

TraCen Cape May Education Update #263

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Question of the Week

Q: I heard that I can only use benefits under the new GI Bill for courses leading toward a college degree, is that right?

A: I wish I could give you a "yes" or "no" answer, but (like most things related to the new GI Bill) it's not simple question to answer.

Generally, if you want to use benefits under the new GI Bill, you can only use them for courses offered by "institutions of higher learning" (IHL). Essentially, an IHL is an institution which offers courses which lead to an associate or higher degree and is empowered by a state governmental agency to grant degrees or is accredited for degree programs by a recognized accrediting agency. So if you want to take a welding or auto shop or some other non-academic course you can use new GI Bill benefits only if it's offered by an IHL.

However, if you gave up education benefits under one of the other GI Bill programs (MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP) to get benefits under the new GI Bill, this general rule doesn't apply. Instead, you'll be able to take any courses or participate in any programs you could have taken or participated in if you'd stayed under the GI Bill you gave up. These include (among other things) culinary, truck driving, welding, 100-ton license preparation, apprenticeships, and college degree programs.

This is why recruits now entering the regular Coast Guard are strongly urged to think hard about declining benefits under the MGIB-AD. It's true that if they accept the MGIB-AD they'll have to give up \$100 per month for the year after they graduate (which they can get back if they exhaust their new GI Bill benefits). But if they decline it they'll only be able to use the new GI Bill for courses offered by IHLs.

Help Shape a College's On-line Degree Offerings

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."

TESC October Course Start Date & Tuition Increase

When you submit a tuition assistance request for courses offered by Thomas Edison State College starting on or after 01 October 2009, make sure you use the correct starting date and per-credit tuition cost. The starting date for both undergraduate and graduate October courses is **28 September 2009**. And the tuition for those courses and all subsequent courses is **\$230/credit**.

Apply for More than \$96,000 in Government Scholarships

The web site GovCentral (http://edu.govcentral.com/articles/458-newest_scholarships_on_govcentral) has general info on a number relatively obscure scholarships, along with links to the application web sites.

Mark Your Calendar for CollegeWeek Live

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.

Other CollegeWeek Live Events

In addition to its virtual college fairs, CollegeWeek live hosts many other types of events (http://www.collegeweeklive.com/en_CA/guest/app-about). For example, it's hosting a Test Prep event on Thursday, 17 September between nNoon and 2200 (eastern time) where you can "attend" any of 20 practice SAT, ACT or TOEFL test sessions. These are no-cost events you can access from your computer.

"Test prep tutors from organizations like ProTesters and Powerscore will be leading the live video sessions with real time Q&A, so make sure to be there. Test experts Gary Gruber, Ira Wolfe, and Lynn O'Shaugnessy and representatives from ACT and CollegeBoard will be there to answer your questions."

And if you're considering early admissions, CollegeWeekLive gives you the ability to research a wide variety of colleges, and text chat live with admissions officials. This makes college admissions easier by eliminating money, time, and travel issues from the college search.

At CollegeWeekLive, you can:

- video chat with students on campuses across the country,

- chat live with admissions reps from hundreds of colleges,
- get admissions questions, answered by the pros in real-time,
- win scholarships and other special promotions just for attending, and
- access hours of on-demand content on crucial admissions topics.

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).

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

Officer Program Interviews

Starting on 01 October 2009, CGAS Atlantic City, Sector Delaware Bay, and Training Center Cape May will implement a unified schedule for hosting officer program interviews. This means that for all future interviews, applicants from anywhere in New Jersey, Delaware, and southeastern Pennsylvania may choose a date and time to be interviewed at any of these three commands.

This unified interview schedule will eliminate the *ad hoc* method most units use and will make it possible for applicants, recruiters, officers who serve on interview boards, and ESOs can make plans around fixed interview dates. This schedule will

- allow the officers who serve on boards to plan their schedules better and eliminate last-minute schedule shuffling;
- provide recruiters with regularly-scheduled interview dates they can count on, plan around, and advise applicants of;
- allow applicants to make plans around specific interview dates and to be interviewed at any of three sites in New Jersey and southeastern Pennsylvania, regardless of their recruiter's location or the location of their parent unit;
- make for a smoother officer recruiting and accession process by creating a steady flow of screened and interviewed applicants with minimal imposition on all parties;
- improve civilian applicants' perceptions of the Coast Guard; and
- eliminate the need for ESOs to scramble to find officers who can serve on interview boards.

Interview dates are totally unrelated to application deadlines. That is, you don't have to (and, to make this process work, shouldn't) schedule your interview for a particular date based on an application deadline. As long as the selection board for your program meets less than two years from the date your interview report is signed, you're OK.

The FY10 schedule is posted at TraCen Cape May's web site

(<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/education/interview.asp#sked>) and applicants will schedule interview appointments at any of the three sites via a link on that page

(http://www.supersaas.com/schedule/TraCen_Cape_May/Officer_Program_Interviews). The on-line appointment scheduler will accept reservations up to two weeks before a scheduled interview date. If an interview date has not been reserved two weeks before that date, the interview board will be cancelled. Applicants who are ill or otherwise unable to keep an interview date should advise the POC immediately and reschedule.

Applicants should not take this greater availability of interviews as a license to re-interview repeatedly until they have what they consider a satisfactory interview. If they desire, applicants may attempt to set up subsequent interviews by directly contacting officers of the required ranks and specialties. But barring circumstances such as those which justify a substitute servicewide exam (see article 5.D.3.b.2. of the Personnel Manual), interviews will be scheduled for the same applicant only once every two years.

Learning a Second Language for Coast Guard Duties

Practically everyone's seen an ad in a magazine or a commercial on TV for Rosetta Stone software for learning a foreign language. But don't go out and buy it just because everyone's talking about it. Before you log on to Rosetta Stone's web site to order the software, do some research.

- Check the price. There's no Coast Guard funding available to reimburse you for Rosetta Stone or any other language software you buy on your own.
- Ask around; see if you can find others who have used Rosetta Stone. Find out if it helped them learn what they need to know to talk about Coast Guard-related matters (e.g., law enforcement) in the target language. Unless you just want to learn another language for fun, if the software doesn't help you learn what you need to learn it's probably not worth buying.

If you really need to know a second language for work, the Coast Guard will probably pay for you to learn it. But a method other than software may be more effective. That is, if all you can do after months of using a computer program is make small talk, it's probably not worthwhile for Coast Guard purposes.

Check around to see if there are any intensive language training courses available in your area through a college/university, a commercial language school, or a government agency. For example, now that the Coast Guard and the Customs and Border Protection agency work for the same cabinet secretary, you may find that you can get into a CBP language training program that either the Department or Coast Guard will pay for.

Reimbursement for Language Software

If you decide to buy a computer-based program 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.

Tuition Assistance Processing Tips

As we approach the beginning of a new school year, the number of tuition assistance requests is likely to increase. Here are a few tips which will speed up processing time.

- (1) **Use eTA (rather than a PDF form) to submit your TA request.** When you use eTA, all the data you enter is automatically transferred to the computer program which generates TA authorizations. When you use a PDF form, Coast Guard Institute personnel have to type into the TA authorization program everything you have on your form. That's why the Institute often sends you your authorization a few minutes after your ESO submits an eTA request, and why it takes a few days to get your authorization if you use the PDF form. (For instructions on how to use eTA, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp#applying>.)
- (2) **Get it right the first time.** Make sure EVERYthing on your TA request is accurate to avoid back-and-forth e-mails and, perhaps, you having to re-do the application or missing your school's payment deadline.
- (3) **Provide documentation without being asked.** Your ESO is required to verify that the per-credit tuition and fees you list on your application are correct. If you don't send this documentation, your ESO will have to ask you for it, which will slow down the process.
- (4) **NEVER contact the Institute directly about tuition assistance.** If you have a question about TA in general or your TA request in particular, ask your ESO. The more information requests the Institute has to handle, the slower it processes TA requests.
- (5) **Be patient.** Don't assume that you'll receive your TA authorization overnight or in a few hours just because you have in the past. The Institute's work flow varies. When application volume is low, turn-around is quick. But when volume is high (as at the beginning of a school year), turn-around time slows a bit. Because of this, the Institute's staff guarantees only that you'll have your authorization in less than two weeks.
- (6) **Plan ahead.** Submit your TA request as soon as you know which courses you'll be taking (course number and name) and their starting and ending dates. The Institute will accept TA applications up to three months before the course starting date. If you know your courses more than three months in advance, you can fill out the eTA application and save it, then submit it to your ESO three months before the starting date.

Be Prepared to Wait for New GI Bill Benefits

An 18 August article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* wants those who plan to use benefits from the new GI Bill for the academic term about to begin that payments could be delayed.

“As of Monday [17 August], the department had yet to process 211,251 educational-benefits claims, up from 191,388 last week, according to a workload chart posted on the department's Web site. Some colleges are already making arrangements to accommodate veterans who could be still waiting for their educational-benefits checks on the day tuition payments are due.”

To read the complete article, go to http://chronicle.com/article/GI-Benefits-Checks-Could/48024/?sid=cc&utm_source=cc&utm_medium=en.

Transferring New GI Bill Benefits from Non-CAC Computers

CG-6 has provided a step-by-step process for shipboard personnel (using a shipboard workstation) to access the TEB site and complete the benefits transfer process.

Before you start the first step, however, you'll need two things: a Coast Guard workstation with common access card (CAC) reader installed and the 6- to 8-digit PIN you entered when you got your CAC.

Units are authorized to purchase CAC readers (for about \$8) and have them installed by their IT personnel. The CAC reader by itself will not let users log on using the CAC, however. As to your PIN, if you've forgotten it you'll need to get it re-set by a facility that issues CACs.

Once the CAC reader has been installed and you have your PIN, here's the process.

- Log onto your shipboard Coast Guard workstation as you normally do (i.e., with your user name and password, NOT using your CAC).
- Insert your CAC into the reader.
- Open Internet Explorer and go to the TEB web site.
- Enter your CAC PIN when asked.

Remember: logging onto the computer is a separate process from logging into the TEB web site. You may not use your CAC for the first process; you must use it for the second.

ME Rating Update

Information about the new Maritime Enforcement Specialist rating is available on the Coast Guard Portal (<https://cgportal.uscg.mil/lotus/myquicker/me/welcome>) including force notes, the billet map, and info on the process of lateraling from other rates.

The rating force master chief for the new rating is MECM Gordon Muise. He advises that you can find answers to the majority of your questions in ALCOASTs 409/09, 410/09, 411/09, and 445/09. Force Notes can be found on CG Portal (above).

If you'd like to obligate two years of service, Master Chief Muise advises, “We were told it could be done, but now we are hearing from the field unless someone is within the time window to extend or re-enlist they can't. Sorry for the confusion. I recommend at least fill out a Career Intentions Worksheet stating you wish to extend. Submit it to your command and have them note it on their endorsement.”

He also advises that “If you speak a foreign language, I suggest you list under skills. Include your skill level.”

The deadline for submitting your request to lateral is 02 October 2009 for enlistees and 09 September 2009 for warrant officers. Remember that your request must include a command endorsement. That being the case, make sure you submit your request early enough to your command to allow time for it to be properly reviewed and for an endorsement to be drafted.

MBA vs. MPA

Most people have heard of MBA (master of business administration) degrees, but few have heard of MPA (master of public administration) or MPP (master of public policy) degrees. The MPA and MPP are, essentially, the public (and not-for-profit) sector versions of the MBA.

The core courses in an MBA program are designed to introduce students to the various areas of private sector business such as accounting, marketing, human resources, operations management, economics, organizational behavior, marketing, finance, strategy, operations management, international business, information technology management, supply chain management, and project management..

The MPA and MPP prepare individuals to serve as managers in the executive arm of local, state/provincial, and federal/national government, and increasingly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the not-for-profit sector. Instruction includes the roles, development, and principles of public administration; public policy management and implementation; the relations between organizational management and legislators; the public and non-profit budget processes and financial management; administrative law; personnel management focusing on civil employees; professional ethics; and appropriate research methods.

10 Reasons to Get an MPA or MPP

1. So you can make a difference, change the world & help others by solving problems
2. Learn to better communicate and work in teams & groups
3. Understand the bigger picture (beyond just the bottom line) to get things done
4. Have a flexible degree that lets you transition seamlessly across sectors – public, private, and not-for-profit
5. Improve your professional knowledge, skills & abilities and thus open up new career opportunities
6. Meet passionate and committed individuals who share your interests
7. Prepare yourself for a rapidly changing economy and globalized world
8. Develop your decision-making, judgment & leadership skills
9. Have an impact on public policy on whatever level you're working on
10. Because an MPA or MPP will help you succeed at items 1 through 9 more than a JD or MBA

If you like the missions, goals, and security of government service, consider the MPA or MPP (and related undergraduate degrees).

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) 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.

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 to the Institute via its TA tracking program. 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_____).

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.

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.

College Give-Aways

Periodically, the Education Center receives give-away items from colleges that are looking for your business. These include things like pens, mouse pads, notebooks, refrigerator magnets, sewing kits, and the like.

If you'd like to check out what's available and take any we have, please stop by the Education Center and look on the deck just inside the door to your right (under the light switch). You're welcome to anything there.