

DEGREE COMPLETION TIPS

Where do you start? There are several ways you can complete your degree. Several options are outlined for your consideration. You may elect to mix and match the options as you think best. For instance if you have a good foundation in English Composition and write proficiently, you might want to consider taking the CLEP General Examinations. If, however, you are not as confident when it comes to a particular subject, you might want to take a course either through distance learning or in a college class room. It's your choice to decide how to complete the degree requirements. Keep in mind that most plans will require some resident courses through that specific college/university. You will find specific information on the degree plan under "Policy Notes". Please read it carefully. Consider the following options.

Step 1 CLEP General Examinations

The **CLEP General Examinations** (CLEP) consist of a series of examinations that test college level knowledge gained through military classes or technical assignments, or through personal reading, travel, and intellectual curiosity. The Examinations measure achievement in five basic areas of "general" or "liberal" education. Each examination has a 90-minute time limit. The multiple-choice questions cover material taught in required courses most students complete in their first two years of college.

There is no penalty for guessing so when in doubt, give your best guess. Each of the examinations is recommended for six semester hours of college credit. Therefore, if you complete all five of the CLEP general examinations, you will have earned 30 semester hours of college credit. Thirty semester hours equates to one year of college coursework. Additionally, the examinations are free of charge to USCG personnel, active duty, reservists, spouses, and civilian employees.

The CLEP General Exams are the following:

- 1. English Composition with or without Essay** (The University of Phoenix is the only known institution that will accept this exam without the essay. If applying at Excelsior College, be aware that Excelsior does not accept the CLEP General English Composition exam but requires students to take the Excelsior College Composition Exam or a traditional college course.)
- 2. Social Sciences and History**
- 3. Natural Sciences**
- 4. Mathematics**
- 5. Humanities**

Practice Test. There is a practice test for each examination. The practice test are copyrighted and not available free of charge to the general public. However, you can obtain a free copy by working with your Education Services Officer (ESO) or Test Control Officer (TCO). The practice test provides an outline of the content of the test, sample questions and answers. If you can pass two-thirds of the questions correctly on the practice test, you CAN pass the test. You can learn more about the exams at collegeboard.com.

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Study Materials. If you don't do well on the practice test, you might want to study and try again. Several sets of videotapes, DVDs, and audios are available to help you study for the examinations. The USCG has purchased several sets. They are stored at the Audio/Video Library where you can check them out free of charge. See *Education Services Officer Procedures Volume IV, College Audio/Video Courses* (CGI Publication P1550.1) and order the preparatory materials. The publication is available on the Institute website at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/eso/eso_guide_v4.asp. There is a study guide that accompanies the videotape that must be purchased by the student. Volume IV provides information about the names, sources, and costs of the accompanying materials.

Testing. The CLEP examinations are administered by authorized DANTES Test Control Officer (TCO). Usually the TCO is also the ESO (Education Services Officer). If your unit does not have a DANTES TCO, the ESO should be able to contact the nearest TCO and make the arrangements for your test. If your ESO is not available, you may go on-line at the DANTES homepage and go to the Test Center Lookup page and find the nearest TCO at http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/apps/testcenters/testcenterlookup.asp?Flag=True If unsuccessful, contact the USCG Institute for help in locating the nearest DANTES TCO.

Step 2 Other College Credit Examinations

Other College Credit Examinations There are at least 200 additional college credit examinations that may help meet your degree requirements. The exams are also free of charge and can save you a great deal of time and money. The other college credit examination programs include the following:

**CLEP Subject Examinations,
DANTES subject Standardized Tests (DSST)
Excelsior College Examinations.**

You will find more information on these programs on the Institute website at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/eso/eso_guide_v4.asp (The CLEP Subject Exam practice test is copyrighted and can only be accessed through the ESO in the same manner as the CLEP Subject Examinations.) Audio/Video test preparation programs are also available for some of the programs. See the *Education Services Officer Procedures Volume IV, College Audio/Video Courses* (CGI Publication P1550.1).

ESO Procedures Vol IV, CGI Publication P1550.1. On the matrix of courses is a list of 42 exams for which free audio and video study materials are available. The third column of the matrix specifies the applicable subject area. Any of the exams will satisfy that type of credit on the degree plan (i.e., Course Title – Ethics in America, Credit - Hum/3 sh LL). In plain language, this means that 3 semester hours of Humanities credit is awarded for this exam by most colleges and universities. Upper level (courses taken in the third and fourth years of college) liberal arts courses are also available and are noted by a UL in the third column.

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GRE Subject Examinations. The GRE Subject Examinations are usually required for admission to certain graduate programs. However, a few colleges (Excelsior College and Charter Oak State College) will award some credit for the GRE Subject Examinations. Charter Oak requires a passing score around the 44 percentile whereas Excelsior has established a sliding scale and the number of hours awarded depends on the passing score. As many as 30 semester hours (18 of which are upper level) may be awarded to those who pass at the 80 percentile or higher. The GRE subject examinations cover material normally covered in ten college classes and are therefore, considered fairly difficult.

Study guides may be downloaded free of charge from the GRE web site at <http://www.gre.org>.

Step 3 College Courses

College courses from any regionally accredited institution may also satisfy the degree requirements. The courses may be resident courses or distance learning courses. Be sure to note that most colleges require that students complete a specified number of credits through their institution. This information is contained in the “Policy Notes” at the end of your personalized degree plan. Try to satisfy the residency requirement, as soon as possible while stationed in the geographic area. If the institution offers courses at a distance, the distance learning courses will count toward the residency requirement.

When taking college classes at local colleges and universities, you may encounter problems in getting the in-state rate for tuition. States that currently have a policy NOT to provide in-state rates for military personnel and their dependents are Connecticut and South Dakota. Some states allow the institution to make the decision to grant in-state rates. These states are: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Puerto Rico, Vermont, and Washington. The state policies are published at <https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/education/InState/index.htm>.

More than 6,000 courses from dozens of regionally accredited colleges and universities are listed in the DANTEs Independent Study Catalog. You may enroll in them whenever you want as they have open enrollment and you have one year to complete the course. You will want to search the postsecondary section for the academic code listed on your degree plan. The catalog is available on-line at the DANTEs website at:

<http://www.dantescatalogs.com/CounselorDisclaimer.asp?Catalog=DISC&CameFrom=DISC/DISCNav.asp>

Taking courses through the SOCCOAST (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Coast Guard program) institutions assures greater transferability of credit. When enrolled with a SOCCOAST Institution, the institution is obligated to provide the student with a SOCCOAST Student Agreement after completing 6 semester hours of course work with the home college. The agreement specifies the courses required to complete the degree and lists the course number for the degree. By using the SOCCOAST Handbooks (available on-line at <http://www.soc.aascu.org/soccoast/Default.html>), you can determine the course category code and locate other colleges that offer that course. Your ESO may be able to help you with the SOC Codes. Also, you may call SOC at 800-368-5622 or an education advisor at the Institute.

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There are four colleges recognized as **military credit recognition degree programs** that do not have a residency requirement. These institutions are Excelsior College, Thomas Edison State College, Charter Oak State College, and the University of Phoenix. These institutions offer enrollment options where you can choose to take courses through them or to transfer in all the credits. If you elect to transfer in all the credits, be aware that there is an annual maintenance fee. Specific fees are contained in the last few pages of your degree plan.

Be sure to apply for tuition assistance for the courses. The tuition assistance request form and instructions are available on the Institute website at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/cfa/ta.asp>

Step 4 College Enrollment

When you are ready to enroll with a college or university for which the Institute has provided a degree plan (SOCCOAST), go to the institution's web site and download the college enrollment form. Complete the form and forward it to the Institute. Other documents you will need to provide include the following:

1. **Prior College Transcripts:** Any prior college work you have completed must be transcribed by the originating college. Go ahead and request an official transcript from all prior colleges to be sent to the college with which you are enrolling. It is recommended that you include all sealed transcripts with the enrollment package. That way, the entire package will be complete when it is sent to your college. Transcripts that are sent later will arrive on different days and may be misplaced or misfiled.

2. **College credit examinations completed prior to June 1994** must be transcribed by the appropriate testing agency. After June 94, the Institute established an electronic link with the testing agencies and will transcript the test scores. To ensure that you receive proper credit for all examinations taken, attach a copy of your official score report with the enrollment form.

3. An official transcript documenting your military learning experiences will be completed by the Institute and forwarded to the college along with your application. A link to the "student copy" of the official transcript will be provided to the applicant by e-mail. The Institute will enclose a copy of the degree plan (assuming that the member stated what plan was requested) and a copy of the student agreement. By processing your application, the Institute becomes your liaison with the college and will assist in resolving problems when possible. Direct liaison with your college advisor is also strongly encouraged.

Remember that the education counselors work for the Coast Guard and not the college. Therefore, they have YOUR best interest at heart. They will be glad to assist you with your questions. Contact the counselor who prepared your package if you have any questions. If it has been a while since your package was prepared, look at the list in step 5 for assistance.

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Step 5 Contact Information

Advising Support:

If you need assistance in interpreting your degree plan or other aspects of the education program, please feel free to call the education specialists in the College Degree Branch who processed your educational package.

Mailing address:

Commanding Officer (VE)
USCG Institute
5900 SW 64th Street, Room 235
Oklahoma City, OK 73169-6990

Website is <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/>

Education Advisor email is cgi-dg-education_advisor@cginstitute.uscg.mil
