

TraCen Cape May Education Update #321

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Congratulations!!

The following personnel in the Cape May area passed Coast Guard Institute end-of-course, AQEs, and other tests since the last update:

Name	Work Site	Test
GMC Jason Murphy	TraCen (Armory)	E-PME-8*
DC2 Lisa Zammiello	TraCen (FE)	E-PME-6
YN1 Jeremy Bruner	TraCen (Recruit Trng)	E-PME-8*

* First attempt

Well done, all 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: I'd like to improve my computer skills, but don't have the time to take a course through my local community college. Are there any Coast Guard resources I could use to do this?

A: The short answer is, "Yes", through a company called SkillSoft which provides "on demand e-learning and performance support solutions." The Coast Guard has paid for SkillSoft licenses so you can access training at any time and any place to suit your needs.

Are you interested in learning to better use the programs that are part of Windows Office 2007 (e.g., Word, Excel, etc.)? Would you like to improve your customer service, communications, or leadership skills? How about project management or strategic planning?

Courses on these and hundreds more subjects are available **FREE**. Once you've logged in, just click on "Catalog" to see all the free courses.

In addition, you can also use Books 24x7, an on-line library of hundreds of books covering topics related to business, IT, office and personnel management, and office computer applications.

To log in and check it out, go to the CGPortal, then click on the "Training & Education" button on the blue bar. Scroll down and at the bottom of the text you'll see "SkillSoft" and a small logo that says "SINGLE SIGN-ON" next to it.

If you have a question you'd like answered as a Question of the Week, e-mail it to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Web Page in the Spotlight

There's a lot of stuff on the TraCen Cape May web site you might not check out if you didn't know it was there. So this week, I'm spotlighting **Frequently Asked Questions** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/faq.asp>).

Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused words. This week, the often-confused words are *forego* and *forgo*.

Forego is a verb meaning to go before, to precede. It's more often used in its adjectival form to mean previous or already passed. "It was a foregone conclusion that the home team would win the game" or "The foregoing statement can't be proven".

Forgo is a verb meaning to forsake, renounce, do without, or abstain from. "He promised to forgo seconds at Thanksgiving dinner".

If there are any word usage, grammar, or similar issues you've encountered, please e-mail them to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Thinking about Ashford University?

(from Rob McKee, full-time ESO at Sector San Juan)

If you're considering getting a degree from Ashford University and received your high school diploma in Puerto Rico be aware that you will have to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language, <http://www.ets.org/toefl/>) before you will be admitted – even if you're in the Coast Guard or one of the DoD services.

May Servicewide Exams

If you met all the qualifications for advancement by 01 February 2011, PSC will automatically send a SWE for you to the ESO at the examination board listed on the Personal Data Extract (PDE). **Your ESO has nothing to do with PDEs and you cannot request a SWE.**

When your PDE is made available (on DirectAccess in the next few weeks, in hard-copy format a few weeks later via your SPO), make sure you check **everything** on it carefully – including your examination board name and OPFAC.

- Are you going to be on leave or TAD on the date of your SWE?
- Will you be in-transit due to a PCS move on the date of your SWE?
- Are you going to be away from the unit listed on your PDE for any other reason on the date of your SWE?

If so (and if you want to take the SWE), do the following:

- find a unit you know you'll be geographically near on your SWE date,
- contact the ESO at that unit and ask if it's OK to take your SWE there,
- assuming the ESO says "yes", ask for the unit's OPFAC,
- let your SPO know what the name and OPFAC of that unit so the info on your PDE is changed.

PSC will automatically send your exam to the unit list as your exam board on your PDE.

Substitute exams are authorized ONLY in emergencies. Regular leave (even if you scheduled a Caribbean cruise six months ago) is not an emergency. A wedding – even your own – is not an emergency. For more information on just what circumstances justify requesting a substitute exam, see Article 5.D.3. of the *Personnel Manual*.

If you change the Exam Board on your PDE and later find out you won't be able to take your SWE at that location, let your ESO know immediately.

For info on studying and test-taking skills, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studying.asp>.

Excelsior College Exams

Excelsior College Exams (ECEs, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ece.asp>) have long been available to uniformed personnel (regulars and Reservists) in paper-and-pencil format through many ESOs free of charge.

As of the beginning of FY12 (01 October 2011), DANTES will no longer pay for ECEs. Also on that date, paper-based tests will become a thing of the past and all ECEs will be administered only in a computer-based format.

If you want to take an ECE, your DANTES Test Control Officer must request it before Wednesday, 01 September 2011 and it must be returned for scoring no later than Friday, 30 September 2011.

New (Post-9/11) GI Bill Note

Many people are under the impression that when they use benefits under the new GI Bill, there is an upper limit of \$17,500 per year for all courses and programs. This is not the case.

Starting on 01 August 2011, upper limits will only apply in the following cases:

- students pursuing a degree at a privately-funded or foreign institution of higher learning (IHL) more than half-time (\$17,500/year)
- students pursuing a certificate or other non-college degree more than half-time (whether at an IHL or elsewhere) (\$17,500/year)
- students pursuing flight training more than half-time (\$10,000/year)
- students in programs "pursued exclusively by correspondence" more than half-time (\$8,500/year)

Full-time, at IHLs that run on a semester system, is usually considered to be 12 credits. For IHLs on a quarter system, 18 credits is usually considered to be full-time. For trade and technical courses, full-time is defined as 22 hours per week.

Recent CGA Grads & the New GI Bill

On 04 January 2011, President Obama signed S. 3447, which amended many provisions of the new (Post-9/11) GI Bill. One of those amendments (effective on the date it was signed) eliminated the different treatment graduates of the DoD services academies received with respect to eligibility compared with graduates of the Coast Guard Academy.

Specifically, graduates of the Coast Guard Academy (like their DoD counterparts) must now wait until they have completed their five-year active duty service obligation before they can accrue active duty time which counts toward eligibility for benefits under the new GI Bill.

EXAMPLE 1: If a cadet or midshipman graduated from one of the DoD academies in May 2003 and has remained on active duty since then, she will be eligible for benefits under the new GI Bill at the 100% level in May 2011 (five year

service obligation completed in May 2008 plus 36 months of additional active duty service). The same is true for 2003 CGA graduates who did not activate their new GI Bill benefit before 04 January 2011.

EXAMPLE 2: If a cadet or midshipman graduated from one of the DoD academies in May 2007 and has remained on active duty since then, she will complete her five-year obligation in May 2012. Ninety days after that, she will be eligible for new GI Bill benefits at the 40% level and the level will increase until, in May 2015, she's eligible for 100% of the benefits. The same is true for 2007 CGA graduates who did not activate their new GI Bill benefit before 04 January 2011.

EXAMPLE 3: A Coast Guard Academy cadet who graduated in May 2007 became eligible for new GI Bill benefits at the 100% level in May 2010. If he activated them before 04 January 2011 he may use them even though he hasn't completed his five-year service obligation.

ACT Exam at TraCen Cape May

If you're a regular or Reserve Guardian and are interested in taking (need to take) the ACT exam (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp>), you can take it at TraCen Cape May on **Thursday, 10 March 2011**. Tests are free if the Coast Guard has never paid for you to take it before. If you've taken it before and want to take it again, that's OK, but you'll have to pay for the test. The cost is \$33.

If you'd like to take this test, let me know **before Wednesday, 09 February**. I have to order tests a month before the test date.

I haven't yet set a date for the next SAT, but will do so before the end of this month.

To see a comparison of the ACT and SAT, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/comparison.asp>.

Reservists & Tuition Assistance

Reservists may be unaware that they may use Coast Guard tuition assistance (TA) to pay for courses which meet the eligibility and use rules laid out in the Performance, Training, & Education Manual (COMDTINST M1500.10 (series)). These rules are summarized at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp#eligibility>.

The PT&E Manual states that "TA is not authorized for reservists who have not met participation standards for the 12 months immediately prior to application or for reservists who are more than six months out of compliance for readiness metrics." However, Reservists who have not served for a year are presumed to be in compliance with the readiness criteria set forth in the Reserve Policy Manual (COMDTINST M1001.28 (series)). That means that Reservists who just graduated from boot camp may apply for TA.

Best Colleges for Women and Minorities in STEM

(from Forbes magazine)

An article in the 15 December 2010 issue of Forbes magazine lists "schools [which] help underrepresented groups succeed in science, technology, engineering and math" and describes why these fields are the key to higher salaries (<http://www.forbes.com/2010/12/10/best-colleges-minorities-women-science-lifestyle-education-stem.html>).

However, before jumping into a major which you're not all that keen on just so you can make more money, be sure to check the long-term prospects for people with a degree in these majors. The Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm>) is the best source of information on trends in the employment market.

New GI Bill Changes Take Effect in March

On 05 March 2011, the first of many changes to the new (Post-9/11) GI Bill will take effect. These changes will apply only to active duty military personnel. On that date, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will no longer automatically pay the whole cost of college courses. Instead, the amount active duty personnel receive will depend on how long they've served on active duty. See the table at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-33.asp#payments>.

For example, let's say you've served for 32 months on active duty and have been taking two courses per term at State U. where the total cost of tuition and fees for those courses is \$6,800. The DVA will no longer pay the full \$6,800. Instead, it will pay only 90% of \$6,800. This is because, according to the table, those who've served between 30 and 36 months on active duty are entitled to payments at the 90% rate. Once you reach your third anniversary of active duty service, you'll be entitled to the 100% rate.

Other New GI Bill Changes

On 01 August and 01 October 2011 other changes to the new GI Bill will take effect. The recent amendments to the new GI Bill

- make those pursuing programs other than those leading to a degree (e.g., vocational courses, flight training, apprenticeships, etc.) eligible for funding,
- allow reimbursement for licensing, certification, and admission tests,
- make students working toward a degree via distance learning courses eligible for a housing allowance,
- extend the book stipend to active duty personnel,
- extend the transferability provision to personnel in the NOAA and PHS commissioned corps,
- limits payments to private and foreign colleges/universities to \$17,500 per year (but retains the Yellow Ribbon program),
- eliminate the state payment-rate tables for publicly-funded colleges/universities and extends the rules applicable to undergraduate programs to graduate programs (i.e., the new GI Bill will now pay in-state tuition and fees for publicly-funded schools for both undergraduate and graduate courses).

I'm working on a comprehensive before-and-after comparison so you can see what's changed and how the changes will affect you. In the meantime, you can find a summary of these changes on the Department of Veterans' Affairs' web site (http://www.gibill.va.gov/post-911/post-911-gi-bill-summary/Post911_changes.html).

Continuing Education Courses

Cape May County Technical School District, at the Technical Center for Continuing Education (TCCE, exit 11 on the Garden State Parkway), offers dozens of courses in topics as varied as:

- NJ licensing (e.g., Black Seal, dental radiology, wastewater, cosmetology, etc.)
- General interest technical (e.g., auto repair, cabinetmaking, woodturning, etc.)
- Job/business technical (e.g., HVAC, art metal work, electrical house wiring, masonry, upholstery, welding, etc.)
- Ballroom dancing
- Special training (e.g., defensive driving, digital photography, dog obedience, genealogy, financial education, etc.)
- Computer applications
- Cooking/baking
- Languages
- Health and fitness
- Office, business, and careers

These courses are all extremely reasonably priced, with classes generally meeting in the evenings.

In addition, the TCCE has on-going **free** GED preparation courses and testing, adult basic education courses, ESL courses, citizenship courses, and computer literacy courses running continuously throughout the year.

For more information, drop by the Education Center for a course booklet or go to Cape May Tech's web site at <http://www.capemaytech.com/2011winterspringbrochure.pdf>.

Striker Programs Update

ALCOAST 591/10 announced that the BM, DC, MK, and SK striker programs have been reinstated indefinitely. However, the EM3 and YN3 striker programs have been terminated because most EPQs for those ratings can't be completed outside of "A" school or the YN3 distance learning program.

New Amounts for Coast Guard Foundation Grants

The Coast Guard Foundation announced earlier this month that it has increased the maximum grant available from \$350 to \$500 per calendar year. At the same time, the Vander Putten grant has been reduced from \$500 to \$250 per calendar year, available if you have received the maximum available under the Foundation grant.

Note that these amounts are maximums and that there are no guarantees that you will receive a grant just because you applied for one. Although the Coast Guard Institute is now accepting applications for Coast Guard Foundation and Vander Putten grants, be aware that there is currently no funding for these grants. The Institute estimates that funding will be available in March, but there is no guarantee this will be the case.

Remember: funding for these grants comes from individuals (civilian and military) who contribute money when they can

For more information (including a link to the current application form), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#cgf>.

Learning a Second Language & Foreign Language Testing

There are a number of software applications that help you learn a foreign language. “Tell Me More” (http://us.tellemore.com/free_demo) and “Rosetta Stone” (<http://www.rosettastone.com/>, which everyone’s seen on TV) 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 and Reserve enlistees on active duty (i.e., not drilling Reservists or 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.
- **Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP).** If you want to earn FLPP as one of your unit’s designated interpreters, it’s highly unlikely a commercially-available language course will give you the proficiency needed to get the necessary rating on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT, see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>). And keep in mind that even if it does, your unit has to have designated interpreter billets *and* you have to be formally assigned to one of those billets. (Most operational units have only two or three interpreter billets.)

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.

You can also find loads of (mostly) free resources for learning foreign languages at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/languages.asp>.

Scholarship for Cape May-area Residents

The Wildwood chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is offering a \$500 scholarship for seniors at Wildwood High School or Wildwood Catholic High School.

For more information, contact Mr. John Burgin (TraCen Cape May Facilities Engineering) at 609-898-6948 or 609-536-2754.

Coast Guard Foundation Scholarships

ALCOAST 007/11 was published last Friday, announcing six different scholarships open to dependent children of active duty, retired, or deceased Coast Guard enlisted personnel, and dependent children of enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard Reserve currently on active duty. The application deadline for these is **01 April 2011**.

The Coast Guard Foundation also has two other scholarships. One is open to employees of the Aviation Logistics Center in Elizabeth City, NC (active duty officers and enlisted personnel, federal civil service employees, and their dependents). The deadline for this scholarship is **15 March 2011**.

The other program is open to dependent children of Coast Guard personnel who lost a parent in Coast Guard operations. Applications for this program are accepted at any time.

For more information about these scholarships, see ALCOAST 007/11 at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST007-11.pdf>.

LEAD Program

Although it's too late this year (applications have to be submitted by 25 January), middle school and high school students should seriously consider getting ready to apply for any of the three programs sponsored by an organization called LEAD – Leadership Education and Development. These programs provide fantastic opportunities to motivated middle school and high school students.

LEAD Business “is a national partnership of top U.S. corporations and graduate business schools that encourages talented students from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in business.” It is open to high school juniors with a “B” average or better, combined test scores of at least 100 on the PSAT, 1000 on the SAT (critical reading and math combined), or 22 on the ACT. Applicants must also demonstrate leadership ability and active involvement in their schools and communities. However, applicants need not have previous experience in or knowledge of the field of business. For more information, go to <http://www.leadbusinesssite.org/HOME.html>.

LEAD Engineering “exists to introduce students of color with outstanding academic performance and demonstrated leadership skills to the field of engineering. The mission of LEAD Engineering is to lay the foundation through an intense curriculum for an increase in the number and quality of diversified students interested in careers in engineering and other technical fields.” It is open to students in their sophomore or junior years of high school with at least an average GPA 3.2 and combined test scores of at least 100 on the PSAT, 1000 on the SAT (critical reading and math combined), or 22 on the ACT. Applicants must have successfully completed a minimum of two science courses and Algebra II. They must also be US Citizens or permanent residents. For more information, go to <http://www.leadengineeringsite.org/>.

LEAD Global “exists to expose American students of color to global career opportunities alongside peers from different countries in one program so that all participants might make better informed decisions when choosing a college or profession.” Applicants must currently be in the ninth or tenth grade and have at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA. They must be mature, stable, adaptable, and self-disciplines in new environments and they must have a valid passport. For more information, go to <http://www.leadglobalsite.org/HOME.html>.

Re-taking ASVAB Tests

Are you interested in going to “A” school for a particular rate, but realize your ASVAB scores aren't high enough? You may be unaware that at any time you can re-take one or more of the tests which comprise the AFCT (Armed Forces Classification Test) – the version of the ASVAB available only to military personnel.

Before you pick up the phone to call your ESO to schedule a test, however, keep in mind two things. First, whatever score you get on the re-test (higher, lower, or the same) it becomes your new official score. Second, if you're unsatisfied with the score you get on a re-test, you must wait six months to take that test again.

Other Considerations

- The VE score represents a scaled composite of the scores on two separate tests: PC and WK. You can't take a single test to improve your VE score.
- The WK test is a vocabulary test and, as such, is virtually impossible to prepare for. If you've become an avid reader since you took the ASVAB at a MEP Station or have memorized a dictionary, you may improve your WK score greatly. But if not, you should think twice about re-taking it – especially if your existing score is relatively high.
- You can qualify for five ratings' "A" schools (AET, AMT, AST, ET, IT) either by getting the required composite score or by getting an AFQT score of at least 65. (Your AFQT score is equal to AR + MK + (2 x VE).) To qualify for these schools via the AFQT score, you do *not* have to have a minimum AR score of 52.

For more information about the AFCT/ASVAB, each of its tests, and how to prepare for them, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/asvab.asp>.

TraCen Cape May Testing Calendar

Tests at TraCen Cape May are administered by appointment according to the following schedule:

Mondays (0800): Defense Language Proficiency Tests

Tuesdays (0800): EOCTs and AQEs*

Thursdays (0745): college tests, CLEP tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

- * If operations or your work schedule make it impossible for you to take an EOCT or AQE on a Tuesday morning, you can take it on a Thursday morning.

This schedule leaves most of the day on Tuesdays, as well as all day on Wednesdays, Fridays available for other occasional tests, counseling, and other face-to-face interactions with you. When no one is taking a language test, the doors to the Education Center are open on Mondays, as well.

If you call and I don't answer the phone, I'm usually administering a test (and, because of the noise, can't talk on the phone) or otherwise busy with someone in the office. E-mail is the best way to get in touch with me.

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 Center 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.