

# TraCen Cape May Education Update #339

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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:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Work Site</b>	<b>Test</b>
BM1 Juan de Leon	CGC Ibis	DWINTR
SN Kristie Bailey	CGC Ibis	E-PME-4*
MKC Dominic Celli	Station Atlantic City	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:** My husband's a civilian and is interested in getting a degree. Can he use my tuition assistance? And is he eligible for any other benefits?

**A:** Unfortunately, there is no direct financial aid for education available to spouses or other dependents of Coast Guard military personnel. This includes tuition assistance. If you are eligible for benefits under the new (Post 9/11) GI Bill and have served in the Coast Guard (regular, Reserve, or both) for six years, you can transfer whatever benefits you have under that program to one or more dependents.

Dependent spouses can also access some financial aid for education from Coast Guard Mutual Assistance's (CGMA's) Supplemental Education Grant and from its education loan program. The Coast Guard Foundation also just recently inaugurated its own grant program for spouses of uniformed Coast Guard personnel.

Other programs, services, and benefits available to dependents are described at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dependents.asp>.

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](mailto: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 **Dependents** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dependents.asp>).

## Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused/mispronounced words. This week, *cache* and *cachet* (definitions are from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*).

**Cache** (pronounced the same as *cash*) is a French noun we use to mean a hiding place, especially for concealing and preserving provisions ("The rebels put most of their ammunition in a well-hidden cache") or implements or something hidden or stored in a cache ("The Marines found a huge cache of materials used to build IEDs").

**Cachet** (pronounced *kashay*) is also a French noun we generally use to mean a characteristic feature or quality which confers prestige ("People in her social set considered her home address on Central Park East as giving her a lot of cachet").

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](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil).

## Watch Out for Diploma Mills Masquerading as Legitimate Colleges

(courtesy of Troy Blappert, full-time ESO at Base Seattle)

Before responding to an ad or other hype describing how easy it is to get a college degree, check out a web site that will help you figure out if the school you're interested in is a legitimate. "Phony online colleges crank out fake diplomas and phony college degrees at a dizzying pace," one page of the web site's *Diploma Mill Police* page states (<http://www.geteducated.com/diploma-mill-police>).

"Diploma Mills almost always promise a fast college degree based on life experience. GetEducated's online education researchers have prepared these Top 10 Signs of an Online College Degree Mill to help online students protect themselves from this popular online education scam."

In addition to a database of degree/diploma mills, the site provides a way for you to report buy-a-degree scams and has short articles that describe how to recognize a degree/diploma mill, where most are located, whether saying you got your degree on-line is a good idea, a list of fake accrediting agencies, the pros and cons of "life experience on-line degrees", and much more. And, to quote Mr. Blappert, "It also highlights schools that are nationally accredited as opposed to regionally, and it explains the difference and potential drawbacks."

## Enlisted Reserve Scholarships

The Coast Guard Foundation is awarding six \$1,000 scholarships to enlisted Reservists or their dependents for the 2011-2012 academic year. The application deadline is Friday, 08 July 2011, but the application process is relatively painless:

- a signed one-page letter from the applicant attesting to his/her eligibility (per the requirements listed in ALCOAST 292/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST292-11.pdf>));
- a typed one-page essay on "how my (or my parents/my spouses) service in the Coast Guard Reserve has contributed to my success";

- an official copy of your college transcript from the 2010-2011 academic year or the last academic year during which the applicant attended college.

For all the details, see ALCOAST 292/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST292-11.pdf>).

## New Requirements for First-time TA Users

Beginning on next Friday, if you're applying for tuition assistance (TA) for the first time and working toward an undergraduate (associate's or bachelor's) degree, you'll have to provide your ESO with an unofficial copy of your most recent transcript from the Coast Guard Institute (less than 4 years old) before she can process your TA request.

To get a transcript, you'll need to download and complete the "Application for Transcript" (form CGI-1561) [http://uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/forms/CG\\_Form\\_1561.pdf](http://uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/forms/CG_Form_1561.pdf). Make sure you read the instructions for each section before filling out that section.

## Using Skillsoft at Home: Free On-line Courses on Hundreds of Subjects

Most Guardians are unaware of the free resource they have at their fingertips wherever they have computer access. This resource is called SkillSoft and it's accessible through the CGPortal (<https://cgportal.uscg.mil/>). Just click on the "Training & Education" button on the blue menu bar and scroll down. You'll see "Skillsoft Single Sign-On" where you can log in to use it at work. Below that you'll see "SkillPort Dependent Registration". To log in from home, the URL is <https://uscg.skillport.com/skillportfe/login.action>.

The courses fall into these general categories:

- Business skills & certifications
- Desktop applications
- IT professional curricula & certifications
- CG Unit Leadership Development Program
- Information systems technician
- Information systems management
- Legal compliance curricula
- Environmental, safety and health, and transportation curricula
- DHS training requirements

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

## How to Go to College Almost for Free

Whether you'd like more money for your own education (even if you're using TA or receiving GI Bill benefits) or for a dependent, you should check out <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/scholarships.asp#strategy>. You'll see that finding money for college *is* possible using a logical, linear (and not all that daunting) methodology devised by Ben Kaplan.

Also, the Education Center recently acquired Mr. Kaplan's video, "Finding College Cash in Tough Times" (<http://www.cityofcollegedreams.org/store/finding-college-cash-in-tough-times>). After a short introduction it covers the following topics:

- Part I: Exploding 3 Myths about Paying for College
- Part II: 3 Strategies for Maximizing Need-based Financial Aid
- Part III: 3 Steps for Finding Merit Scholarships
- Part IV: 3 Components of a Winning Scholarship Game Plan
- Part V: 3 Strategies for Making Your Application Shine
- Part VI: Concluding Thoughts & Final Quiz

Although I can't lend out the video, you can watch it in the Education Center. Please contact me ([andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil)) if you're interested in seeing it. The total running time is 71 minutes. If there's enough interest to warrant it, we'll show it in the auditorium; otherwise, in the Education Center.

## Do I Need a Degree to Get the Job I Want?

Many Coast Guard personnel are more interested in working with their hands (for example, carpentry, gunsmithing, plumbing, locksmithing, electrical work) than they are in sitting in class for five hours a day to get a degree. Still, everyone tells them they need to get a degree to succeed in the civilian labor market so they feel they have to do so.

But before you jump into a degree program, think about your ultimate employment goal and work backwards from it. When planning a car trip, you don't just start driving and hope to end up somewhere you wanted to go. You have a destination in mind and figure out the best route to get there. This should be the way you also plan your career, both in the Coast Guard and in the civilian world.

Let's say you want to work as a video game designer. Assuming you want to work for a company that does nothing but design and market video games, call a half dozen of them and talk with someone who makes hiring decisions in the HR department or the like. Ask what kind of training and/or education they're looking for in new hires. Ask specifically if the people they hire need a degree, a certificate of some kind, or if demonstrated ability (e.g., via a portfolio or other samples of your work) is good enough.

Remember: a college degree requires you to take many courses totally unrelated to your field of interest. Roughly half the courses you take to earn a degree fall into this category. If you're more interested in acquiring the knowledge necessary to start working in the field that interests you, a degree may not be for you.

There are a number of paths you can take once you know whether most likely employers require a degree. You can

- work with someone who has the knowledge you want to acquire (a mentor-protégé or apprenticeship relationship, formal or informal);
- learn it on your own via resources available for free (often on the Internet, see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#knowledge>);
- take college courses just in your area of interest and, perhaps, earn an academic certificate in the process (see "Academic Certificates" at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/degreedesc.asp#certs>); or
- take non-credit courses that you have to pay for, for example Excelsior College's Professional Development courses (<http://www.excelsior.edu/web/center-for-professional-development>) or the Graduate School's courses (<http://graduateschool.edu/>), which GI Bill education benefits will likely cover.

First find out if a degree is something you need or want. If you don't need a degree, but you want one and/or what you learn will be useful, by all means work toward one. The point is, don't jump into a degree program just because everyone else is doing so.

## Build Skills for Education Success

If you're about ready to start taking college courses or want to improve one or more ASVAB scores, check out the Online Academic Skills Course (OASC) from Peterson's. It's designed to help you build your math and verbal skills, which will help you score well on exams and excel in your career – in or out of the Coast Guard.

OASC is available free 24/7 to you and your family on the Internet.

How does it work? You first take an initial test to measure your strengths and weaknesses. Then you'll receive a personalized set of lessons based on your test results. Those lessons will engage you with interactive activities, flash cards, quizzes, and practice tests. Once you've completed all the lessons, you'll take another test to evaluate your progress.

For more information, to register, and to get started, go to <http://www.petersons.com/dantes>.

## Is Distance Learning for You?

Because of its convenience (no need to leave the house to attend classes), distance learning appeals to working people – especially to military personnel. This fact means many Coast Guard personnel (who are often not near large population centers) have opportunities for higher education they might not have had in the past.

But before you plunk down the application fee for a distance learning course, check out the information about distance learning at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp>. And before you hop on the on-line course bandwagon, spend a little time with the University of Georgia's on-line assessment tool to help you determine if computer-based distance learning is for you (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#01>).

## Credit-by-Exam Test Preparation

If you're preparing to take a credit-by-exam test (e.g., CLEP test, DSST, or ECE), check out the Coast Guard Institute's new library of study materials (including, in most cases, on-line courses) for each of the 111 different tests. Everything's accessible via the Internet at [http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/active\\_duty/go\\_to\\_college/earn\\_credits/dantes\\_library/default.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/active_duty/go_to_college/earn_credits/dantes_library/default.asp).

## Spanish for Law Enforcement Academic Certificate

California University of Pennsylvania has an undergraduate certificate program in Spanish for Law Enforcement. This program "is specifically designed to meet the needs of law-enforcement officers, correctional officers, public and private security personnel, and for those students seeking employment in a relevant field."

The program consists of four 8-week courses which all students (regardless of existing language proficiency) must take. Students complete this program in one academic year and "learn basic practical language skills that will assist them as criminal justice practitioners in a number of situations such as law-enforcement commands and dealing with suspects, victims, and witnesses; prison populations; and border and immigration issues. Students will also learn about Hispanic culture and customs so they can better understand the needs of members of their communities."

Tuition is below the maximum authorized by tuition assistance (TA), but there are fees not covered by TA (approximately \$160 per semester).

The school also offers an Arabic Language and Culture undergraduate certificate program. For more information, go to <http://www.calu.edu/prospective/global-online/index.htm>.

## Veterans Technology Certificate Program

Syracuse University, in conjunction with JPMorgan Chase, has created a new Veterans Technology Certificate Program around the university's Global Enterprise Technology (GET) curriculum. GET integrates "coursework with real-world, on-the-job experience. The purpose of the program is to help veterans interested in technology careers in global companies to move toward that goal.

The program is self-paced and computer-based (completely on-line). Program administrators estimate it will take approximately 240 hours (six weeks of full-time work) to complete. The only application requirements are that you:

- have served on active duty since 10 September 2001,
- are preparing to separate (e.g., checking out or attending a TAP seminar before separating) or are a veteran,
- have demonstrated a genuine interest in and aptitude for technology,
- are able to commit a minimum of four hours per day to the program, and
- submit a complete application (consisting of an application form, a résumé, and two references).

For more information, go to <http://veterans.syr.edu/JPMC/faq.html>. To download the application, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/VTCP.pdf>.

## Make Your OCS Narrative Memo Stand Out

One of the main anxiety-inducing parts of the officer program application process is the narrative memo. Almost all applicants ask me a variation of the question, “Where can I find a template for the memo?”

The short answer is: “There isn’t one.”

The narrative memo is supposed to show the interview board and, more important, the selection board how **you** write and (indirectly) how you think. Because you can’t always explain your views or findings to decision-makers in person, a big part of being an officer is writing: everything from e-mails to messages to memos to position papers to massive reports.

But even if that weren’t the case, members of the selection board have nothing else that comes from you directly to use in making their decision. That being the case, the narrative memo is your only way to talk directly to them and sell them on the idea that you – of the hundreds of applicants – should be chosen. That being the case, you not only want to be able to explain yourself clearly and concisely, but (optimally) in an engaging manner. You want to hook them when they read your first sentence, make each succeeding sentence matter to them, give them such a good idea of who you are that they’ll be thinking, as they finish reading, “That’s somebody I’d want in *my* wardroom!”

How do you write a 1½-page memo that does that? Consider taking a course on writing creative nonfiction. What’s creative nonfiction? It’s a form of writing which “uses literary styles and techniques to create factually accurate narratives”. Check out <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/druker/nonfic.html> and <http://www.gartistic.com/ar/creative-nonfiction-writing.php> for good (and brief) explanations of just what creative nonfiction is.

A number of reputable schools offer such courses, which can be applied toward a degree (making TA available to pay for them). Examples are those offered by the University of Wisconsin ([http://distancelearning.wisconsin.edu/course\\_info.cfm?id=1997&source=1](http://distancelearning.wisconsin.edu/course_info.cfm?id=1997&source=1)) and Empire State College in New York (<http://www.esc.edu/admin/esc/cdl/cdlcat.nsf/byid/67D8D2FCBD5510FF852575C3006F65BF?opendocument>).

If a course seems a bit much, keep in mind your goal and what serving as an officer will entail. A course that will help you improve your writing will pay off in both the short-run (making you more competitive in the selection process) and in the long-run (making it easier for you to write throughout your career). But if you decide you absolutely don’t want to take a course, at least get a good book, read it thoroughly, and apply what you learned to your memo.

For more on the narrative memo, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/narrative.asp>.

## Thinking of Starting Your Own Business?

If you’re thinking about starting your own business, either while you’re still in uniform or after you leave the Coast Guard, check out a sampling of resources for entrepreneurs at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/smallbiz.asp>. There you’ll find general resources applicable to all types of small businesses on many different subjects (e.g., drafting a business plan, finding funding, etc.).

There are also sections aimed at those interested in starting not-for-profit businesses and those interested in social entrepreneurship. Contrary to the popular notion, not-for-profit doesn’t mean “no profit” or that you can’t earn a substantial salary. It just means most of the profit has to be put toward specific things, usually plowed back into the business. There’s also a section with links to labor market information.

Finally, drop by the Education Center to pick up a copy of the book *Best Career and Education Web Sites*. Chapters 7 (“Self-Employment and Small Business”) and 8 (“Temporary Work, Contract Employment, Freelancing, Teleworking, and Volunteering”) have many great leads.

## How Fees Count Against Your Per-credit TA Limits

OK; this is your first time applying for tuition assistance (TA) and you’re not exactly sure what to put in a couple of the boxes on the application. Specifically, “Cost per Credit” and “Course Fees”.

The “Cost per Credit” field (#35 on the WebTA application) is where you put your per-credit tuition. Field #36 (“Course Fees”) is where you put fees that are covered by TA and nothing else. The rule of thumb is that if a fee is directly related to the course you’ve listed on the same line, it’s covered by TA. If you’re taking a course to learn how to draw blood correctly and there’s a fee associated with it to cover the cost of masks and gloves, that fee’s covered by TA. These fees are generally listed next to the course in the school’s course guide.

Fees that all students have to pay regardless of which course they’re taking are not covered by TA. These are generally listed in the school’s course guide inside the back cover and include things like parking fees, student activity fees, etc.

If you have to pay a fee that is covered by TA (a course fee), *don’t* add it to the tuition or enter that total in field #35. If you do, you’ll end up paying more than if you entered only the tuition in field #35 and only your course fee in field #36. Here’s an example. Let’s say your school operates on a quarter system and charges tuition of \$151/credit. You’re taking one 3-credit course that includes a \$75 course fee.

If you add your tuition and the fee together, here’s what’ll happen. You’ll enter \$226 as the “Cost per Credit”, or \$678 for the total cost of the course. But since TA pays no more than \$166.67/credit for quarter-based courses, TA will pay \$500.01 to the school ( $\$166.67 \times 3$ ) and you’ll be left having to pay the difference or  $\$678 - \$500.01$  or \$177.99.

If you fill out the form correctly, however, you’ll list your tuition as \$151/credit in field #35 and your \$75 fee in field #36. Since TA will cover up to \$166.67/credit and your tuition is only \$151/credit, the difference between the two ( $\$15.67/\text{credit}$  or \$47.01 for the course) that will be applied to your \$75 course fee, leaving you to pay only  $\$75 - \$47.01$  or \$27.99.

The bottom line is: enter the correct tuition – and *only* the tuition – in field #35 and enter only fee(s) directly associated with your course in field #36. You’ll end up having to pay less out of pocket than if you combine the two in field #35.

## Civilian Career Myths

Excelsior College’s alumni magazine often includes articles of use to military personnel about to enter or re-enter the civilian work force. The latest issue has an article entitled “Fact or Fiction: The Truth About Career Myths” (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/careermyths.pdf>). You can also read “Skills Employers Seek” (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/skills.pdf>) and the Fall/Winter 2008 issue.

Check ‘em out!

## Reserve Resource Guide

In addition to the web site of the Coast Guard Office of Reserve Affairs (<http://www.uscg.mil/reserve/>), Reservists should also check out TraCen Petaluma’s Reserve Resource Guide (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/tracenpetaluma/RRG/>). Together, these provide info on and links to info on every facet of Coast Guard affairs related to service in the Reserve.

## 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 at [andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil](mailto:andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil).

## 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>).

Also, stop by the Education Center to check out the (small) supply of booklets related to rejoining the civilian work force. Here are the topics of the booklets:

- Jobs With a Future
- How to Develop Job Resources
- The Resume
- The Cover Letter: A Resume Should Never Stand Alone
- The Mature Resume: The Resume with Experience
- The Follow-up Letter
- The Interview
- How to Choose a Career: A Guide to Self-Assessment
- Civilian Again
- Leaving the Service ... and Beginning Your Next Career
- Military to Civilian: Your Resume and Job Hunt
- Effective Goal Setting: How to Reach the Goals You Set for Yourself

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 (or a transcript) 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>).

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.

## Education Center Library

The TraCen Education Center 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>.

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) and Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs) 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.