

TraCen Cape May Education Update #352

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Question of the Week

Q: I just graduated from boot camp and want to use tuition assistance to pay for the few courses I need to finish to get my bachelor's degree. I've heard that before I can use TA, I have to get an education credit assessment from the Coast Guard Institute. Why do I need to do that when I earned only six credits in boot camp and none of them will count toward my degree?

A: In July of this year the Institute announced a new requirement that everyone who's working toward an undergraduate degree (associate's or bachelor's) must have on file with the Institute a transcript of service-earned credit that's less than four years old. What this essentially means is that all undergraduate students who want to use TA must have requested an education assessment within the last four years.

The rationale for this requirement is that credit earned from Coast Guard training is often credit the student doesn't have to earn by taking a college course – or use TA to pay for such a course. The requirement is intended solely to save money.

Unfortunately, as is usually the case with one-size-fits-all policies, this means that a lot of people will have to take the time to request an assessment to get a transcript from the Institute that won't show any credits that can be applied to their degree plans. This is just one of those things in life you do even though it will not do anything useful and will not save the Coast Guard any money.

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

Web Page in the Spotlight

There's a lot of stuff on the TraCen Cape May web site you might not check out if you didn't know it was there. So this week, I'm spotlighting **Getting Started** (toward a college degree) (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/starting.asp>) and the other pages under it.

Grammar & Usage Corner

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

Although these two words sound very similar when spoken, their written forms have totally different meanings. *Bazaar* is a noun originally from the 16th century Persian word meaning a market consisting of rows of shops or stalls selling miscellaneous goods. Today, in the U.S., it often means a fair for selling things to raise money for charity. Examples: "The souk in Marrakesh, Morocco is an example of a traditional bazaar" or "Frederick Douglass Middle School held a bazaar to raise money to refinish the gym floor".

Bizarre, on the other hand, stems from a 17th century Italian word and means strikingly out of the ordinary, odd, extravagant, eccentric in style or mode, or involving sensational contrasts or incongruities. Examples: "The widespread appearance of mutant amphibians is a bizarre event that has biologists concerned" or "Salvador Dalí's surrealistic paintings are bizarre".

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.

Foreign Language Proficiency Pay

If you're proficient in a language other than English and are assigned to a designated interpreter or linguist billet, you may be eligible for Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP). The Coast Guard recently changed its policy on who's eligible for FLPP.

Until the end of FY11, there were only two categories: Interpreter and Linguist. Individuals who received a score of at least 2+ on both the listening and reading portions of the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) were entitled to the higher FLPP of a Linguist. Those who received a score of at least 2 on both tests were entitled to Interpreter FLPP. The revised policy created four Interpreter categories and two Linguist categories. Which level you qualify for depends on your DLPT scores, and whether you're assigned to an Interpreter or Linguist billet.

For more information about the DLPT and to see what the payment rates are for the different Interpreter and Linguist categories, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>.

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 October, you'll need to use the PDF application form (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 later than three months from today.

Tuition Assistance Tip

As tuition assistance (TA) veterans know, you have to provide grade reports for courses paid for with TA no later than 60 days after the date you put in the "Term End Date" field on your TA application. If you don't, you receive a series of nastygrams from the Navy the last of which notifies you that the amount TA paid for your course will be deducted from your pay.

I often receive TA requests from multiple people taking courses at the same school in the same term, but who list different starting and ending dates on their applications. Many of these are hastening the arrival of the first of these nastygrams by entering a date that's earlier than the "Term End Date". For example, they may enter the date they will attend their last class or the date of their last final exam.

To give yourself the longest legitimate amount of time in which to send in your grade report, always remember to enter the date the **school's term ends** – even if it's two weeks after your course or finals end. The same goes for the "Term Start Date": enter the date the term starts, not the date of your first class.

If you don't know where to find these dates, look in the school's course guide or, on-line, on the school's academic calendar.

Thinking of Applying for an Officer Program?

If you're considering applying for one of the Coast Guard's officer programs, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete all the required documents and steps. You can't get everything done in a manner that will give you a good shot at being selected if you spend less than six months on the application process.

Keep in mind that you can't just request an interview and expect everyone will be able to drop everything on a moment's notice to do it. You need to plan ahead so that whomever is charged with setting up interviews can find officers of the required ranks who can all meet in the same place (availability of which must be worked out) at the same time to interview you. For example, TraCen Cape May, CGAS Atlantic City, and Sector Delaware Bay only interview applicants once a quarter in rotation according to a schedule published a year in advance (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/interview.asp#sked>). This gives applicants plenty of time to schedule an interview.

Remember that the date of your interview is **completely** unrelated to dates published in the most recent ALCGRECRUITING message (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/alcgre recruiting010-11.pdf>): not the date your application has to be completed and submitted, not the date the selection board meets. You can (and should) schedule your interview relatively early in the process so you're not under the gun to get it done before the submission deadline. But bear in mind, too, that certain things have to be done in a certain order.

For example, your application folder's not complete unless a report from the interview board is in it. You have to provide a number of documents to the interview board before your interview, one of which is your current CO's endorsement of your narrative memo. Most commands require applicants to forward a draft of the CO's endorsement up through the chain of command – which can take as much as a month. And your chain of command can't revise the draft endorsement unless it has your narrative memo done.

For information on the officer program application process, go to my web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/oapp.asp>.

Interested in Working in the Health Information Technology Field?

Estimates from government agencies and independent studies indicate a need for 50,000 to 80,000 more health IT workers so health care facilities can implement and maintain electronic health records (EHRs) and meet meaningful use requirements.

Included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 were grants to community colleges to be used to train “health information technology professionals”: people qualified to support information exchange among health care providers and public health authorities and to redesign of workflows within the health care settings to gain the quality and efficiency benefits of EHRs.

If you’re interested in finding out more about opportunities these grants create, information on colleges providing this training, their admission criteria, their tuition structures, etc. check out the fact sheet at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/HIT.pdf> and one of the participating consortium’s web sites at <http://hitregiond.pittcc.edu/index.html>.

Marine Technology Degrees & Certificates

West Kentucky Community & Technical College (WKCTC) in Paducah, KY offers mostly on-line academic programs related to marine technology: three degrees (marine engineering, marine logistic operations, and wheelhouse management) and two certificate programs (marine industry and marine technology business).

Courses are intended to assist students achieve licensure and advance in inland waterways careers. The curriculum for the Marine Technology program is taught primarily on-line with flexible components to accommodate students’ changing schedules. Go to http://westkentucky.kctcs.edu/en/Academics/Academic_Divisions/at/Marine_Technology.aspx for more information.

In addition, WKCTC is looking for individuals who have prior experience as an engineering officer (all types of CG vessels, officers and enlisted) to apply for instructor positions. The ideal candidate should have a license and live relatively close to Paducah, KY. An associate’s-level degree is the minimum degree level required. Interested candidates should contact Andrew Gates, Program Coordinator for the Marine Technology program at 270-534-3285 or e-mail him at andrew.gates@kctcs.edu.

National Resource Directory Web Site for Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families

Servicemembers, veterans, their families, and their caretakers can find a huge amount of useful information about benefits and various resources at <https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>.

Civilian Employee Student Loan Repayment Program

The Coast Guard has a new program which will “repay certain types of federally insured student loans as recruitment or retention incentive for certain Coast Guard civilian employees paid from appropriated funds.”

For more information, see ALCOAST 419/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST419-11.pdf>) and COMDTINST 12500.3 (http://www.uscg.mil/directives/ci/12000-12999/CI_12500_3.pdf) which authorizes the program.

Staying Current with Deck Watch Officer Test Requirement

If you’re in a billet that requires you to remain current with respect to a Deck Watch Officer test, you can find a synopsis of the policy, a link to the COMDTINST 16672.5C, and a link to some sample test questions at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/nrt4.asp>. (If you’d like a hard copy of the COMDTINST, drop by the Education Center.)

Also be aware that if it’s been less than five years since you last passed either the DWINTO (closed-book) or the DWINTR (open-book) test, you can take either test (subject to the prohibition against re-taking the same test title more often than every three weeks).

If you're looking for a way to study for the test besides the NavRules course from the Coast Guard Institute (which is available through your ESO), you might want to consider investing in a copy of RulesMaster Pro software from Australia (<http://www.rulesmaster.com/>). This program makes the nautical rules of the road come to life, with sound signals and lights as you'd see them underway at night from all angles.

Getting Back the \$1,200 You Paid for the Montgomery GI Bill

A lot of people wonder about whether and how they can recoup the \$1,200 for the MGIB-AD that was taken out of their pay after boot camp, once they relinquish MGIB-AD benefits in favor of the new (Post-9/11) GI Bill. Here's the scoop.

Keep in mind that there are two conditions which determine whether you receive a reimbursement and how much it will be:

1. You can't have used up all 36 months of your entitlement before dropping the MGIB-AD so you could get the new GI Bill.
2. You have to exhaust the last month of your 36-month entitlement during a school term during which you're eligible to receive the monthly housing stipend (i.e., attending school more than half-time).

EXAMPLE 1: If you used all 36 months of MGIB-AD benefits before switching to the new GI Bill you will not be entitled to any reimbursement of the \$1,200 you paid during your first year after boot camp.

EXAMPLE 2: Let's say you used 12 months of MGIB-AD benefits before switching over to the new GI Bill. The amount you get reimbursed is determined by dividing the number of months you *didn't* use under the MGIB-AD (24) by the total number of months you were eligible to use it (36), and multiplying that number by \$1,200, or $2/3 \times \$1,200 = \800 .

EXAMPLE 3: Let's say you used none of your MGIB-AD benefit before switching to the new GI Bill. You will receive a reimbursement of \$1,200.

If, as sometimes happens, the Coast Guard didn't actually deduct some or all the \$1,200 from your pay, but you became eligible for MGIB-AD benefits anyway, the most you can receive back is the amount that was actually deducted.

Be aware that transferring all or some of your new GI Bill benefit to a dependent will affect whether and how much of a reimbursement you can receive. Months of benefits used by a dependent will not be counted as months you used under the new GI Bill and will, therefore, reduce the amount of your reimbursement.

If you took advantage of the Buy-up option, unfortunately Congress has not seen fit to offer a way to recoup the contributions (up to \$600) you made.

Future-Proof Your Education

"How do you prepare for uncertain career paths where technical knowledge doubles every two years? You pay attention to the skills that surround the content: Interact, Flex, Learn, Explain, Analyze, and Focus." Check out "Future-proof Your Education" at http://prezi.com/gsoot_1arnmk/future-proof-your-education/.

For best viewing, roll your cursor over "More" (in the bottom right corner) and select "Fullscreen". Then, use your keyboard's left/right arrow keys (or click on the arrows) to go forward or backward in the presentation. If a small window entitled "Hups. Bzzr." appears in the middle of your screen, you'll need to view the presentation/video on a computer other than your CG workstation.

GI Bill & Tuition Assistance

Many people are confused about the policy on using GI Bill benefits and tuition assistance together. They often call the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to ask if it's OK to do so. Invariably, the response from the DVA is "Yes". But when they try to use both at the same time for the same courses, the Coast Guard says that's not allowed. Here's why.

The DVA is responsible for administering GI Bill education benefits and there's nothing in the GI Bill statutes which prohibits GI Bill benefits from being used with tuition assistance (TA) at the same time, even for the same courses. But the DVA has absolutely no authority over the Coast Guard's TA program, policies, or procedures.

Each of the armed forces has its own version of TA which each controls absolutely. This means each can set its own rules on when and under what conditions TA can be used. That's why the five services each have slightly different TA rules. For example, Navy personnel can only use TA for 16 semester credits or 24 quarter credits per year. There are no such limits for Coast Guard personnel. And Coast Guard civilians are authorized to use TA, while civilian employees of the DoD services are not.

The DVA can say whatever it wants about using TA and GI Bill benefits at the same time and for the same courses, but the Coast Guard and other services have the final word on when, how, and for what TA can be used. This being the case, the Coast Guard has decided that its personnel are not allowed to use TA for the same courses they're receiving GI Bill education benefits for.

The main point to remember is that you may not receive GI Bill benefits for courses paid for by TA. However, this does **not** mean you can't receive GI Bill benefits at the same time you're using TA to pay for some of your courses.

EXAMPLE: Say you're taking 6 courses totaling 18 credits. You know that the maximum benefits you can received under the MGIB-AD, MGIB-SR, or REAP top out at 12 credits (or whatever your school considers full-time attendance). That is, you don't receive any more GI Bill money for any credits you take beyond those 12.

If you wanted to, you could file a GI Bill benefits claim for 4 of your courses (12 credits) and use TA to pay for the other two courses (6 credits). Or any combination totaling 18 credits, as long as you're not receiving GI Bill benefits for courses paid for with TA money.

Just make sure the person verifying the number of credits you're taking for GI Bill purposes doesn't tell the DVA you're claiming 18 credits. Anything more than the total number of credits you're taking minus the number being paid for by TA is contrary to Coast Guard regulations and could subject you to action under the UCMJ.

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) 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>.

On-line College Language Courses

If you're interested in taking one or more language courses on-line and either don't want to or can't afford to use those which are commercially available, check out the dozens of courses available from many different regionally-accredited colleges and universities throughout the country.

The DANTES Independent Study Catalog

(<http://www.dantescatalogs.com/DISCSubjectAreas.aspx?MajorSubjectArea=PC>) lists them, gives a short description of what they entail, and lists all costs associated with them. Tuition assistance (TA) can be used to pay for all or most costs of all these courses and you'll earn college credit for them as well.

If you're specifically interested in Spanish, another option comes from Ms. Kristi Hilton (full-time ESO at Sector Columbia River). She found courses offered by the University of Texas at <http://courses.webhost.utexas.edu/dec/college/searchresults.cfm>. You'll also earn college credit for these courses and the cost is only \$147.60/credit. If you want to use TA, there's a "Military Tuition Assistance" option on the payment page. If you run into snags trying to use TA to pay for the course, the school's Registrar, Ms. Carol Tremaine (at 512-471-2906), will answer any questions you have about the procedure.

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.

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.