

TraCen Cape May Education Update #264

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Question of the Week

Q: Although I know what degree I want and where I want to get it, a buddy told me I should check with my ESO anyway before taking any courses. So, what can the ESO tell me that I don't already know?

A: Your ESO can tell you to consider putting your buddy in your will.

I can't tell you how many people I've talked with who have jumped into taking college courses based only on a TV commercial or ad in *Navy Times* or a magazine – and have later regretted it. Why? Because they dealt with sales people who call themselves "counselors". And sales people from these institutions are interested in one thing – and it's not your education. They're interested only in getting you to pay the institution money. The fact that you're taking courses and not buying Pokemon cards is irrelevant. Sales are sales and they get paid according to how much money they rake in.

ESOs, on the other hand, are prohibited from steering you toward or away from particular institutions. Our job is to provide facts in as unbiased a way as we can. Who's more likely to tell you the truth: an ESO who has nothing to gain from your decision or a salesperson whose income depends on your decision?

Here are a few questions to get answers to before you request tuition assistance and start taking college courses from a particular institution.

- Does the institution you're considering require you to sign a contract (perhaps called an "education agreement") before you can take courses there? If so, beware. You may commit yourself to taking a specific number of courses, to paying a withdrawal fee if you decide not to take a course – even if you haven't started the course – or other practices you'd find used in an appliance store rather than an institution of higher education.
- Does the institution automatically sign you up for pre-determined courses, requiring you to withdraw from them or else pay for them (like a book or CD club)? Or does it require you to sign up for specific courses you decide to take as you want to take them?
- Is it difficult to find basic information on its web site such as the type of accreditation, whether it runs on a semester or quarter system, and how much its per-credit tuition is? If so, dig deeper and be ready to run. Good schools aren't afraid to let students know this information.
- Does the institution make it easier to find information on how easy it is to finance your education than to find out how much your education there would cost?

- Do you really need a degree or are you mostly interested in learning specific skills or acquire specific information? If you're getting a degree to prepare you for a specific career outside the Coast Guard, have you checked with potential employers in that field to see if they require applicants to have a degree? For example, do you really need a bachelor's degree to become an illustrator, graphic designer, or video game designer or to start your own business? Don't assume employers want a degree; they might be looking for specific skills and knowledge instead. And you can often acquire such skills and knowledge by taking individual courses (not degree programs) that might make you more desirable to employers than would a degree for which you have to take English, math, history, and other courses unrelated to your interests. These courses are available on-line, by other types of distance learning, or in class.

The bottom line is: be a smart consumer. You wouldn't buy a house or a car without first looking at and comparing a few. So why would you buy an education without using the same degree of care?

Coast Guard Spouse College Grant

"Could you use up to \$6,000 in additional financial assistance to help pay for your advanced education? Through Columbia College's new Coast Guard Spouse Grant, you can receive a 50 percent tuition discount for online and on-campus courses." These grants can be used for on-campus and on-line courses, up to \$6,000 per spouse. Spouses must be degree-seeking and fully admitted to Columbia College.

For more information about these grants, as well as other financial aid for spouses, go to <http://www.ccis.edu/military/spouses.asp>.

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.

Free SAT- ACT Prep Software for Military Families

The eKnowledge Sponsorship Alliance (ESA) – which includes the DoD and a group of NFL and MLB players – is offering SAT and ACT test prep programs to all military service members and their extended families. You're eligible if you're a servicemember from any branch of the military (regular, Reserve, National Guard), retired, a veteran, or a DoD employees or civilian performing military support and their relatives and dependents.

For more information, go to <http://www.military.com/grad-center/prepare-for-success/free-sat-act-prep-software-for-military-families>.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Seminars

TAP seminars are offered at various locations throughout the year. However, ESOs have nothing to do with them and there's no Coast Guard-wide master list of where and when they're held. Check with your Work-Life representative for more information.

ME Lateral Deadline Fast Approaching

If you're considering changing rates to become a Maritime Enforcement Specialist (ME), you need to know the deadline for submitting your request is Friday, 02 October 2009.

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

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.

Gauging Your Distraction

(from *The New York Times*)

“New studies show that drivers overestimate their ability to multitask behind the wheel. This game measures how your reaction time is affected by external distractions. Regardless of your results, experts say, you should not attempt to text when driving.” To try the game, go to <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/07/19/technology/20090719-driving-game.html>.

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.”

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.

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.

Learning a Second Language

There are a number of software applications that help you learn a foreign language. Rosetta Stone (<http://www.rosettastone.com/>, which everyone's seen on TV) and Tell Me More are (http://us.tellmemore.com/free_demo) are but two of these.

But don't go out and buy one just because everyone's talking about it. Before you order the software, do some research.

- Check the price. The only direct Coast Guard-related funding available to reimburse you language software you buy on your own is the Coast Guard Foundation Grant – which is only available to regular Coast Guard enlisted personnel (i.e., not Reservists and not officers).
- Ask around; see if you can find others who have it. 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 that helps you locate a good restaurant, 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.

And, of course, you can always take college courses in the target language. Tuition assistance will pay for them and you'll also earn college credit from them.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.