

# TraCen Cape May Education Update #242

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## Congratulations!!

Name	Work Site	Test
GM2 David Hardy	TraCen (Recruit Trng)	E-PME-6
HS2 Sarah Reid	TraCen (Health Services)	E-PME-6*
HS2 Shelby Carlson	TraCen (Health Services)	HS1

\* First time taking test

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.

## Forwarding Your SWE

Are you going to be transferring, on leave, or on TAD when your SWE is administered in May (05MAY for the E-5 and E-7 exams; 07MAY for the E-6, E-8, and E-9 exams)? If so, don't forget to annotate your PDE **before Wednesday, 01 April** to that effect. Here's how to do it.

Go to your SPO and look at your PDE (just above the signature box) for the passage that reads: "YOUR \_\_\_ SERVICE WIDE EXAM WILL BE MAILED TO THE EXAM BOARD LOCATED AT: \_\_\_\_\_ OPFAC: \_\_\_\_\_ ." If you want it sent to a different unit, just cross out the printed OPFAC and unit name and write in the OPFAC and name of the unit at which you want to take the test. Then let the YNs in SPO know about the changes you made and you're all set. They'll let the Pay & Personnel Center know about the change and the exam will be sent directly to the unit you want to take it at.

## Preparing for a SWE

If you've never taken a servicewide exam before, you may be a bit confused as to just what the exam covers and, maybe, why you have to take one after passing an end-of-course test (EOCT). EOCTs separate those who don't know the knowledge, procedures, policies, etc. for each rating (pay grades E-4 through E-6) from those who do. The purpose of servicewide exams (SWEs) is to rank order enlisted personnel (pay grades E-5 through E-9) for purposes of advancement.

Everyone who takes a SWE is assumed to be qualified for the next higher pay grade in his/her rating. That's why there are so many requirements to fulfill before you can take a SWE. These requirements are spelled out on your PDE.

TraCen Petaluma's web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/TracenPetaluma/TPF/SWE/SWE2-MainPage.asp>) has extensive information on the SWE process. TraCen Cape May's web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/swe.asp#preparing>) has information on preparing for a SWE and tips on how to study and take tests efficiently and effectively.

## Next Weekly Workshop, 01 April: Financial Assistance for Dependents

I'm currently holding a series of informal workshops on the following topics:

- **Education Assessments** – how to find out how many college credits you've acquired through military service
- **Tuition Assistance** – how to apply for the Coast Guard's Tuition Assistance (TA), what it can be used for, etc.
- **ASVAB** – how to find out what schools you currently qualify for, re-taking specific tests, how to study for it
- **Enlisted-to-Officer programs** – learn what programs are available, how to apply, deadlines, etc.
- **Financial assistance for dependents** – learn what's available, how to find it, etc.

We're rotating through the above list. Last week, we covered Tuition Assistance; next week it'll be re-taking ASVAB tests. After I've covered all five topics, we'll start the rotation over again.

The Education Assessments, Tuition Assistance, and ASVAB workshops will be held in the Learning Resource Center (computer lab) on the first deck of Munro Hall at 1300 on Wednesdays or elsewhere (as announced if recruits have it booked). The others will be held in the Education & Career Development Center (Admin Bldg, Rm 113) starting at 1130 on Wednesdays. You're welcome to bring your lunch to the 1130 workshops.

These workshops will be open for anyone who's interested in and/or who has questions about the topic. All you have to do is show up. Each workshop will be announced in this newsletter each week.

If you lose track of which workshop is being held in any particular week, you can look at my Outlook calendar. If you're not sure how to do that, open your Outlook calendar and follow this path: File > Open > Other User's Folder

Click on "Name" and find my name, then click OK and you'll see my calendar.

## Thinking About Taking College Courses? Check out College 101

So you're thinking you'd like to start taking college courses, but don't really know where to start. What should you do? First you should go through the brand new Coast Guard Institute on-line presentation, *College 101*.

*College 101* is intended to provide essential information to anyone who's just starting on the path to a college certificate or degree. It should be your first step on that path and you should view the whole thing before making an appointment with your ESO to talk about your educational options.

This extremely informative presentation started out in the Marine Corps and was brought to the Coast Guard by Mr. Bob Bothel, now the head of Voluntary Education at the Coast Guard Institute. Ms. Robin King (also at the Institute) designed it, and many IT and other people had a hand in making it available.

You can find *College 101* on the Coast Guard Learning Portal (<http://learning.uscg.mil/>). After you've logged in, follow this path: Course Catalog > Education > College 101.

## Scholarship for Dependent Children of Military Personnel

An organization called Homefront America is offering a total of twenty-five individual \$1,000 scholarships to dependent children of military service members between the ages of 17 and 21 who will be pursuing a postsecondary educational degree at a fully accredited college, university, technical, or vocation institution in the fall of 2009 or spring of 2010.

Applications must be postmarked by Friday, 24 April 2009.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.homefrontamerica.org/oohrahhome.htm>.

## SN/FN Courses & EPQs

There seems to be a persistent belief that E-2s have to complete a seaman (SN) or fireman (FN) course to advance to E-3. ***This is not the case.*** The SN and FN courses old-timers may remember were done away with via ALCOAST 222/00 (dated 23 May 2000).

Similarly, the separate EPQs (formerly practical factors) became obsolete on 30 April 2005 for regulars and on 30 June 2005 for Reservists (via ALCOAST 179/05).

E-2s now must complete only the E-3 E-PME Performance and Knowledge Requirements (which replaced MRN requirements).

For complete information on what E-2s must do to advance to E-3, see the first section of Tab Six ("Enlisted IDP E-2 to E-3 Advancement Checklist") to enclosure (2) to COMDTINST 5357.1A ("Coast Guard Individual Development Plan (IDP)").

## A Word to the Wise

Any time you're using any educational services (whether through the Coast Guard, the VA, a private organization, or a college/university), be smart and save ALL correspondence.

This may seem an unnecessary waste of time. But if you have a problem with tuition assistance or GI Bill payments or grades, having a paper trail (or e-mail trail) could save you a lot of scrambling to re-create the chain of events which led to the problem.

And if you're using tuition assistance, save a copy of each TA authorization you receive – either electronically or in hard-copy format. You'd be surprised how many people need a copy long after they use TA to pay for a course.

## Deploying?

If you know you're going to be deploying for some length of time – whether to the Persian Gulf or somewhere here at home – and want to use tuition assistance (TA) to pay for a college course, submit your TA request to your ESO as soon as possible.

The Coast Guard Institute will accept TA requests up to three months before a course begins. But your ESO may be willing to accept them at any time, and then submit them to the Institute as soon as that three-month window opens.

Don't wait until a few days before you're due to sail to submit your TA request. Even if it comes back quickly, if you don't have Internet connectivity you won't be able to download the TA authorization and may not be able to get it to your school by its deadline. The bottom line is: PLAN AHEAD!

## 15 April Deadline: Scholarships for Military Women

The Alliance for National Defense (AND), will award two \$2,500 scholarships to current and future military women in 2009. The deadline for applications is 15 April 2009.

The Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing powerful advocacy and a positive voice for military women. AND encourages and promotes the vital role of military women and men in our nation's defense. AND directors, national council members, and supporters include active duty military personnel and concerned veterans working alongside civilians interested in military issues to provide factual, thoughtful, objective information on military personnel issues to policymakers, legislators, and the public.

Honoring Brigadier General Evelyn P. Foote, USA, Ret., the Foote Scholarship is reserved for a currently serving enlisted woman who is enrolled for at least six credit hours at an accredited college or university. The Sadler Scholarship, named for Captain Georgia Sadler, USN, Ret., is intended for a woman enrolled in her second year in an accredited ROTC program.

Scholarship winners will be chosen from among applicants representing any branch or component of the armed forces based on merit, academic potential, community service and need. Winners will be announced in July 2009.

For more information, go to [http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND\\_Scholarship\\_information.pdf](http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_information.pdf). For an application, go to [http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND\\_Scholarship\\_Application.pdf](http://www.4militarywomen.org/AND_Scholarship_Application.pdf).

## Question of the Week

**Q:** I used TA to pay for a college course but had to withdraw from it because my ship is getting underway unexpectedly. Do I need to do anything else?

**A:** Yes! In addition to withdrawing from the course, following your school's procedures, you also need to cancel your TA authorization. If you don't, you could find your pay docked for the amount of the TA even if you didn't take the course.

How do you cancel your authorization? Tell your ESO that you need to cancel it. Provide your ESO with the authorization number (located is directly below your signature on the authorization) and your SSN. Your ESO will advise the Institute that your authorization needs to be cancelled and you'll be all set.

## Officer Program Interviews

If you're applying for a Coast Guard officer program (or for the Physician Assistant program) one of the last things you need to do is undergo an interview by a board of three officers. You can use the report on your interview in future applications for up to two years from the date of the interview. That is, you can arrange for an interview at any time and use the report for up to two years from the interview date; the interview does not have to coincide with the date of your application.

TraCen Cape May holds these interviews every quarter, and the next series will be held on Wednesday, 8 and 15 April 2009. However, the number of interviews available is not unlimited: seven interviews are available on each date.

If you're in the last stages of your application process and would like to schedule an interview in April, please let me know ASAP. Before doing so, however, review the list of items you must have completed before your interview (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/interview.asp#info>). If those items aren't done, don't schedule an interview.

## National Career Readiness Certificate

ACT – the independent, not-for-profit organization which developed and owns the national college admissions examination of the same name – has recently developed a new tool (called the National Career Readiness Certificate) employers are increasingly asking for when screening applicants and making hiring decisions.

“The Certificate”, to quote from ACT’s web site, “is designed to complement other traditional credentials, such as a high school diploma, community college degree, or college degree. While these education credentials mark the fulfillment of your classroom learning experiences, The Certificate proves you have the workplace skills needed to succeed at your new job. The Certificate offers individuals, employers, and educators an easily understood and nationally valued credential certifying essential workplace skills.”

If you’re looking for a way to make your job application stand out from all the others, you might want to consider taking the tests which make up this certificate program. For more information, go to <http://www.act.org/certificate/index.html>.

## Studying for CLEP Tests or DSSTs?

A new web site is aimed at people who are studying on their own for self-improvement, going more into depth in their college courses, or taking credit-by-exam tests (e.g., CLEP tests, DSSTs, or ECEs). It’s called Self-Made Scholar (<http://selfmadescholar.com/b/>) and it includes: links to free courses, a blog on self-education, links to dozens of self-education resources, essays and tips on self-study, and much more.

And you absolutely must check out Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>) – even if you’re not studying for a college course or a test of some kind – a “not-for-profit organization with the mission of providing a high quality education to anyone, anywhere.” There you’ll find more than 700 10-minute videos covering physics and all levels of math as well as SAT preparation, the current credit, banking, and financial crises.

## Boost Your GPA with CLEP Tests, DSSTs, and ECEs

One of the little-recognized bonuses that comes from taking CLEP tests, DSSTs, and/or ECEs for college credit is they can help you increase your GPA. If you’re thinking about applying for graduate school or a professional degree program (e.g., physician, lawyer, MBA) this could be a big help.

Say you’ve got a degree plan for a 120-credit bachelor’s at State U. And suppose State U will accept all credit-by-exam scores as credit toward its undergraduate degrees. Suppose, further, that your degree plan includes ten courses you know you’ll do OK on if you take them through the school, but will likely only get a C or, at best, a B. If you’re good at studying on your own and can pass the tests which equate to those courses, you should consider taking tests rather than the courses.

Why? Because you either pass these tests or you fail them; no letter grades are given. That means their scores aren’t counted by State U when it calculates your GPA. Assuming you do well in all courses you take through the school, and that you probably wouldn’t have done so well on the CLEP/DSST/ECE subjects if you’d taken them as State U courses rather than as tests, your GPA will be higher than if it included the grades you would have received if you’d taken those subjects as State U courses.

## 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.

## American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 & Education

The recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 included a number of provisions which will help college students. It creates the "American Opportunity Tax Credit", which

- applies to tax years 2009 and 2010 for the first 4 years of post-secondary education.
- increases the Hope Scholarship Credit to 100 percent of qualified tuition, fees, and course materials paid by the taxpayer during the taxable year not to exceed \$2,000, plus 25 percent of the next \$2000 in qualified tuition, fees and course materials. The total credit does not exceed \$2500.
- refunds 40% of the credit.
- is subject to a phase-out for taxpayers with adjusted gross income in excess of \$80,000 (\$160,000 for married couples filing jointly).

The Act also raises the maximum amount available under the Pell Grant program to \$5,350 year for the 2009-2010 award year.

Also planned, but not included in the Act, are the following:

- replacing the complicated FAFSA form with a check box on all tax forms that authorizes the use of tax information for financial aid purposes;
- encouraging state Early Assessment Programs for high-school juniors (which assess the student and determine whether he/she is prepared for college, then provide resources to bring the student up to speed) and providing \$25 million in matching funds for states having these programs;
- eliminating the Federal Family Education Loan Program, which provides loans through private lenders and is more expensive to taxpayers than direct loans from the federal government.

## DWINTR & Open-Book NavRul Tests

If you're preparing to take either the open-book NavRul or DWINTR test, be aware that the **only** reference material you can use during either test is a corrected-to-date, copy of the *Navigation Rules (International – Inland)* (COMDTINST M16672.2(series)). No highlighting, diagrams, drawings, comments, personalized tabs, indexes, notes, or anything else is allowed. You can find the current corrections to the Nav Rules book by going to <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/> and following this path: Nav Rules > Download > Changes and Typographical Errors.

This is consistent with COMDTINST 16672.5A, which sets policy for deck watch officer testing. Those who created the NavRul course book know that this policy is contrary to what's written in the course book. ***The information in the NavRul course book is incorrect.***

## Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessel Course

(courtesy of Monty Mathis, full-time ESO at Sector St. Petersburg)

A lot of people want to know if they can use tuition assistance (TA) or the GI Bill to pay for a vessel captain's license course. The general rule for TA is that the course has to be offered by a nationally- or regionally-accredited institution AND must yield transferable credit (i.e., credit you can apply at another accredited school toward a degree program).

As to the GI Bill, it all depends on whether the state in which the course is offered has approved the course for GI Bill funding. For more info about whether a particular course is covered by the GI Bill, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-o.asp#saa>.

There's only one college ESOs have discovered which offers a course like this you can get college credit for (i.e., which is covered by TA). It's offered by Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (<http://www.nwtc.edu/PublicSafety/Default.htm>); scroll down to "Coast Guard Full OUPV". This is a distance-learning course.

## CompTIA Certifications

If you're a Coast Guard IT or have acquired information technology skills on your own, you might want to consider taking a CompTIA certification test.

CompTIA (the Computing Technology Industry Association) calls itself "the voice of the world's information technology (IT) industry." Its web site says it "serves the IT industry as the world's largest developer of vendor-neutral IT certification exams. Experts and industry leaders from the public and private sectors, including training, academia and government work with CompTIA to develop broad-based, foundational exams that validate an individual's IT skill set. This group of experts provides the resources and subject matter expertise necessary to build a vendor-neutral industry-defined certification exam."

To see what exams are available, go to <http://www9.pearsonvue.com/> and follow this path:

Test Taker Services tab > Select Your Category [Information Technology (IT)] > Select Your Program [CompTIA] > View Available Tests

You can use your GI Bill education benefits to pay for these tests. For more information, go to <http://pearsonvue.com/military/certify/> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center to pick up a brochure.

## Reservist Eligibility for MGIB-SR

There seems to be some confusion about when Reservists become eligible to use the Reserve GI Bill (aka MGIB-SR or chapter 1606). Unlike regulars, Reservists do not sign any document to verify that they want to have the MGIB-SR or to refuse it. They do, however, have to finish their IADT (usually "A" school) before they're eligible to use their benefit. At that time, they have to sign what's called a "Notice of Basic Eligibility (NOBE)" (DD form 2384-1).

To activate their benefit, Reservists submit a copy of their NOBE and VA form 22-1990 ("Application for VA Education Benefits") to the VA Regional Office nearest to their school.

## Tuition Assistance & Grade Reports

If you're using tuition assistance (TA) to take college courses, remember that you **must** provide the grade report for your courses to the Coast Guard Institute within 60 days of the end of the course. If you don't, you'll receive a series of nastygrams from the Navy (which is the Coast Guard's agent for paying TA to schools) demanding reimbursement for the courses you used TA to pay for.

To avoid this, provide a copy of your grade report (with your full name and SSN on it) to your ESO. Your ESO will then submit it (usually via e-mail) to the Institute. If you're unable to put your SSN on it (e.g., if you print it to a PDF file from your computer screen), provide it to your ESO.

If at all possible (so what the Institute sees is legible), print your on-line grade report to a PDF file. If you're not sure how to do this, here's the process.

- (1) Get the grade report on your computer screen.
- (2) Select "File" and "Print" (or press CTRL and P at the same time)
- (3) Select "Adobe PDF"

- (4) Click on "Preferences"
- (5) Click "Layout" tab
- (6) Select "Landscape"
- (7) Click "OK"
- (8) Click on "Print"
- (9) Click "Save" after deciding where you want to save the file
- (10) Attach the PDF document you just created to an e-mail and send it to me.

And if possible, please include in your e-mail the number of the TA authorization which corresponds to the grade report. The TA authorization number is in the upper right corner of your authorization (CGI\_\_\_\_\_).

## **Income Tax Deduction/Credit & TA**

If you used TA to pay for one or more courses in calendar year 2008, you may receive from your school an official-looking statement showing how much you and the Coast Guard paid to your school for tuition (IRS form 1098-T). This is provided in case you're eligible for education-related deductions from and credits to your income tax. Be aware that only money you personally paid to the school can be used to determine if you qualify for one of them. That is, tuition assistance (and GI Bill funds) can't be included, since that money was an education benefit, not part of your earned income.

You can find an overview of these deductions and credits at <http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/taxbenefitsguide.html>. And the IRS publication which goes into depth about them is at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf>.

## **Free On-line Language Lessons**

If you have a library card for the Cape May County Library system and Internet access, you can use Mango Languages. This is a system similar to Rosetta Stone, which was previously available through the libraries' web site. Through Mango, you can learn Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese. Also available are English for Polish, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese speakers.

To check it out, go to [http://www.cape-may.county.lib.nj.us/online\\_databases.asp#Language](http://www.cape-may.county.lib.nj.us/online_databases.asp#Language) and find "Mango Languages" in the menu on the left side of the page under "Authorized Links".

## **Online Student Survival Guide**

Western Governors University has a blog with all kinds of comments, tips, and general info about on-line courses. Check it out at <http://onlinestudentsurvival.com/>. NOTE: some of the items in this blog are thinly-veiled ads for Western Governors University, so take those with a grain of salt.

## **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.