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OPNAV INSTRUCTION 1560.9A

From: Chief of Naval Operations

Subj: VOLUNTARY EDUCATION (VOLED) FOR NAVY SAILORS

Ref: (a) U.S. Code, Title 10, Sections 2005 and 2007
(b) DoD Directive 1322.8E of 3 Jan 05
(c) DoD Instruction 1322.25 of 5 Feb 97, CH-1 of 3 Feb 99
(d) DoD Instruction 1322.9 of 16 Oct 95
(e) SECNAVINST 1560.4A of 1 Dec 05
(f) NAVFACENGCOM Facilities Standard for Navy College Offices (NCO) or Lifelong Learning Centers, NAVFAC P-80
(g) DANTES Examination Program Handbook
(h) BUPERSINST 1780.1A

Encl: (1) Definition of Terms

1. Purpose. To issue policy and assign responsibility for Navy Volunteer Education (VOLED) per references (a) through (e). This instruction is a complete revision and should be reviewed in its entirety.

2. Cancellation. OPNAVINST 1560.9.

3. Background. Education is instrumental in developing the competencies, knowledge and critical thinking skills required by the 21st century Sailor. VOLED provides education opportunities and support for Sailors pursuing education during their off-duty time. This program supports long range Navy goals for developing a highly adaptable force; enabling career-long learning; and enhancing personal and professional development, recruitment and retention.

4. Scope. Per reference (d), this VOLED program applies specifically to active Sailors. United States Navy Reserve (USNR), Department of Defense (DoD) civil service employees, adult family members, retirees and members of other services may participate in some of the programs on a space-available, at no cost to the Navy. Navy VOLED programs will be made available for Sailors stationed on Navy installations and ships at sea,

forward deployed, or at overseas locations. Sailors stationed at joint locations operated by other military departments will be supported either remotely by the nearest Navy College Office (NCO), the Navy College Center (NCC) which is a virtual center, or through an agreement with the other applicable service.

5. Definitions. Specific terms used in this instruction are defined in enclosure (1).

6. Policy. The Navy provides VOLED opportunities to enable Sailors to pursue professional and personal academic goals during off-duty time. When mission requirements allow, Commanding Officers are encouraged to release Sailors from their duties to enable them to participate in VOLED programs including academic skills, college preparation, educational counseling, testing, and courses. VOLED programs provide opportunities for active duty Sailors to complete a high school diploma (or equivalency certificate), pursue lifelong learning, and earn a college degree. To aid in the accomplishment of this policy, NCOs will administer local VOLED programs.

a. Academic Skills and College Preparatory Services. All Sailors will be given the opportunity and should be encouraged to upgrade their academic skills. The Navy will provide the means to assess Sailors' reading, writing and mathematics skill levels and provide programs designed to improve their basic skills, prepare them to retake the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), or prepare them to enroll in entry-level college courses.

b. Educational Counseling. Sailors should receive educational counseling from qualified NCO or NCC personnel to optimize use of educational opportunities and to plan an appropriate program of study. Educational counseling will be made available to adult family members on a space available basis. The Department of the Navy staffing standard at ashore facilities, per reference (f), is one staff member for every 2,000 permanent active duty personnel. At a minimum, NCOs will be assigned two staff members with at least one professional counselor.

c. Testing Services. NCOs must provide access to a wide range of examination programs to assist service members in meeting their educational goals. Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) test centers will be established, where appropriate, to provide additional opportunities for Sailors to take tests.

(1) When the Navy offers tests under the auspices of the DANTES, all personnel, military and civilian, ashore and afloat, who administer DANTES controlled tests shall be trained and certified as DANTES Test Control Officers, per policy and procedures outlined in reference (g).

(2) DANTES tests are controlled items which require secure storage and handling. Guidelines in reference (g) for safeguarding tests will be strictly enforced.

d. Tuition Assistance (TA). TA is an in-service support program. It provides funds to assist in payment of tuition costs enabling Sailors to enroll in courses supporting completion of a high school diploma; or an associate, bachelors, master's or doctoral degree. Regular component active duty Sailors, reservists on continuous active duty, and reservists ordered to active duty for 120 days or more may receive Navy TA provided provisions of paragraph 7 are met and as follows:

(1) TA covers 100 percent of the tuition up to the maximum limit allowed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense per credit hour. To maximize the opportunity for participation by the broadest number of Sailors and in keeping with the need to ensure a balance with other professional demands, the following applies:

(a) TA will be limited to 16 semester hours or 24 quarter hours per fiscal year.

(b) Tuition shall not exceed $250.00 per semester hour or $166.67 per quarter hour.

(c) Direct, mandatory expenses for instruction such as laboratory and shop fees will be covered by TA up to semester or quarter hour limits. Fees not covered include application fees, student activity fees, textbooks and consumable materials.

(d) TA may not be used to fund Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

(2) TA funding may only be paid to educational institutions accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (DoE).

e. Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE). NCPACE provides Sailors the opportunity to experience challenging education while assigned to sea duty or remote

locations. NCPACE courses cover 100 percent of tuition costs and are not restricted by the semester/quarter hour caps. Sailors pay for their own textbooks and other instructional materials and may participate in NCPACE provided provisions of paragraph 8 are met.

(1) NCPACE is available to commands having a sea duty unit identification code (UIC) of type 4, some remote locations, and Sailors assigned to support contingency operations.

(2) Institutions offering courses through NCPACE must be accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Department of Education.

(3) Undergraduate institutions offering courses through the NCPACE must be members of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Navy (SOCNAV).

f. Veterans Administration (VA). Education benefits are available for eligible veterans and active duty Sailors to attend school. Educational assistance is available primarily through the Post-Vietnam Era Veteran's Educational Assistance (VEAP) and the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), per reference (h).

g. On-Base College Programs. Shore installations will provide opportunities for on-base education through NCOs.

(1) NCOs will conduct formal needs assessments, at a minimum, on a three-year cycle to ensure on-base programs meet identified needs.

(2) All civilian institutions offering courses on Navy bases must operate under a Memorandum of Understanding between the base commanding officer or regional commander, and the college.

(3) On-base undergraduate institutions must be members of SOCNAV. Institutions offering graduate courses must be accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the DoE.

(4) To ensure the quality of education offered on-base, NCOs and on-base institutions will participate in the Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER) process as directed, per reference (b).

(5) All on-base programs will encourage degree completion and be fully coordinated to avoid duplication of courses or programs.

h. Educational Documentation

(1) The Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript (SMART) is the Navy's academically accepted document which validates a Sailor's Navy training and military occupational experience. It is endorsed by the American Council on Education (ACE) and displays ACE recommendations for college credit for military training and experience. It provides the primary source of information for the degree evaluation and planning process. SMART may be requested through Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), at https://www.nko.navy.mil or directly at the Navy College Program website, https://www.navycollege.navy.mil.

(2) To update their education level in their personnel records, officers must have their official transcripts forwarded to Navy Personnel Command (NPC) (PERS-45E) for validation. NPC will ensure degree information is entered into the Officer Personnel Information System (OPINS), the appropriate subspecialty code is entered into Officer Assignment Information System (OAIS), and the transcript is forwarded to PERS-312 for inclusion in the officer's permanent record which is maintained in the Electronic Military Personnel Records System (EMPRS).

(3) The Navy College Management Information System (NCMIS) is the authoritative education data source for enlisted personnel. NCMIS feeds education data to EMPRS, the Electronic Training Jacket (ETJ) and the Enlisted Master File. The NCC will validate all transcripts from academic institutions for enlisted personnel as a prerequisite for entry into NCMIS. The NCC will then forward the transcript to PERS-312 for inclusion in EMPRS.

i. Individual Education Plans. Individual education plans are key factors in helping Sailors achieve their educational goals. At a minimum, these plans list recommended courses, College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and DANTES Standardized Subject Tests (DSST) examinations, as well as ACE recommended college credits for training and experiences which are applicable to courses of study leading to a degree or other education goal. NCOs will assist Sailors in developing their individual education plans. The NCC is also available to provide worldwide access to information on the Navy College Program and ongoing VOLED programs. Access to the NCC is available through NKO or the Navy College Program website.

(1) Approved Courses. Sailors are allowed to take up to five courses without an approved education plan. To receive approval to take additional courses using TA or NCPACE, Sailors must have an approved education plan. Only courses required by the education plan will be authorized for TA and NCPACE.

(2) Testing Requirements. When an individual education plan recommends credit by examination, NCOs are required to assess the Sailor's likelihood of success through counseling. CLEP/DSST practice tests and study guides are available on NKO and from NCOs.

(3) Restrictions to Education Plans. Education plans which lead to an additional degree at the same or lower education level will not be supported through TA or NCPACE. Lower division or prerequisite courses may be supported if the courses are part of the degree program and are listed on the Sailor's approved education plan. Degree plans should logically progress from associate through master's degrees.

j. Navy College Program Distance Learning Partnership (NCPDLP) Program. The NCPDLP program provides distance learning opportunities for Sailors to earn associate and bachelor degrees. The program makes maximum use of military professional training and experience to fulfill degree requirements. Degree roadmaps provide a predetermined education plan and are available via the Sailor/Marine Online Academic Advisor (SMOLAA). SMOLAA can be accessed on the Navy College Program website and NKO.

k. SOCNAV. Per reference (d), Sailors are encouraged to obtain a SOCNAV agreement. This agreement complements the individual education plan and provides specific requirements for obtaining an associate or baccalaureate degree. SOCNAV colleges and universities accept both traditional and non-traditional credits towards completion of degree requirements.

l. Warfare and Professional Qualifications. First assignments are challenging and rigorous as Sailors learn their professional responsibilities. Careful planning, focus and time management are critical to success. To enhance the chances for success, Sailors are strongly encouraged to complete warfare and professional qualifications prior to pursuing education courses through TA or NCPACE.

m. Service Obligation. By statute, active duty commissioned officers, including Limited Duty Officers and Chief Warrant Officers, must agree to remain on active duty for at least two years after completion of or withdrawal from the last course funded by TA or NCPACE. This commitment is discharged concurrently with any other service obligation. It does not obligate the Navy to retain the officer on active duty. This statutory commitment may not be waived or cancelled through reimbursement of costs covered by TA or NCPACE.

n. Waivers. Waivers of policy not specifically addressed in this instruction, will be requested via the chain of command to Commander, Naval Education and Training Command (NETC).

7. Tuition Assistance Program Implementation

a. Sailors must meet the following criteria to be eligible for TA.

(1) Advancement eligible Sailors must have taken and passed the most recent advancement exam. Commanding officers/officers in charge may grant waivers for Sailors who are unable to take the most recent advancement exam due to legitimate reasons such as working outside their rating, operational commitments, or other command-sanctioned circumstances.

(2) Sailors must have passed the most recent physical fitness assessment.

(3) Sailors must be recommended for promotion or advancement on their most recent evaluation/fitness report.

(4) Sailors in initial skills training must have completed "A" school or be in a status of "awaiting instruction" long enough to complete the academic course before commencement of training.

(5) Officers must agree in writing to serve on active duty for a period of two years following completion of or withdrawal from the supported education.

b. Sailors may not be authorized TA in the following instances:

(1) When in a duty-under-instruction status (DUINS), except as noted in paragraph 7a(5).

(2) When participating in a Navy education program such as, but not limited to, Graduate Education Voucher (GEV), Advanced Education Voucher (AEV), and Scholarship.

(3) When enrolled in an officer accession program involving full-time instruction at a civilian institution.

(4) When course work will not be completed on active duty.

(5) When convicted at a special or general court-martial and sentenced to a punitive discharge or confinement.

(6) When found guilty at a summary court martial or awarded non-judicial punishment in the previous six months.

(7) When on appellate leave.

(8) When pending administrative separation.

c. In the case of Sailors who accumulate an average of less than "C" (or a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale) over 12 semester hours (or equivalent) of course credit which has been funded by TA, no additional TA will be processed until that Sailor is counseled by a NCO or NCC professional and a new education plan is developed.

d. Sailors who voluntarily withdraw from or fail a course funded by TA must reimburse the government. No further funding will be provided until the debt has been repaid. Sailors may request a waiver for reimbursement, via their chain of command to the local NCO, when withdrawal was involuntary due to operational commitments or military directed actions, such as TAD, emergency leave, and medical leave.

e. Regardless of college policy, Sailors who have received a grade of "I" (incomplete) in a course funded by TA will be given no more than six months from the term ending date to complete course requirements and earn a grade. Members shall reimburse the government if they fail to convert an "I" into a passing grade within six months.

f. Sailors stationed outside the continental United States (OCONUS) may use TA to take traditional classroom courses at an American college or local university only if the school has entered into a contract or MOU with the U.S. Government.

8. NCPACE Program Implementation. Sailors must meet the criteria cited in paragraph 7a to be eligible for NCPACE course enrollment. Sailors may not be authorized NCPACE course enrollment under the circumstances cited in paragraph 7b.

9. Responsibilities

a. The Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Manpower, Personnel, Training and Education (MPTE)(N1) shall:

(1) Act as resource sponsor for VOLED programs.

(2) Develop, coordinate and promulgate Navy-wide policy for VOLED programs per references (a) through (d).

(3) Represent Navy VOLED interests throughout the Navy, Office of the Secretary of Defense, the other military departments, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

(4) Represent the Navy and maintain liaison with appropriate federal and state agencies, private sector organizations, DoE, ACE, SOC, and similar education associations whose policies affect voluntary education.

(5) Serve as the Secretary of the Navy's representative with the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) and provide a staff member for the DANTES Working Group in consonance with the Navy's Executive Agency role.

(6) Submit quarterly performance reports to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs ASN (M&RA), and to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, OSD (P&R), per reference (c).

b. NETC shall:

(1) Develop tools and checklists to support command leadership in determining Sailors' eligibility for VOLED programs.

(2) Promulgate guidelines for the implementation of policies contained in this instruction.

(3) Comply with policies and procedures which align VOLED programs with initiatives on recruitment, retention, lifelong learning and readiness. Coordinate policy waiver requests with Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) N12.

(4) Provide execution oversight of the VOLED program components, including measures of performance and strategies for the distribution of resources.

(5) Act as the Executive Agent for DANTES.

(6) Advocate resources required for VOLED programs during the Program Objective Memorandum/Program Review (POM/PR) process.

(7) Conduct and/or publish studies periodically to assess the impact of VOLED programs on personnel, commands, recruitment, retention and readiness.

(8) Monitor TA funding obligations and establish waiver criteria as appropriate to the TA semester hour cap.

(9) Institutionalize the requirement for ACE evaluations for classroom training and distance learning.

(10) Submit quarterly performance data to CNO (N12) in support of reference (c).

c. Shore installation commanders shall:

(1) Be responsible for education programs offered on their installations.

(2) Assess the need for on-base education programs and develop Installation Education Plans in conjunction with the local NCO. The assessment shall be done at a minimum of every three years.

(3) Under the provision of a host/tenant agreement, provide the local NCO with the following on a non-reimbursable basis: office space, audio-visual equipment, office furniture, utilities (e.g., lights, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, etc.), facilities maintenance, metered mail, telephone (including DSN and long distance services), and janitorial service. NCO facilities shall conform to reference (b), enclosure (4).

(4) Provide on-base college institutions with office and classroom space, utilities (e.g., lights, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, etc.), and janitorial service under the provisions of an MOU;

(5) Encourage on-base college institutions to reinvest in the off-duty education program by making items such as hardware and software that enhance instruction, library access, Internet access, and so on; available to Sailors as a part of the MOU;

(6) Support and advocate a cooperative arrangement with DoD Dependent Schools (DoDDS) to provide classroom and laboratory facilities, where feasible, to support on-base college courses;

(7) Establish an Education Advisory Committee to address installation education requirements; and

(8) Actively support Educational Services Officer (ESO) and Navy Career Counselor participation in VOLED opportunities.

d. COs and OICs shall:

(1) Ensure all newly assigned personnel have the opportunity to develop individual education plans which support professional and personal education goals;

(2) In conjunction with the local NCO, establish and maintain a process for command review and approval of Sailor requests for TA and NCPACE, as applicable, to ensure compliance with this instruction;

(3) Consider the Sailor's progress toward completion of required warfare/professional qualifications prior to approving a request for TA/NCPACE. Sailors should demonstrate satisfactory progress toward timely completion of warfare/professional qualifications and the ability to assume the additional challenge of an academic program. When a request is disapproved, a plan will be developed which defines steps which, when complete, may lead to approval of TA/NCPACE. Warfare qualifications affect sea-going Sailors, but there are some shore duty professional qualifications which should be met as well. These include, for example, General Military Training and Leadership Courses.

(4) Have the authority to grant waivers per paragraphs 7a(1).

(5) Actively support ESO and Navy Career Counselor participation in VOLED opportunities.

e. COs of deploying units shall carry out responsibilities delineated in paragraph 9d and additionally shall:

(1) Provide adequate lead time for the local NCO to conduct orientation services before deployment. This will facilitate the assessment of crew education levels and the subsequent development of the Command Education Plan.

(2) Appoint Test Control Officers who have been trained and certified by DANTES to maintain accountability and safeguarding for CLEP and DSST tests administered while underway.

f. Individual Sailors shall:

(1) Plan for lifelong learning which reflects a priority on warfare/professional qualification and supports career development.

(2) Ensure their education and training data are properly recorded and kept up to date in their SMART transcript.

(3) Periodically discuss individual education goals and progress with the chain of command and NCO counselors.

(4) In the case of officers who have incurred a service obligation as a result of participating in VOLED programs and are requesting separation from active duty, confirm service obligation completion date.

for J. C. HARVEY, JR.
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
Deputy Chief of Naval Operations
(Manpower, Personnel, Training
and Education)

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this instruction, the following definitions apply:

American Council on Education (ACE). Works in cooperation with DoD and the various Service branches to evaluate military training, course work and occupational experience. ACE provides a review, by the civilian education community, of the courses, programs, occupational environment, and other training experiences offered by the Services.

Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). Assists the Services with providing off-duty VOLED programs and opportunities for service members, DoD personnel, and family members. DANTES supports the Navy College Program by managing contracts for VOLED to include the ACE Military Evaluations Program, SOC and related functions, and the MIVER. In addition, DANTES manages selected testing programs and distributes reference materials including distance-learning opportunities for NCOs and naval commands throughout the world.

Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER). Provides an independent, third-party assessment of the quality of the postsecondary education program provided to off-duty Sailors at military installations around the world. MIVER assesses the quality of service provided by the NCOs, as well as the quality of course and degree offerings provided by institutions serving the installation. A visiting team evaluates how well the installation's NCO and on-base college institutions are meeting the specific needs of the installation.

Overseas Sea Duty (Type Duty Code 4). (1) Duty performed in commissioned vessels and deployable squadrons homeported overseas. (2) Overseas land-based activities and embarked staffs which require members to operate away from their duty station in excess of 150 days per year.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Navy (SOCNAV). A consortium of colleges and universities that facilitate the achievement of college degrees for military students. Per reference (c), Sailors pursuing an undergraduate degree with a SOCNAV institution shall be encouraged to obtain a SOCNAV agreement. Colleges providing undergraduate courses on naval installations, as well as those participating in the Navy College Program Distance Learning Partnership consortium, must be members of SOCNAV and adhere to SOCNAV membership requirements.

Sea Duty (Type Duty Code 2). (1) Duty performed in commissioned vessels and deployable squadrons homeported in the U.S. (including Hawaii and Anchorage, Alaska). (2) U.S. land-based activities and embarked staffs which require members to operate away from their duty station in excess of 150 days per year.