

TraCen Cape May Education Update #265

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Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
HS2 Chris Engstrom	TraCen Medical Clinic	HS1
HS2 Christie Herms	TraCen Medical Clinic	HS1

Well done, both of you!

And if you've just finished a degree program or have any other noteworthy academic achievement to brag about, please let me know so I can recognize you for it.

Question of the Week

Q: Why should I see my ESO before starting to take college courses?

A: There are many reasons, but the one that's most important to you is: to avoid costly mistakes.

Just last week, a young active duty petty officer sent me the following e-mail:

"I have been going to _____ college for a year and have been recently informed that the tuition may be more than what the GI Bill covers. I was thinking about transferring to a different school because I cannot afford the difference. I'm not sure exactly how to go about this or what schools I should consider. Can we please set up a meeting to go over this and exactly how the GI Bill works. Thank you in advance."

This e-mail immediately raised a red flag: I found it troubling that any distance learning school's tuition was more than the GI Bill would cover. Then, when I looked up the school on-line I was more disturbed. If PO Jones got her degree from this school, the total cost just for tuition would be just under \$60,000. Not only that, the school isn't regionally accredited.

When we met, the bad news kept on coming. PO Jones told me she had received about \$5,000 in GI Bill money from the Department of Veterans Affairs. This she used to pay a \$1,200 bill from the school and the rest to pay off credit card debt.

It also came out, during our discussion, that this school automatically signs students up for courses and it's up to the student to confirm or reject them.

As if this all weren't bad enough, I also had to tell her that because the school wasn't regionally accredited, she might not be able to use credits she's earned from this school toward a degree at another school.

But the worst part of our get-together was finding, from documents she brought with her, that she had (apparently without knowing she'd done so) taken out student loans totaling \$9,500 to pay for this school's tuition and fees.

The salesman PO Jones had talked with on the phone took advantage of her and, apparently, got her to commit to things she wouldn't have committed to if she'd known what was actually happening.

There are a number of lessons you should take from this real-world tale of woe.

- First, try to avoid institutions which don't give you basic info on their web sites and, instead, ask you to fill in an on-line form to have a "counselor" call you. The person who calls you will likely be a high-pressure sales person.
- If you do end up talking with one of these "counselors", do so on your own terms. If you don't have a written list of questions you want to get answers to, tell the person it's not a convenient time and that you'll talk with him/her later. REMEMBER: You can hang up the phone at any time; you don't have to talk with anyone if you don't want to.
- When you finally talk with the "counselor", be extremely wary if he/she steers the conversation to financing your education, says that won't be a problem, and then brings up the GI Bill and/or loans. There's no reason you should have to use either your GI Bill or loans to get a degree by distance learning from reputable school. Tuition Assistance will cover most costs at all but the most expensive schools.
- While talking with the "counselor", find out the cost of tuition per credit, how many credits you'll have to earn to get your degree, and whether the credits you earn will be quarter or semester credits. This info will give you a way to roughly compare costs at different schools.
- Read the info at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/step6.asp>.
- Finally, and most important, see your ESO before taking ANY action toward starting a college course.

Testing in TraCen Admin Building

Education customers in the Cape May area who have visited the TraCen Education Center know it's conveniently located in the Command & Mission Support (aka Admin) building. Of course, this convenience comes at a price: noise. Conversations – even quiet conversations – in the inside hall or the outside walkway are easily heard inside the Education Center. And this noise makes it difficult for those taking tests to concentrate and do their best.

To reduce the noise in the area, we've recently acquired some signs to notify visitors when testing is in progress in hopes they'll stop talking. We have four of those yellow A-frame signs (placed at both ends of the inside hall and the outside walkway) as well as a red-and-green electronic sign above the Education Center door. Both say "QUIET! TESTING IN PROGRESS".

As a sign of respect for your shipmates and their desire to take tests in a quiet environment, please stop talking when you see the yellow signs and the lit red-and-green sign.

Free On-line Academic Skills Course

If you're not sure you're quite ready for college (part-time or full-time), you'll soon be able to access another tool to improve your chances of doing well in college courses or to improve your ASVAB scores.

Peterson's Online Academic Skills Course (OASC) 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."

For more information or a 14-day demo, go to <http://www.petersons.com/oasc/default.asp?sponsor=8219>.

New Maritime Law Enforcement Degree

By next summer, you'll be able to get a degree related to maritime law enforcement through a new SOCCOAST network (<http://www.soc.aascu.org/soccoast/Default.html>). The ten schools in this network are working with representatives from the Coast Guard's Maritime Law Enforcement Academy (MLEA) and the Coast Guard Institute to create courses which supplement, enhance, or fill gaps in your professional training, according to Mr. Robert Bothel at the Institute.

The American Council on Education has completed its evaluation process for all the MLEA courses and courses associated with the new ME rate. The ten participating schools are now creating degree plans which include credits earned through the MLEA and other Coast Guard training courses toward this new degree.

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/myquickr/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.

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."

Enlisted-to-Officer Programs

Many opportunities exist for hard-charging enlisted personnel who are looking for a change of emphasis in their Coast Guard careers. If you're unsure just what the differences are between enlisted and officer careers, you can find information about them at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/o-e.asp>.

And for short descriptions of the various enlisted-to-officer programs, as well as an in-depth description of the application process, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/oprograms.asp>.

Finally, many enlisted personnel are unaware that they may not have to get their educations one or two courses at a time before they can apply for officer programs. The Coast Guard Academy offers a full-time course of instruction that includes both academics and professional training. At the end of four years, eligible cadets earn a bachelor's degree and a commission as an ensign.

The main requirements are that you

- are a U.S. citizen,
- are between 17 and 22 years (as of 01 July of the year of entry),
- are high school graduates, and
- have no dependents or financial obligations.

For more specifics, go to <http://www.cga.edu/>.

Tuition Assistance Requests

When you're submitting a TA request, ALWAYS make sure you enter the actual per-credit tuition amount **not** the maximum TA will pay. Why? There are two reasons. First, ESOs are required to verify that everything you enter on the form is correct. Second, you may want to use Top-up (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-30.asp#topup>) if your tuition is higher than the maximum TA will pay. If you don't enter the actual per-credit tuition amount, you won't be able to use Top-up to get reimbursed for the amount TA doesn't cover.

New College Info

Periodically, the TraCen Cape May's Education Center receives flyers, brochures, posters, and other information from colleges and universities around the country which are hoping to tap into the military market. This information is available for browsing any time during working hours (including lunch time). ***The fact that this information is available does not constitute an endorsement of the corresponding schools or programs.***

Here are the most recent offerings from regionally-accredited schools with tuition well under the max allowed by tuition assistance.

Bismarck State College in North Dakota is unusual in having six engineering-type degree programs you can pursue on-line, as well as seven non-engineering programs. Here they are:

- Associate of Arts (emphasis in criminal justice)
- Associate in Applied Science (power plant technology, process plant technology, electric power technology, nuclear power technology, electrical transmission systems technology, criminal justice, human services, management, geographic information systems, web page development & design, and information processing specialist)
- Bachelor of Applied Science (energy management)

Tuition costs between \$176 and \$227 per semester credit (depending on the major). For more information, go to <http://bscmilitaryonline.com/default.asp> or drop by the Education Center for hard-copy info.

Brigham Young University sent its latest Independent Study guide which describes dozens of university-level, high school, middle school, and personal enrichment courses. These courses are available either in a paper format or on-line. Tuition for both types of university-level courses is \$148 per semester credit, with an additional flat \$10 fee for paper-based courses. High school course credit is based on Carnegie Units and tuition is \$124 per ½ credit or \$78 per ¼ credit. And personal enrichment courses cost \$48 per ½ credit, with an additional flat \$10 fee for paper-based courses. For more information, drop by the Education Center to look through the Independent Study guide or go to <http://ce.byu.edu/is/site/>.

Still Thinking About Learning Another Language?

(courtesy of Mr. Rob McKee, ESO at Sector San Juan)

Rio Salado College (a SOC school) offers Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Arabic, or Chinese on-line learning using interactive voice recognition software and computer-based exercises all backed by the school's faculty. These courses use Auralog's "Tell Me More" language learning software (Rosetta Stone's main competitor).

Tuition is \$215 per credit (well under the max covered by tuition assistance – TA). The course requires you to buy an interactive computer DVD (\$70), but this is covered by TA. If you don't already have them, you'll want headphones, as well, but they and the \$15 registration fee are the only out-of-pocket costs.

These courses are for college credit, are self-paced, and can be completed in 14 or 8 weeks. (They start at 14 weeks but in your first week, if you wish, you can select to do the 8-week class. Your decision as to the length of the course is irrevocable.) You can use the course software without Internet connection, but must submit assignments and take tests via the Internet.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These courses are only available for PCs, not for Apple computers. Also, you may not be able to take the course using a Coast Guard workstation.

For more information, go to http://www.riosalado.edu/programs/general_education/Pages/languages.aspx or contact Ms. Yvonne Lawrence at yvonne.lawrence@riomail.maricopa.edu or by phone at 480-517-8183 or 800-517-8590.

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.

Considering a Health Services Career?

Are you interested in any of the following health services careers?

- dietetics
- medical engineering
- medical record administration
- physician assistant
- nursing
- pharmacy
- sanitary science
- computer science
- dental hygiene
- medical laboratory technology
- therapy (e.g., occupational, physical, speech-language pathology, or audiology).

If so, you might want to look into the Public Health Service's Junior and Senior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Programs (JRCOSTEP and SRCOSTEP). These programs offer "two excellent opportunities for students to serve their country while completing their education."

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/oprograms.asp#phs>. And if you have questions, you can get them answered during upcoming free conference calls. (To participate, call 866-705-5819 and use the passcode, 1633181.) These conference calls will take place at the following dates and times (all times Eastern):

September 29, 2009: 1400
October 15, 2009: 1500
October 26, 2009: 1000
November 17, 2009: Noon
December 7, 2009: 1300
December 17, 2009: 1100
December 21, 2009: 1000
December 29, 2009: 1500

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.

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>.

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.

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.