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**STATEMENT OF
MR. TIMOTHY R. LARSEN
DIRECTOR PERSONAL AND FAMILY READINESS DIVISION
MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
VOLUNTARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE MEMBERS
ON
SEPTEMBER 22, 2010**

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Chairman Snyder, Ranking Member Wittman, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your interest in the Marine Corps' Voluntary Education Programs and for the opportunity to discuss college education opportunities, concerns associated with the quality of education provided by schools, and steps taken by the Marine Corps to manage and oversee this activity.

COLLEGE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Tuition Assistance. The Marine Corps Tuition Assistance Program is consistent with the Department of Defense's uniform policy standard in that it is available to all active duty Marines and Reservists on continuous active duty. Each Marine receives \$4500.00 per fiscal year (1 Oct-30 Sep), with a cap of \$250 per semester hour. The tuition assistance eligibility guidelines provide that:

- Funds are authorized for vocational and technical, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs;
- Funds may only be provided to those academic institutions that are properly accredited and recognized by the Department of Education (DoE); and
- The Marine Corps does not have the legal authorization to deny tuition assistance to any academic institutions that are recognized by DoE.

Marine Corps Tuition Assistance Utilization Rates. In FY09, 30,739 Marines took 74,695 courses, utilizing a total of \$48,106,577. The 25 schools with the highest enrollments received 81 percent of Marine Corps tuition assistance funding. Of the 25 schools, 58 percent were proprietary/for-profit institutions, 20 percent were state supported/public schools, and 22 percent

were independent schools. Overall, the Marine Corps' average tuition assistance participation rate is 14 percent of our active duty end strength. Over the last five years, the Marine Corps' tuition assistance participation rates have been very consistent, ranging from 13 to 15 percent. In FY09, 95 percent of Marines received a passing grade. However, of the Marines taking their first class, we see a completion rate of only 82 percent.

There were 702 waivers granted for various reasons, such as duty, transfer, medical, or emergency situations.

Distance Learning. Using tuition assistance participation rates as a basis for calculation, we know that there has been a steady increase in our Marines' participation in distance learning courses over the last five years, from 49 percent in FY05 to 64 percent in FY09. The growth of participation and interest in distance learning can be attributed to many different factors:

- First, it reflects our increasingly mobile and technologically advanced society. Distance learning allows Marines to continue their education regardless of where their duty stations may be located. It is both portable and convenient for our expeditionary Marines.
- Although distance learning courses may have originally started out as correspondence courses, they now encompass myriad of education delivery modes, ranging from correspondence, CD, and videoconferencing, to hybrid or blended courses of study. This emerging technology is becoming widely used in universities and institutions around the world.
- It is both portable and convenient for our expeditionary Marines.

The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) assists Service members with readjustment after their separation from military service by providing education and training opportunities for

individuals who first enter active duty on or after 1 July 1985. Participation of active duty and veteran Marines over the last five years has been very consistent, ranging from approximately 55,000 to 58,000 per year. Approximately 96 percent of users are veterans and the remaining are Active Duty Marines.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill was implemented in August 2009 and there has not been sufficient time to identify quantifiable metrics on the impacts of the program. However, the provisions of the program seem to be universally welcomed and appreciated by Marines. Current data reflects that approximately 6,000 Marines have been approved to transfer their benefits.

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Marine Corps (SOCMAR), a consortium of colleges and universities, assists Marines in earning a college degree despite geographic and institutional obstacles by providing increased transfer credit flexibility, limited residency requirement, and recognition of military learning for academic credit.

Deployed Education provides education opportunities for Marines who are deployed. Marines who are permanently assigned to ships for duty may participate in the Navy's Program for Afloat College Education (PACE) or participate in classes aboard ship, specific for their units. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point have established Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with academic institutions to deliver undergraduate level courses aboard ship. Other deployed Marines may participate in programs and services provided by the Tri-Service Postsecondary Contract for Europe and CENTCOM Contract for Afghanistan and Africa. Enrollments in our deployed education program are as follows:

DEPLOYED EDUCATION PROGRAM		
YEAR	Enrollments	Cost
2009	5,512	\$3,441,837
2008	5,094	\$2,977,861
2007	3,705	\$2,045,032
2006	4,708	\$2,543,228
2005	3,891	\$1,181,980

CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH QUALITY OF EDUCATION SCHOOLS

The Marine Corps has concerns with the quality of education and, in some cases, the practices of some academic institutions providing Voluntary Education programs to our Service Members. Some of these concerns include aggressive marketing and recruiting techniques that are handled at the local level. If not resolved, issues are elevated to Headquarters Marine Corps for remediation.

We rely heavily on the accreditation bodies recognized by the Department of Education (DoE). As long as an academic institution is recognized by the DoE, the Marine Corps will provide funds. We also believe that new policies proposed by OSD will help establish universal controls over a schools conduct and interactions with potential students. Primary to this effort is the requirement that all institutions participating in the TA program will have a Memorandum of Understanding, which articulates the commitment and agreements between the educational institutions and DoD prior to an institution accepting funds via each Service's TA program.

Other disciplines for each education institution include:

- Must be accredited by an agency recognized by the Department of Education.
- Must agree to support the regulatory guidance provided by DoD and the Services.

- Must agree to participate in the Military Voluntary Education Review (MVER).
- Must agree to one single TA rate, per Office of Postsecondary Education identification number.
- Must agree to provide course enrollment, course withdrawal, course cancellation, course completion or failure, grade, verification of degree completion, and billing information to TA issuing Service’s education departments, as outlined in the Service’s regulations and instructions.

ACTIONS TO MANAGE AND OVERSEE PROGRAMS

There are a number of actions to help manage and oversee programs:

- The Command Inspector General (CIG) conducts the Command Inspection Process (CIP) on the Voluntary Education program every three years.
- In addition, the Marine Corps has conducted two Functionality Assessments (FA) on our Voluntary Education program.
 - The first FA, which was conducted in August 2002, resulted in the primary recommendation that Active Duty Marines working in the Voluntary Education Center be returned to operational units. As a result, thirty-one military billets were converted to civilian billets. Other actions included the development of staffing models, program standards and performance measures.
 - The second FA, which was completed in June of this year, resulted in the recommendation that we integrate complementary programs and services to provide a “one-stop shopping” capability to Marines. Our primary objective with this initiative, which I discuss in greater detail later in my statement, is to provide every Marine with

an opportunity to successfully achieve their educational and career goals through personal roadmaps.

- Our Lifelong Learning policy was recently revised and signed earlier this month.
- Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER) is sponsored by the DoD to assess the quality of off-duty post-secondary educational programs and services used by Service members regardless of location or duty assignment, and to assist in the improvement of education programs and services. The Marine Corps participates in the MIVER assessment process to ensure that the education programs are high quality and meet academic criteria, regardless of the delivery method or the location.
- External Reviews. Currently, we are engaged with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on its study of DoD's Tuition Assistance program, as well as the Defense Manpower Data Center's strategic assessment of whether the utilization of tuition assistance on enlisted, active duty and Reserve components has an impact on retention and promotion, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2008. In addition, we are working on a request from your Subcommittee staff, as well as a request from Members of the Senate, to compile data and statistics on our tuition assistance and voluntary education programs. We look forward to the outcomes of these reviews.
- The Marine Corps has implemented additional measures to assist Marines in their educational pursuits:
 - Marines who arrive to a new installation are required to be introduced to the Lifelong Learning education center and to receive a brief overview of the voluntary education programs and services offered at the installation.

- First time tuition assistance users must participate in a College 101 brief, which provides a larger overview of the tuition assistance program, the tuition assistance enrollment process, and the Marine's role/responsibility in pursuing additional learning.
 - Once the College 101 brief has been completed, Marines can meet on a one-on-one basis with a counselor who determines the Marine's eligibility based on their General Technical (GT) score.
 - Scores of 99 or below require the Marine to take a further assessment test in the form of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The TABE, which is a diagnostic test used to determine a person's skill levels and aptitudes, is used as a measurement to guide people into adult education programs, such as getting a GED or going to trade school. It is also used by many companies for hiring and promotions or for selecting employees for training programs.
 - Marines who score a minimum of 10.2 on this test are authorized to utilize tuition assistance under the guidance of the education counselor.
 - Those who do not score the minimum may be required to enroll in a basic skills program such as the Military Academic Skills Program (MASP).
 - Employing policies such as these have allowed the Marine Corps to ensure that our service members have the skills and means available to be successful in pursuing their educational goals.
- Program Initiatives. Marine Corps leadership has affirmed that we must aggressively support the professional and personal development pursuits of every Marine. We

recognize that education is the primary key to helping a Marine in these endeavors. To that end, we have embarked on two related initiatives:

- The first is a reorganization of our traditional Transition Assistance Management Program. Heretofore, our focus has been on ensuring that each departing/transitioning Marine receives a body of information required by statute and/or that is deemed to be most useful to the Marine. While we have successfully met the required program delivery standards, we have not been able to successfully bring together all the disparate programs that could aid a Marine through the military lifecycle including the transition process. We have developed a solution which calls for integrating complementary services, such as Transition Assistance, Voluntary and Off Duty Education, Personal Financial Management, and Family Member Employment Assistance, and acting to begin the personal and professional development process at the point of initial entry. This integrated program delivery will provide “one-stop shopping” and help Marines establish their personal and professional roadmaps to not only be successful in the Corps but also through transition to becoming productive and responsible citizens.
- The second initiative focuses on providing post secondary education opportunities for every Marine who wishes to invest their time, talents, and resources in the pursuit of a college education. To this end, we have proactively engaged with a number of major universities to establish a Special Admissions Program that matches a willing and qualified Marine with the school of their choice. To date, our experience has been remarkable. Currently, there are 13 universities in North Carolina, 23 universities in California, as well as such prestigious universities as Colgate and Columbia, who are

full partners in this program. Based on these early successes, we expect to have formal relationships established with 100 of our Nation's top universities by the end of Fiscal Year 2011. Given the enthusiastic response from and endorsement by participating university leaders, we are confident that we will ultimately have universities from every corner of the Nation participating in the Special Admissions Program. This Special Admissions Programs creates the perfect match between a willing Marine, a willing university, the application of the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit, use of the Yellow Ribbon Program, and diversification of the student cultural and educational experience via the introduction of qualified veterans to the university campus. The Special Admissions Program is a true “win-win” initiative.

CONCLUSION

The Marine Corps is committed to ensuring that your Marines receive education programs and services on par with the highest academic standards in the Nation.

We are grateful for your interest and steadfast support in this area and thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.