

TraCen Cape May Education Update #247

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EOCT Scoring Problem

For about the last two weeks, the computer system used by the Coast Guard Institute to score end-of-course tests (EOCTs) has been OOC. This means that no matter how one takes an EOCT (on paper or on-line) it can't be scored. ESOs assume the Institute's IT staff is working hard to fix this problem, but the only information we've received about it was an e-mail from on 27APR which read as follows:

As the online answer sheet continues to be down, we have an interim solution for library units. . . .

Please hold onto . . . completed [hard-copy] answer sheets. When the online form is live again, these tests can be put in and processed in the normal fashion. You have the ability to backdate tests on the online answer sheet so you will be able to enter the actual test date rather than the date they data is entered.

Thank you for your patience.

As soon as we're able to do so, ESOs will enter your responses into the on-line answer form and submit them to the Institute for scoring.

Can't Find Your CG Institute Transcript and/or Degree Plans?

If you requested an education assessment, degree plans, or both from the Coast Guard Institute more than a month ago and didn't download them at the time, don't despair. Just ask your ESO to re-open the TACCTS case used to submit your original assessment request and request copies of your transcript, degree plans, or both.

New Homeland Security Degree

Thomas Edison State College is now offering an on-line bachelor of science degree in homeland security and emergency preparedness. For more information, go to <http://www.tesc.edu/5933.php>. Thomas Edison is one of a number of colleges and universities which accepts virtually all college credits you've earned through military service to be applied toward its degrees.

Question of the Week

Q: My enlistment expires before the ending date of the next course I want TA to pay for? What should I do?

A: As you know, if you're using TA to pay for a college course you have to finish that course before your enlistment expires. If you're going into the Reserve after your regular enlistment expires or if you're re-enlisting, you'll need to provide your ESO with a copy of something which shows what date your new enlistment will expire. That can either be a re-enlistment contract or, the case of those going into the Reserve, your orders showing the end date of your Reserve obligation.

Your ESO will scan the document and e-mail it to the CG Institute which will adjust the ending date of your enlistment in the computer program it uses for tuition assistance. This will unlock eTA so you can apply for TA.

The contract won't be signed, of course, until you actually re-enlist. That being the case, keep in mind that if you change your mind and separate, instead of reenlisting, the Institute will start the collection process to recover money spent on your tuition and covered fees.

Excelsior College Graduate?

If you're in the Cape May area and are in the June 2008 – July 2009 graduating class at Excelsior College, please let me know ASAP.

SOC Agreements

Are you getting your degree from a SOCCOAST school? If so, and if you've completed six credits, you should ask the school for a SOC agreement. This evaluation of completed and remaining degree requirements serves as a contract between the school and you and remains in effect even after you leave the Coast Guard.

With a SOC agreement in place, the school can change its graduation requirements and you won't have to worry about having to take courses to meet the new requirements.

ACE Transfer Credit Guide

The American Council on Education (ACE) has just published a guide to help you understand your military transcript 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.

Licensing and Certification Test Reimbursement

Having a license or certification can open doors for you in today's job market. Many professions require a license or certification. If you're eligible for Montgomery GI Bill education benefits (MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP), you can receive up to \$2,000 per test for various licensing and certification tests. To find out if the test you want to take is one of those which qualifies for reimbursement, go "Search for Approved License and Certification Programs" on the VA's web site (http://www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_Info/search_programs.htm).

MGIB reimbursement is also available for many on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. Again, see the VA's web site to see if your program qualifies.

The new GI Bill will reimburse you up to \$2,000 for one test.

New GI Bill Update

For those who haven't yet seen it, ALCOAST 250/09 provides the latest official information on the Coast Guard's policies regarding the new GI Bill (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Act).

The ALCOAST refers to what you may already have seen on the VA's web site, that "Starting May 1, 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs will begin accepting applications for the Post-9/11 GI Bill."

Even though this is the case, if you're currently eligible for the MGIB-AD (i.e., if \$1,200 was deducted from your pay and you've been on active duty for more than two years) please don't rush into any decisions by submitting an application without thinking through your decision completely.

Holding off on applying will **not** lock you into whichever version of the GI Bill you're currently under or prevent you from receiving benefits under the new GI Bill if you aren't currently under any other version. **But if you elect to apply for benefits under the new GI Bill you can NEVER take it back.** If you're currently eligible for another education benefit, the form you'll fill out requires you to make an irrevocable election to relinquish benefits under all other programs you're currently eligible for.

NOTE: You shouldn't assume that just because you're now retired you're not eligible for benefits under the new GI Bill. If you served on active duty for more than 90 days after 10 September 2001, you may be eligible.

At least twice during the week of 11 May, I plan to give a relatively short presentation and answer any questions I can. I'll publish more details as soon as the dates and times are finalized. These will be held in the auditorium and will be open to **anyone** who wishes to come.

For the latest definitive information on the new GI Bill, go to the VA's web site: <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>. There you can find questions people like you have asked and the VA's answers to them. You can also find a number of if-then scenarios for regulars and Reservists.

You can read ALCOAST 250/09 and the previous two ALCOASTs at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-33.asp#alcoasts>.

New GI Bill and CGA Grads

One feature not mentioned in ALCOAST 250/09 was undoubtedly the result of an oversight by those who drafted the legislation. Nonetheless, Congress's oversight could benefit recent Coast Guard Academy graduates.

As you know, you have to have served at least 90 days on active duty since 10 September 2009 to be eligible for benefits under the new GI Bill. But the law specifies that the active duty time a USMA/USNA/USFA or ROTC graduate serves in fulfillment of his/her post-graduation service requirement doesn't count toward the new GI Bill active duty service requirement. This means that officers who graduate from the DoD service academies need to have served on active duty for five years and 90 days to be eligible for the lowest payment level (40%) under the new GI Bill.

But this provision doesn't currently apply to CGA grads. That is, there is no prohibition on CGA graduates counting all their active duty commissioned service since they graduated when determining whether they have accumulated the time required to qualify for a particular benefit level under the new GI Bill.

So until Congress closes this loophole, CGA grads' eligibility for benefits under the new GI Bill is based on all their active duty commissioned service since they graduated.

Transferability of Benefits under the New GI Bill

While specific service obligation requirements have yet to be finalized, there are a few things we know for sure about transferring benefits under the new GI Bill to dependents. One is the amount the dependent will receive.

- If a servicemember transfers her benefit to her husband, he's only entitled to tuition payments.
- If a servicemember transfers her benefit to a dependent child, the child is entitled to tuition payments and the housing allowance and the book stipend.

And don't forget that the law which created the new GI Bill also amended the existing MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, and REAP to allow their unused benefits to be transferred to dependents as well. The transferability provision for MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, and REAP took effect on 30 June 2008 but, as with the new GI Bill's transferability provision, rules governing the process have yet to be finalized.

New DC2 Course

A replacement for the current DC2 course (dated February 2005) is now available. It is based on the latest EPQs (dated November 2007).

To quote ALCOAST 237/09, "Those who have already passed the old DC2 (0216-1) EOCT are exempt from completing the new course. The DC2 EOCT version (0216-1) will become obsolete effective 01AUG09."

To get a copy of the new course, send your request (with your employee ID number) to your ESO.

New HS Courses

ALCOAST 246/09 announced the availability of new HS1 and HS2 courses. These are based on the latest EPQs (dated May 2008) and replace the HS1 course dated October 2006 and the HS2 course dated January 2007.

To quote the ALCOAST, "The revised HS1 course (0130-4) and HS2 course (0230-4) will be required for SWE and advancement eligibility effective 01FEB10. Older HS1 and HS2 end-of-course test (EOCT) completions will remain valid until 01AUG09. The last day the older HS1 (0130-3) and HS2 (0230-3) EOCTs will be administered is 01AUG09. The HS EPQ form CG-3303C-HS (rev. 05-2008) must be signed and verified on page two prior to taking any rate training end-of-course test (EOCT)."

To get a copy of the new course, send your request (with your employee ID number) to your ESO.

Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Technology

Southern Illinois University offers a B.S. degree in Industrial Technology taught on weekends at Dover Air Force Base (in Delaware). For information, go to <http://www.engr.siu.edu/outreach/Dover%20AFB.htm> or stop by the Education & Career Development Center.

Spouse-friendly Colleges and Universities

Margaret Cotroneo – SOC's Coast Guard person – has created a list of over 30 schools which provide scholarships, tuition waivers, tuition discounts, and other breaks to spouses of military personnel. You can find it at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dependents.asp#friendly>.

Attention Coastline Students!

Coastline Community College (<http://military.coastline.edu>) will be changing its requirements for some degrees this summer. If you want to lock in the courses you're required to take for your chosen major, you'll need to apply for an official SOC evaluation and agreement by 09 June 2009, if you haven't already done so.

If you have an official SOC agreements before 09 June, you won't have to take additional courses, if any the course requirements for your major change. **Getting a SOC agreement could save you from having to take courses you didn't plan to take.**

To get an official evaluation, go to <http://military.coastline.edu> and click on the applicable Coast Guard link. Then, scroll down to "SOC Evaluation Request" and follow directions there. You'll find information on how to get your Coast Guard Institute transcript sent directly to Coastline's Military office. If you have college credit from other institutions, you'll have to order official transcripts to be sent directly to Coastline by those colleges/universities. **DON'T DELAY!!**

Servicewide Exams

TraCen Cape May has received the May servicewide exams (SWEs) for personnel in the Cape May area.

If you haven't received an e-mail invitation from me I haven't received an exam with your name on it. If I haven't received an exam for you and you were expecting to take the exam, you'll need to check with your SPO to find out why you didn't get an exam.

The exams will be held in the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Building according to the following schedule:

Tuesday, 05MAY (morning) – tests for advancement to E-5
 Tuesday, 05MAY (afternoon) – tests for advancement to E-7
 Thursday, 07MAY (morning) – tests for advancement to E-6
 Thursday, 07MAY (afternoon) – tests for advancement to E-8 and E-9

Morning sessions will start promptly at 0800; no one will be admitted after 0750
 Afternoon sessions will start promptly at noon; no one will be admitted after 1150

Your e-mail invitation will include all particulars as to attire, what you can and can't bring, etc.

ACCC Summer and Fall Course Guides

If you're taking courses at Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) and want to get a jump on things by submitting TA requests early, the course guides for both summer and fall courses are now available.

You can pick them up

- just inside the outer doors at the Exchange,
- in the Lab waiting area in the Health Services building, and
- just outside the Education & Career Development Center in the Command & Mission Support building.

I try to keep the display racks full, but if you don't find a rack empty please let me know so I can restock it.

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.

Effective Studying

An article in the 01 May 2009 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* debunks common perceptions about the best way to study for a course – any course.

Most people think the best way is to read carefully, write down unfamiliar terms and look up their meanings, make an outline, and re-read each lesson/chapter.

[S]ome scientists would say that you've left out the most important step: *Put the book aside and hide your notes. Then recall everything you can. Write it down, or, if you're uninhibited, say it out loud.*

Two psychology journals have recently published papers showing that this strategy works, the latest findings from a decades-old body of research. When students study on their own, "active recall" – recitation, for instance, or flashcards and other self-quizzing – is the most effective way to inscribe something in long-term memory.

The author of one of these papers, professor of psychology Mark McDaniel (from Washington University in St. Louis), says that "it is generally a mistake to read and reread a textbook passage. That strategy feels intuitively right to many students – but it's much less effective than active recall, and it can give rise to a false sense of confidence."

"When you've got your chemistry book in front of you, everything's right there on the page, it's all very familiar and fluent," says Jeffrey D. Karpicke, an assistant professor of psychology at Purdue University and lead author of a paper in the May issue of *Memory* about students' faulty intuitions about effective study habits.

"So you could say to yourself, 'Yeah, I know this. Sure, this is all very familiar,'" Mr. Karpicke continues. "But of course, when you go in to take a classroom test, or in real life when you need to reconstruct your knowledge, the book's not there. In our experiments, when students repeatedly read something, it falsely inflates their sense of their own learning."

You can read the whole article at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/20090501CHE.pdf>.

More on the New GI Bill

Before you change GI Bill education benefit programs from the MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP to the new GI Bill, make sure it fits your needs. Once you change, you can't go back. On the other hand, you can elect to receive benefits under the new GI Bill any time after 01 August 2009 and the number of benefit months you have remaining under the MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP will be available under the new GI Bill.

To figure out how much of your tuition and fees will be paid for by the new GI Bill benefit, follow these four steps.

- Determine your entitlement percentage under the new GI Bill. This is based on the number of months you have served on active duty since 10 September 2001. You can see a table showing these percentages in the VA's brochure on the new benefit (http://www.gibill.va.gov/pamphlets/CH33/CH33_Pamphlet.pdf).
- Ask your school how much you'd have to pay for tuition and fees.

- Determine the maximum amount the VA will pay based on the in-state tuition rate for your school (http://www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_Info/CH33/Tuition_and_fees.htm).
- Multiply the maximum rate for in-state rate tuition and fees by your entitlement percentage and compare the number you get with your school's tuition and fees. If your entitlement is equal to or more than the school's tuition and fees, you won't have to pay anything for tuition and fees.

CG Transcript and Degree Plans

The "Coast Guard Education Center" web site, where unofficial transcripts and degree plans from education assessments (form CGI-1561, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/CGI1561.pdf>) have been posted for a long time, is no longer in service.

Instead of getting your unofficial transcript and degree plans there, your ESO will receive them and forward them to you.

If you submitted a request to the Coast Guard Institute for an education assessment in the last couple of months, please be patient. Due to an unexpectedly large number of requests, the processing time for assessment requests is currently 4 to 5 weeks.

If you've received your unofficial transcript and want an official transcript sent to a college, you can still submit your request (form CGI-1564, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/CGI1564.pdf>).

REMEMBER: You can't get a transcript sent to a school unless you've first requested an education assessment. For more on this process, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/step5.asp>.

DWINTR & Open-Book NavRul Tests

If you're preparing to take either the DWINTR or open-book NavRul 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.***

24 April Deadline: Scholarships 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/oohrahome.htm>.

14 May Deadline: Scholarships for Military Personnel & their Dependents

The Pat Tillman Foundation offers need-based scholarships for military personnel and their dependents to ensure they "have every opportunity to pursue broader educational goals. The Tillman Military Scholarships are intended to cover direct study-related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, and room and board as well as other needs such as child care."

Applications must be postmarked by Thursday, 14 May 2009.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.patillmanfoundation.org/>.

15 May Deadline: Scholarships for Dependents of Military Personnel

The organization ThanksUSA is offering 500 \$3,000 undergraduate scholarships to spouses and dependent children (up to age 24) of military personnel who have served on active duty for at least 180 days since 11 September 2001, including all those who have been killed or wounded in action.

The application period is now open and will close when 10,000 applications have been received or on 15 May 2009, whichever comes first.

For all the particulars, go to <http://www.thanksusa.org/main/scholarships.html>.

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!

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_____).

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.

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.

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.