago, California legislators enacted a law that allows residents to boast that all state residents can attend a state college or university tuition free. They did this by defining the money students pay to attend state colleges and universities not as tuition but as a fee.

This seemingly meaningless provision will make it difficult, if not impossible, for many students to attend private schools or to get a graduate degree from a publicly-funded school. This is because the VA's payment rate for tuition for California students is \$0 (since the state says it doesn't charge any tuition for residents).

Legislators and VA reps are trying to figure out a way to resolve this problem without Congress having to get involved. But suffice it to say that if you're thinking of going to school in California, you may be in for a rude awakening. (For more on this, go to <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/23/MNKH17PG4R.DTL>.)

Deciding Whether to Switch GI Bill Programs

If you declined to enroll in the MGIB-AD (either long ago when you had the option to switch from VEAP to the MGIB-AD or while you were in boot camp), this is an easy decision. You should absolutely apply for the new GI Bill. You do this via VA form 22-1990 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/VA22-1990.pdf>) or the VA's on-line version of the same form (<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>).

You'll be able to use the benefits included in the new GI Bill starting on 01 August either for yourself or (once rules are finalized) transfer all or some of your benefit to a dependent.

If you didn't decline to enroll in the MGIB-AD (and have paid all or some of the twelve monthly \$100 payments) or if you're a Reservist enrolled in the MGIB-SR or REAP, here are some things to consider before making that irrevocable election.

- Will the school I'm interested in waive tuition and fees because I'm a veteran?
- What percentage of new GI Bill benefits am I entitled to?
- How much will I spend on rent and books?
- What's the E-5 BAH rate for the Zip code my school's in?
- How many credits am I going to be taking per term?
- What's the current MGIB-AD monthly rate?
- Will I be eligible for tuition assistance?
- Did I contribute to the Buy-up option?
- How much will each benefit pay?

Use the worksheet LCDR Tim Castle (ISC New Orleans) and I created to roughly calculate your benefits under the new GI Bill, the MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, REAP, and tuition assistance (with Top-up). You can find the worksheet at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/GIBillDecisionWorksheet.xls>.

Preparing for CLEP Tests & DSSTs

On-line practice tests for both DSSTs and CLEP tests are available at no charge to military personnel. CLEP tests are available through the Coast Guard Learning Portal (<http://learning.uscg.mil>). Once you've logged in, follow this path: Education > Study Guide for DANTES Exams > Launch then select the test you'd like to take. You'll receive a certificate if you pass a practice exam with a score of 70% or higher.

To find practice DSSTs, go to <http://ibt1.prometric.com/index.asp?ibt=3881494402&>. There you'll have to register (if this is your first time at the site) and then select a test from the list of 37 DSSTs available.

Although ESOs can't require you to take a practice test before taking the real thing, you're strongly encouraged to do so. Taking a practice test help you better prepare for the real thing.

One of the Coast Guard's leadership competencies is stewardship. In a nutshell, this means making sure our resources are not wasted. Every CLEP exam given to a Coast Guard student costs the service an average of \$110, whether you pass or fail it. Right now about 65% of those who take CLEP tests fail them. This translates into a lot of wasted dollars.

Just What are DSSTs?

The DSST program (formerly DANTES Subject Standardized Test program) is an extensive series of examinations in college subjects that are comparable to the final or end-of-course examinations in undergraduate courses, akin to the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). For each of the 37 DSSTs the American Council on Education (ACE) recommends 3 semester hours of credit (some are upper-level credits).

Essentially, DSSTs (like CLEP tests) allow you to obtain college credit without having to take college courses. Quoting from the brochure, "DSST is an effective method to provide your college with evidence of prior training and experience. In fact, the 37 exams funded by DANTES complement other credit by exam programs such as CLEP." For more information, stop by the Education Center or go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>.

Junior Officers, Listen Up!

Many junior officers are unaware of the procedures for ensuring promotion boards and detailers know about higher education they've completed and their extracurricular career development activities. You should fill out form CG-4082 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/CG4082.pdf>) and e-mail it (with scanned copies – front and back – of your official transcript or a certified copy of it) to the appropriate person at the Personnel Service Center Records Branch (adm-3) (<http://www.uscg.mil/psc/adm/adm3/contact.asp>).

If you want an advanced degree entered into DirectAccess, fill out form PPC-2030 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/PPC2030.pdf>), attach copies of your diploma and the corresponding transcript, and take it to your SPO or other YN who enters data into DirectAccess.

Finally, to have Graduate Record Exam (GRE), Law School Admission Test (LSAT), and other standardized test scores sent directly to PSC (adm-3) – which is highly recommended – follow the instructions outlined on page 14 of the *officer Postgraduate and Advanced Education Application Process Guide* (http://www.uscg.mil/opm/Opm1/Opm1docs/PG/AY10Docs/AY10_PG-Adv%20Ed_Process_Guide.pdf).

You can find an on-line version of this item (with hyperlinks to the forms and Guide) at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/opd.asp>.

CG Transcript and Degree Plans

The "Coast Guard Education Center" web site, where unofficial transcripts and degree plans from education assessments have been posted for a long time, is no longer in service.

Instead of getting your unofficial transcript and degree plans there, your ESO will receive them and forward them to you. And if you requested an education assessment, degree plans, or both from the Coast Guard Institute more than a month ago and didn't download them at the time, don't despair. Just ask your ESO to re-open the TACCTS case used to submit your original assessment request and request copies of your transcript, degree plans, or both.

If you submitted a request to the Coast Guard Institute for an education assessment in the last couple of months, please be patient. Due to an unexpectedly large number of requests, the processing time for assessment requests is currently 4 to 5 weeks.

If you've received your unofficial transcript and want an official transcript sent to a college, submit a request (form CGI-1564, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/CGI1564.pdf>) directly to the Institute via the e-mail address near the bottom of the form.

REMEMBER: You can't get a transcript sent to a school unless you've first requested an education assessment. For more on this process, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/step5.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_____).

Save Your TA Authorizations!!

When you receive a tuition assistance authorization by e-mail, don't just print it out and delete the e-mail. Make sure you also download it to your computer or a CD-ROM.

Why? Although the TA system works well, occasionally you may run into problems related to providing grade reports or repaying TA the Coast Guard spent on a course you took. If you don't have the information that's available on your TA authorization, you'll need to get a replacement copy of it from the Coast Guard Institute. The less often you need to ask an Institute staff person for a favor, the more likely he or she will be to help you out when you do ask for one. This goes for resolving problems like those described above.

By saving all documents related to your education to and from your school, the Coast Guard Institute, your ESO, you'll be able to reconstruct events if you ever have a dispute.

Also, changes may occur (e.g., tuition changed, a course you thought you'd be taking wasn't available, the course dates you listed were wrong, etc.) that require you to make changes to your authorization. If you have it available, you can tell your ESO what exactly needs to be changed or deleted from it. This saves everyone time and aggravation.

Deploying?

If you know you're going to be deploying for some length of time – whether to the Persian Gulf or somewhere here at home – and want to use tuition assistance (TA) to pay for a college course, submit your TA request to your ESO as soon as possible.

The Coast Guard Institute will accept TA requests up to three months before a course begins. But your ESO may be willing to accept them at any time, and then submit them to the Institute as soon as that three-month window opens.

Don't wait until a few days before you're due to sail to submit your TA request. Even if it comes back quickly, if you don't have Internet connectivity you won't be able to download the TA authorization and may not be able to get it to your school by its deadline. The bottom line is: PLAN AHEAD!

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.