

Navy College Program for Afloat College Education

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Navy has ships deployed around the globe, which brings with it the unique needs regarding delivering a quality college education to the sailors aboard on active duty. The purpose of this article is to outline the U.S. Navy's distance learning programs for supporting sailors at sea.

The Naval Education and Training Command is responsible for the education and training of naval personal. Under their command is the Center for Personal and Professional development, which has the mission "to develop the Navy's workforce

by providing education and training opportunities that build personal, professional, and leadership competencies in support of mission readiness" (U.S. Navy, 2013c, para. 3). Offerings under the Center for Personal and Professional Development are broken into three categories: personal development, professional development, and voluntary education. Personal and professional development courses are delivered online via the Navy Knowledge Online portal or by CD-ROM as well as classroom format at established sites and via mobile training teams (U.S. Navy, 2013a) The different components to the voluntary education program is targeted to provide a different set of services to its respective customers (McLaughlin, 2010)

Under the volunteer education program sailors have the opportunity to take correspondence courses or online courses through the navy's distance learning partnerships and use a combination of the Navy's tuition assistance program and the Montgomery GI Bill where 43 partner institutions deliver courses via internet, CD-ROM, USB drive, and paper to complete degree requirements. Sailors at sea also have the opportunity to take distance learning courses from the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education, where ten partner institutions have partnered with the U.S. Navy to target their program for sailors deployed in areas where Internet access cannot be guaranteed.

The tuition assistance program offered through the Navy College Distance Learn-



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ing Partnership and the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education are the two programs that more than allow for sailors to pursue college degrees in their off duty time while deployed but require participants to be actively working toward a college degree to be eligible (U.S. Navy, 2013a)

NAVY COLLEGE PROGRAM DISTANCE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

The Navy College Program Distance Learning Partnership was piloted in 1999 with five distance learning partners. Initially the sailors were required to choose a program that was directly related to their rating or field (McLaughlin, 2010). The partnership approach was chosen to allow "greater flexibility, as well as a more open approach to generating ideas," according to one of the Navy commanders on the project (Carr, 2000, p. A60). But the Navy was interested in more than just online courses since "The education environment of our sailors includes frequent deployments, infrequent or intermittent Internet connectivity, and a mobile lifestyle," said the commander. "Thus, not only is the number of distance-learning courses offered important, but also a variety of distance-learning formats" (Carr, 2000, p. 60). As a result, the agreement's memorandum of understanding specifically includes the requirement that courses must be available without Internet access (Carr, 2000; McLaughlin, 2010).

In 2004 the program was expanded to cover all of the Navy's ratings with 96 degree choices and 17 partner institutions (McLaughlin, 2010). In 2007 the Navy College Program Distance Learning Partnership removed the requirement that sailors take a course of study directly related to their Navy rating or field. The increased flexibility allowed for both wider participation and the opportunity for a wider variety of degrees to be pursued. By 2010 the program had grown to 34 fully accredited

academic institutions offering a total of 264 degree programs at the associate and baccalaureate level (McLaughlin, 2010). There are currently 43 institutions participating in the program (U.S. Navy, 2013b).

Participation in distance learning courses grew steadily between 2000 and 2007; the number of sailors taking distance courses with the tuition assistance program grew tenfold, while face-to-face enrollment fell by 29% in the same time period, with distance learning enrollment exceeding classroom enrollment in 2006 (Mehay & Pema, 2010).

NAVY COLLEGE PROGRAM FOR AFLOAT COLLEGE EDUCATION

Sailors at sea also have the option of using the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education, which offers courses free of charge and also offers the additional benefit of master's degree programs (U.S. Navy, 2013b). Central Texas College has been contracted by the U.S. Navy to administer the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE) and offers the opportunity for sailors to continue their education while on sea duty assignments. The program offers instructor delivered and distance learning courses. The distance learning courses are offered by a consortium of 10 colleges that have service-member opportunity agreements to ensure that the credits are transferable. Because NCPACE tuition is covered by the Navy, sailors pay only for textbooks and materials.

NCPACE is specifically targeted for service members who would otherwise have difficulty gaining access to college courses due to physical isolation, a lack of reliable Internet access, and unpredictable work schedules (Park, 2011). Distance learning courses are delivered via CD-ROM, PDA, and MP4 methods since ships at sea cannot guarantee reliable and consistent Internet access. A total of 287 distance learning courses are offered at the associate's

degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree levels. There are currently 42 associate's degrees, 24 bachelor's degrees and six master's degrees available via the program.

In order to participate in the program sailors need permission from their command to register, they need to have completed an individualized education plan with their ship's education service officer to outline the list of courses needed to complete a degree and to ensure that the sailor understands the requirements of the degree path chosen. Prospective students must take an ACT ASSET test to assess math and English skills (can be administered by Navy College or by the ship's education service officer) or have proof of prior college level coursework and complete a distance learning assessment for distance learning courses as a way to stem previously lower distance learning completion rates.

Sailors then register with their education service officer and buy books. Surface Sailors have 14 days from the start date to drop the course without penalty, and Submarine Sailors have 30 days from the term start date to drop without penalty by seeing their educational service officer to drop the course. The course terms run 90 days and sailors are advised to pace themselves in the distance learning program with a midterm at six weeks and a final at 12 weeks which are proctored by the ship's education service officer.

Ninety-seven percent of program participants are enlisted sailors, with 82.5% falling within the pay grades of E3-E6. Higher ranked sailors had higher rates of success, with E6's three times more likely than E1's to be successful. With the high demands of active duty at sea, only 48.1% of first time technology course students were successful at completing their first course, while 79.5% first-time instructor-led students were successful (McLaughlin, 2010).

The difficulty of taking classes during off-duty time demonstrates that sailors who enroll in distance learning classes may have higher ability and motivation levels than those who do not enroll in courses (McLaughlin, 2010). With active duty on a naval vessel being more than a full-time job, first-time distance learners are limited to a single course and returning distance learners are limited to two simultaneous courses.

DISTANCE DEGREES OFFERED VIA NCPACE

42 ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES

- Associate of applied science from Central Texas College (Not intended as the first two years of a bachelor's degree): applied management, applied technology, business management, and criminal justice
- Associate of Arts in General Studies From Central Texas College
- Associate degrees from Coastline Community College (each can transfer 100% into a bachelor's degree with several universities): American studies, administrative manager, arts and humanities, business administration, communications, computer networking: Cisco, computer network: Microsoft, computer networking: security, electronics, emergency management/Homeland security, financial manager, general accounting, general business, general office manager, gerontology, health and fitness, healthcare management, history, human resources management, human services, management, marketing, psychology, science and math, small business management, social and behavioral science, sociology, spanish, supervision and management, and supply chain management
- Associate in arts general education/undergraduate transfer from Dallas Colleges Online

- Associate in science general education/ undergraduate transfer from Dallas Colleges Online
- Associate of science in computer and information science from ECPI University
- Associate of science from Vincennes University in law enforcement, administration of justice, criminal justice, and corrections

24 BACHELOR'S DEGREES

- Bachelor of science in business administration from ECPI University
- Bachelor of arts in interdisciplinary studies from Governors State University
- Bachelor of science in engineering technology from Old Dominion University
- Bachelor of arts in Criminal Justice from Saint Leo University
- Bachelor of arts from Thomas Edison State College in liberal studies, social sciences, humanities, natural science/mathematics, history, and psychology
- Bachelor of science in business administration from Thomas Edison State College
- Bachelor of science in applied science and technology for air traffic control, electronics engineering technology, nuclear medicine, biomedical electronics, electrical technology, nuclear energy engineering technology, clinical laboratory science, medical imaging, nuclear engineering technology from Thomas Edison State College
- Bachelor of arts in administrative leadership from the University of Oklahoma

6 MASTER'S DEGREES

- Master of engineering management from Old Dominion University (for graduates of Navy's Officer Nuclear Power School)
- Master of business administration from Saint Leo University
- Master of science in criminal justice from Saint Leo University
- Master of science in critical incident management from Saint Leo University
- Master of arts in administrative leadership from the University of Oklahoma

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