

# TraCen Cape May Education Update #355

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## TraCen Cape May ESO on Leave

For planning purposes, I'll be on leave from Monday, 21 November through Thursday, 01 December. The Education Center will be closed during that period.

## Question of the Week

**Q:** I requested tuition assistance for a college course last May, but had to withdraw. Now I want to use TA again, but when I go into eTA I'm locked out. The computer tells me I need to provide a grade report or pay for the course. But I didn't take the course! What can I do to straighten this out and use TA again?

**A:** You've done what too many TA users do, sad to say. That is, you've forgotten that when you use TA you have two separate tracks you have to follow at the same time. If you forget one of them, you can find yourself in difficulty. Those two tracks are your school's track and the Coast Guard TA track.

With respect to your school, if you drop a course, be sure to follow the school's rules which may involve getting the instructor's approval and submitting some kind of form to the school. If you just stop going to class, you'll likely find that you flunk the course.

With respect to the Coast Guard, you've got to remember to cancel your TA authorization if you drop a course for which TA was approved. Until you do, the Coast Guard has no way of knowing that you're not actually taking the course. That being the case, the Coast Guard will expect you to provide a grade report within 60 days of the date the school term ends. If you don't, the Coast Guard will assume you failed the course and will require you to repay the TA authorized for the course – even if you never took it.

So if you drop a course, be sure to notify your ESO immediately asking her to cancel the authorization for that course. Be sure to provide your employee ID number and the authorization number, in the upper right corner of the

authorization beginning with three letters, followed by the fiscal year in which the course began, followed by a five-digit ordinal number.

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 **College Basics** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/basics.asp>).

## Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused words. This week, we'll look at **appraise** and **apprise** (definitions are from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*).

The word **appraise** is a verb meaning to set a value on or evaluate the worth, significance, or status of something: "The antiques dealer appraised the value of the vase" and "The professor appraised the essay to be a plagiarism."

The word **apprise** is also a verb, but means to give notice: "She apprised me of the fact I had left my lights on" and "The CO told the OOD to keep her apprised of the movements of the ship on the horizon."

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).

## ACT at TraCen Cape May

The ACT test (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp>) will be administered at TraCen Cape May on Thursday morning, 10 November 2011.

If you're trying to qualify for a Coast Guard program that requires you to have taken either the ACT or SAT and want to take this test, please let me know ASAP. The first three people to get in touch with me (first come, first served) will get a seat. I usually administer these tests once a quarter.

ACT and the CollegeBoard, through DANTEs, authorize ESOs to administer these tests only for uniformed personnel.

ESO's may administer the ACT at any time of the year, but can administer the SAT only between 01 October and 30 June. You can see a comparison of the SAT and ACT at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/comparison.asp>.

Be aware that in almost all cases military personnel don't need to take either the ACT or SAT to be admitted to take college courses.

You can read/download *Preparing for the ACT* (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/PreparingACT.pdf>) and *Taking the ACT* (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/TakingACT.pdf>) for more information about the test.

## Check out Navy Knowledge Online

Thanks to Brion Newman, full-time ESO at Base Seattle, for reminding me about Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). Many Coast Guard personnel (military and civilian, regulars and Reservists) are unaware of the huge amount of useful stuff available through it. NKO is an Internet-accessible portal to information and resources on dozens of topics falling under five broad categories:

- Career Management
- Personal Development
- Leadership
- Learning
- Reference

Under the “Reference” tab, for example, you’ll find links to the Navy’s professional reading program; an Information Literacy Toolkit; language, country, and cultural awareness resources; Tutor.com (where you can link up live with tutors on a huge variety of subjects); and dozens of books (including downloadable audio books), journals, magazines, and newspapers in the e-Library. The only category not of much use to Coast Guard personnel is “Career Management”.

Do yourself a favor and check out Navy Knowledge Online at <https://www.nko.navy.mil/portal/home/>. You can access it from a Coast Guard workstation or personal computer.

## What Your CG Institute Transcript is Telling You

The American Council on Education (ACE) has just published a guide to help you understand your Coast Guard Institute transcript, transcripts from the DoD services, and ACE credit recommendations. You can find and download this 46-page booklet at [http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/Transfer\\_Guide.htm](http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/Transfer_Guide.htm).

## 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.

## No More Paper & Pencil CLEP Tests

DANTES Test Control Officers (TCOs, who are ESOs with authorization from DANTES) can no longer order CLEP tests to administer locally. TCOs may administer tests they already have on-hand until 31 December 2011, but if your TCO doesn't have the test you want to take, you'll have to find a national test center ([http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch\\_clep/searchCLEPTestCenter.jsp](http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_clep/searchCLEPTestCenter.jsp)) at which to take it.

Why is this happening? The number of paper-and-pencil CLEP tests (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/clep.asp>) in use (and which TCOs could administer) was cut back to 14 out of a total of 34 tests. To quote from the official announcement, "The College Board has decided to terminate this service due to the decreasing number of PPT test takers. Over 95 percent of military examinees test on the CLEP computer-based exams either at an onbase or on-campus national test center. The Service members utilizing the computer-based exams benefit from instant score results and access to all 33 CLEP eCBT test titles. . . ."

Because the closest test site to TraCen Cape May for computer-based tests is Rowan University (in Glassboro, NJ – about an hour and a half's drive), I'm working to find alternatives for Coast Guard personnel in southern New Jersey. It's unlikely my efforts will bear fruit before the end of the year, however. For the time being, Prometric (another testing company) will continue to offer DSSTs in a paper format. Check out the offerings (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>) and see if some of them might fit into your degree plan.

## Tuition Assistance for FY12

Currently, the Coast Guard Institute is authorized to process tuition assistance (TA) requests for courses beginning in both October and November 2011. You can use eTA/WebTA (<https://eta.cnet.navy.mil/>) to apply for a course that begins before the end of November 2011.

**Remember:** requests submitted via eTA expire after two weeks. So if you want to apply for a course that begins later than November, you'll need to use the PDF application form ([http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/forms/CG\\_Form\\_4147.pdf](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/forms/CG_Form_4147.pdf)) rather than eTA to submit your TA request. The Coast Guard Institute will keep your PDF request on file and process it as soon as funds become available, in the order in which it was received.

Keep in mind that ESOs may not process TA requests for any course that begins more than three months from today.

## What Does SOC Do for Me?

A lot of people have at least a passing knowledge of SOC (Servicemembers' Opportunity Colleges, pronounced like the word *sock*), but few know much about what it can do for you.

SOC was created to help military personnel pursuing a college degree avoid having to re-take college courses as they moved from one unit to the next and found that the college in their new area wouldn't accept credits earned from a college near their previous unit. (All schools in a SOC network will automatically accept credits earned from other schools in the same network.)

Even though the number of distance-learning college programs has exploded in the last few years, SOC (and its Coast Guard branch, SOCCOAST) still serves an important function. First, although distance learning allows students to take courses from practically anywhere, it's not for everyone. A recent study by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University found that community college students enrolled in on-line courses fail and drop out more often than those who take in-class courses. (See "Community-College Students Perform Worse Online Than Face to Face" in *The*

*Chronicle of Higher Education*, on 18 July 2011.) Many students just prefer in-class to on-line courses or those provided by other distance-learning methods.

Second, some schools which offer degrees by distance learning don't offer all the courses needed to complete a degree. That means you may have to take one or more courses from other schools and transfer the credits to the degree-granting school.

Third, some colleges are known to change their degree requirements which can mean courses a student has already taken don't apply to the degree plan any longer, making it necessary for the student to take more courses and to finish her degree later than she'd planned.

Before you jump into a particular degree program, check out SOCCOAST (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/soccoast.asp>) and the 2- and 4-year college degree networks to see if the major you want to pursue is offered and which schools offer it.

## Low-cost College Courses for Dependent Spouses

Coastline Community College (a regionally accredited school) offers on-line college courses to military dependents (civilian spouses and children). These courses are a real bargain, for \$79 per credit, a \$50 book voucher, and no other costs. (<http://military.coastline.edu/msp/page.cfm?LinkID=1332>).

## 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.

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

Most Coast Guard personnel 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.

## Learning Another 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](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, including <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/LanguageLearning.pdf>.

- **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>.

## Career & Education Planning Tools

Many people in the Coast Guard – military and civilians alike – are unsure of what career fields best match their personal interests and abilities. While you might be extremely competent at what you’re doing in the Coast Guard, you might have skills you’d rather put to use in some other field. ESOs throughout the Coast Guard (including TraCen Cape May’s) have access to many different tools you can use to assess your interests and possible ways to earn a living while pursuing those interests.

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/discover.asp> and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/sitest.asp>.

## 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>).

## 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. There are a number of web sites at which you can find information useful to military personnel transitioning to civilian life and veterans.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management has a veterans' employment web site called "Feds Hire Vets" (<http://www.fedshirevets.gov/>). Its purpose is to implement the federal government's strategy for recruiting and employing military veterans. It's intended to be the preeminent source for federal employment information for veterans, transitioning service members, and their families. And the main federal government jobs web site is at <http://www.fedjobs.gov/>.

And (courtesy of Brion Newman, full-time ESO at Base Seattle) the state of Maryland also has a similar site called the Military to Federal Jobs Crosswalk (Mil2FedJobs, <http://www.mil2fedjobs.com/>) to help you "translate military occupations to federal jobs".

Finally, don't overlook government jobs entities at other levels – state, county, municipality, school district, port district, etc. – which provide benefits similar to those available through the federal government.

## 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.