

TraCen Cape May Education Update #357

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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 just finished a college course I used TA to pay for and am ready to take another one. Besides submitting a new TA request, do I have to do anything else?

A: It all depends on how long it's been since your school term ended. If it's been less than 42 days, you can submit a TA request right now for another course. If it's been 42 days or more since the term ended, you're locked out of eTA until you either submit your grade report for the last course TA paid for or reimburse the Navy for that course.

Don't forget: one of the conditions for using TA is providing grade reports for each course paid for with TA. It's your responsibility – not your school's – to ensure those grade reports get to the Institute via your ESO (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta-b.asp#grades>).

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 *Is Distance Learning for You?* (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#01>).

Grammar & Usage Corner

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

Affect is a verb: "Coast Guard modernization won't directly affect my unit" and "Supply and demand affect gas prices."

Effect is most often used as a noun: "Her personal life has no effect on me" and "The effects of the war in Afghanistan are tragic." HOWEVER, **effect** can also be used as a verb: "The new OIC effected many changes when she took charge."

Keep in mind this memory aid: the word cause is often paired with the word effect; the final letter of the word *cause* is the first letter of *effect*.

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.

Military Student Day – 01 December

On Thursday, 01 December CollegeWeekLive will be hosting its first Military Student Day, "an interactive video event where military personnel and veterans can meet with college representatives. Servicemembers and their families are invited to attend this free event, explore college options, and have their questions answered."

Through CollegeWeekLive's on-line college fairs, prospective students can get help with college planning by connecting with colleges in a live, interactive environment. You'll be able to find information from dozens of colleges and universities on things like admissions, financing, admission test preparation, college visits, and finding the college which best fits your daughter, son, or yourself. And while it's aimed mainly at students, parents and counselors are also welcome.

You can register for free (as well as check out the speakers, their topics, the schedule, and many other things) at http://www.collegeweeklive.com/en_CA/br/Military_Day.

This is a really fantastic tool. You can do everything you can do at a physical college fair except physically pick up brochures and shake people's hands. You can ask questions of speakers and school representatives, you can download information, you can even chat with current students at various colleges.

New ACCC Catalogs and Course Guides

The Spring 2012 Credit Course Guides and the 2011-2012 Catalogs from Atlantic Cape Community College are here!

You can pick up copies in the following locations:

- exchange lobby (near the Post Office window),
- outside the Education Center (Mission Support Building, Room 113)
- lab waiting area in the medical clinic.

Thomas Edison State College Tuition Increase

Thomas Edison State College has increased its tuition from \$239/credit to \$250/credit. When filling out your tuition assistance requests, please use \$250/semester credit.

How to Get a Great Letter of Recommendation

Check out this web site if you need to get letters of recommendation for college or an officer program: <http://matt.might.net/articles/how-to-recommendation-letter/>. Here are some of the points covered:

- Pick your letter-writers well
- How to get a good letter
- How to get a great letter
- How to ask for a letter
- How to follow up
- Should I draft my own letter?

Tuition Assistance Update

Currently, the Coast Guard Institute is authorized to process tuition assistance (TA) requests for courses beginning in **November and December 2011, and in January 2012**. You can use eTA/WebTA (<https://eta.cnet.navy.mil/>) to apply for a course that begins before the end of January 2012.

Because requests submitted via eTA expire after two weeks if you want to apply for a course that begins later than January 2012 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 more than three months from today.

Occupational Certification & Apprenticeship Programs

A number of occupational certification programs are available through your ESO. The United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP - <https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss/static/usmap.jsp>) is a program that allows regular Coast Guard members to earn apprenticeship certification in any of 125 skills learned through work experience and related technical instruction. All you have to do is document the experience you gain while performing your regular military duties; no after-hours work is required.

You can also get a credential (certification or license) in dozens of different occupational fields (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/cert.asp>) through a large number of nationally-recognized certification organizations. Here's a small sampling of the fields in which you can get certified:

- automotive service professional
- dental assistant
- contract manager
- medical technologist
- personal trainer
- human resources specialist
- computer networking professional
- project management
- facilities management.

And if you're eligible for GI Bill benefits, you can likely get reimbursed up to \$2,000 for the cost of each certification or licensing exam.

Interested in a Second Career . . .

. . . as a teacher or IT specialist? . . . in business or one of the health care fields? If so, and if you're thinking of getting a degree, check out Western Governors University (<http://www.wgu.edu/>).

As described in a recent article in *The Washington Monthly*

(http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/features/the_college_forprofits_should031640.php), WGU is different from all other colleges and universities in the country in that its degrees are “based on competency rather than time”.

By gathering information from employers, industry experts, and academics, Western Governors formulates a detailed, institution-wide sense of what every graduate of a given degree program needs to know. Then they work backward from there, defining what every student who has taken a given course needs to know. As they go, they design assessments—tests—of all those competencies. . . .

Those fixed standards enable a world of variation. At Western Governors, students aren't asked to sit in a class any longer than it takes for them to demonstrate that they have mastered the material. In fact, they aren't asked to sit in a “class” at all. At the beginning of a course, students are given a test called a “pre-assessment.” Then they have a conversation with their mentor—a kind of personal coach assigned to each student for the duration of their degree program—to discuss which concepts in the course they already grasp, which they still need to master, and how to go about closing the gap. The students are then offered a broad set of “learning resources”—a drab phrase, sure, but no more so than “crowded lecture hall”—that may include videos, textbooks, online simulations, conversations with a WGU course mentor (an expert in the subject matter who is on call to answer questions), or even tutors in the student's hometown.

If the course material is entirely new to a student, she might make her way through it in eight weeks, or eighteen—or eighty, for that matter. Then again, maybe the student is, say, an ex-pastor who's been selling Nissans in western North Carolina to make ends meet while he earns an MBA in human resources management—and maybe the course is Business Ethics. Ray Shawn McKinnon, the former pastor in question, studied ethics in his early twenties for his bachelor's in ministry and theology, so he nailed the pre-assessment. Given that success, his mentor allowed him to immediately take the final, which he passed. With that, Business Ethics went down on his transcript—and McKinnon moved on to subjects that genuinely terrified him, like math. “If you can prove your competence,” McKinnon said, “why pay all of that money to sit through something you already know?”

This might be just the ticket for you if you've already acquired a lot of knowledge in specific subjects which are part of your intended degree program. It even offers scholarships to military personnel and their spouses which can be used in addition to tuition assistance and GI Bill benefits.

Parents of College-Age Children, This is For You!

The September/October issue of *The Washington Monthly* is its annual college rankings issue (http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/toc_2011.php).

In addition to those rankings are some articles you may find interesting:

- “The End of College Admissions as We Know It” (http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/features/the_end_of_college_admissions031636.php)
- “How the Other Half Tests” (http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/features/how_the_other_half_tests031638.php)
- “The College For-Profits Should Fear” (http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/features/the_college_forprofits_should031640.php)

- “Administrators Ate My Tuition”
(http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/features/administrators_ate_my_tuition031641.php)
- “Is Our Students Earning?”
(http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/septemberoctober_2011/special_report/is_our_students_earning031647.php).

Is Distance Learning for You?

Because of its convenience, 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 take the time to read a short article published by the University of Illinois listing the characteristics of successful on-line students (<http://www.ion.illinois.edu/Resources/tutorials/pedagogy/StudentProfile.asp>).

And if you’re considering distance learning in general (as opposed to sitting in class), please try out a couple of the many on-line assessments you can use to help you determine whether distance learning is the right choice for you. Links to a few of these are available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#01>.

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.

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.

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.

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/sitestest.asp>.

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. 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.