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ON THE ARMY'S VOLUNTARY EDUCATION PROGRAM AND QUALITY OF COLLEGE
EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE MEMBERS

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the Army's Voluntary Education programs and services which afford lifelong learning opportunities for Soldiers and their families. The Army Continuing Education System (ACES) is the organizational structure Army uses to deliver educational opportunities to Soldiers to develop and enhance skills needed for personal and professional development. These skills help to sustain the All Volunteer Force and to assist the Army in retaining its position as the world's premier land force. This is accomplished through vigorously promoting lifelong learning opportunities that sharpen Army's competitive edge by providing and managing quality self-development and continuing education programs and services. Soldier participation in voluntary education activities promotes the development of critical thinking skills and improves analytical abilities, essential tools needed to survive and win on today's battlefield.

Army Continuing Education System

Army voluntary education covers the education spectrum beginning with basic skills, certificate, associates, bachelors, and master's degrees, meeting Soldiers where they are, allowing Soldiers to learn as they choose thereby educating them for Army's present and future needs. Army has consistently maintained Voluntary Education as a priority by fully funding the tuition assistance budget and executing the program in accordance with the Department of Defense (DoD) uniform TA policy. Institutions that

provide voluntary off-duty education programs must be regionally or nationally accredited by accrediting bodies that are recognized by the Department of Education.

Army promotes the education of Soldiers of all components: Active, Reserve and National Guard. Despite the high operational tempo of the past nine years, Soldier participation in education programs, especially college programs, continues to grow. During the past two years alone, Army college course enrollments have increased nine percent. To date this fiscal year, more than 247,921 active duty, US Army Reserve and Army National Guard Soldiers (22%) have enrolled in 535,081 courses at more than 2,500 academic and training institutions. Even more telling is the growth in Soldier participation in distance learning or online courses. In fiscal year 2005, enrollments were almost evenly split between traditional classroom and online courses. This year, to date, more than 76% of all enrollments have been in online courses. Clearly access to quality online courses enables Army's warfighters to continue their progress towards degree completion regardless of duty location, work schedule, and/or family commitments.

Using the talents of professional education counselors and education support personnel, we have continued to assist Soldiers in accomplishing their educational objectives to include making informed decisions on what accredited institutions and programs best meet their needs. The ultimate educational goal for every Soldier is the completion of an educational credential – certificate, associate, undergraduate or graduate degree. In fiscal year 2009 alone, over 4,000 Soldiers earned post-secondary degrees and certificates (1,469 associates; 1,591 bachelors; 962 graduate degrees and

71 licensures/credentials). Over the years, Army has established outstanding educational programs and services which position Army as a leader in the delivery of voluntary educational services. We intend through these programs to provide a competitive edge for Soldiers to enhance their military careers and to find employment comparable to their civilian counterparts as they depart the Army and enter the civilian employment sector.

We have in place a robust oversight program in partnership with Servicemembers Opportunities Colleges (SOC) to monitor the compliance of our academic partner institutions to include “for-profit” schools to ensure that they meet established SOC principles. In addition, SOC schools are required to report course completion rates and report graduates on a regular basis. However, since Army complies with DoD Tuition Assistance policy and authorizes tuition assistance for all regionally/nationally accredited schools, we are somewhat limited in our oversight of the non-SOC member schools and their delivery of quality educational programs to Soldiers.

GoArmyEd Portal

One of the many programs and services provided by ACES is the GoArmyEd (GAE) Portal. The GAE Portal is the Army’s virtual gateway for both Active Duty and Army Reserve Soldiers to request education services and obtain tuition assistance, anytime, anywhere. The student management system for voluntary education participation, GoArmyEd (GAE) eliminated many of the paper-based, in-person processes that Soldiers were previously required to complete. Soldiers use GAE to

carefully guide and track completion of their postsecondary educational goals. Army Education Counselors use it to provide virtual educational counseling to Soldiers 24/7 at locations around the globe. Participating schools use the portal to streamline school acceptance/enrollment processes, deliver degree and course offerings and report Soldier progress 24/7 worldwide. GoArmy Ed also provides extremely efficient and effective financial management of the Tuition Assistance program to include streamlined payments to schools, automated tuition recoupment and online billing. In 2009, GAE won the distinction as one of the top 50 innovations in government in competition sponsored by the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government's Ash Institute for Democratic Governance.

In FY10, ACES integrated the U.S. Army Reserves into the GAE portal, with the addition of more than 1700 schools. Reserve Soldiers traditionally enroll with colleges and universities near their hometowns; consequently, the large increase in the number of schools that needed to be incorporated into the portal to serve them. The Army plans to fully integrate the Army National Guard into GAE at the beginning of FY12. At that time, Army will be able to more effectively manage Tuition Assistance enrollments across all Components regardless of a Soldier's active or reserve status. This is especially beneficial to ensure mobilized Soldiers continue successful progress towards degree completion while on active duty.

Counseling Services

Academic and vocational counseling services assist Soldiers in establishing professional and educational goals, developing education plans, and transitioning to

civilian life with counseling regarding Veterans' education benefits. Professional counselors also monitor student progress via automated alert flags within GoArmyEd, such as excessive withdrawals, course failures, or course incompletes.

Functional Academic Skills Training

Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST) is an on-duty program that provide Soldiers job-related instruction to improve basic educational competencies necessary for job proficiency, advanced schooling, and career progression.

A wide range of postsecondary programs are offered on Army installations, at local colleges and training institutions, as well as through distance learning programs from the associate through graduate degree levels, as well as technical courses for licensure or certification.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges-Army Degrees

Army's college degree system provides off-duty associate and baccalaureate degree programs in over 30 different fields of study through an Army-wide network of more than 120 institutions. By establishing a Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges-Army Degrees (SOCAD) degree plan, Soldiers are guaranteed credit transferability between participating schools, acceptance of non-traditional credits, and minimal residency requirements. This is especially important for Soldiers who may require years to complete degree requirements from multiple locations.

The SOCAD program has now been expanded to incorporate an Army career degree option which maximizes Army learning experiences and minimizes additional college study for the vast majority of Army Career Management Fields. The Army Career Degree (ACD) Program uses the American Council on Education credit recommendations to thoroughly and comprehensively articulate degree options directly related to a Soldier's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The ACD plan provides a military-specific degree career path for Soldiers, guaranteed transferability of college credits among member institutions, limited academic residency requirements, and a formal agreement between college and student. Partner schools must also provide distance learning course options to fill any knowledge gaps thereby ensuring requirements can be completed anytime and anywhere.

Credentialing Opportunities On-Line

In recognition of the importance of credentialing for Soldier professional and personal development, the Army launched the Army Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) in 2002. The COOL web site (<https://www.cool.army.mil>) provides information to Soldiers on how they can fulfill the requirements for civilian certifications and licenses that are related to their military occupational specialties (MOSs). COOL serves as a tool to facilitate the process of identifying and then filling the gaps between a Soldier's training and experience and the desired civilian credentialing requirements. The web site is specifically designed to aid Soldiers in translating their military training and work experience to the civilian workforce.

Testing Program

Academic, vocational interest and Army Personnel Testing (APT) services are available at all of our 116 education centers around the world, including sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Academic and vocational testing includes college level for-credit exams and testing to meet professional certification requirements. APT services include testing to meet Army promotion, language proficiency and reenlistment requirements.

The American Council on Education

The American Council on Education (ACE) serves as an invaluable link between the Department of Defense and higher education through its review of military training and experiences for the award of equivalent college credits for members of the Armed Forces. Much of Army formal training has been evaluated by ACE and is recommended for civilian academic credit. The ACE credit recommendations assist Soldiers in obtaining credentials or degrees in much less time than ordinarily required and result in significant cost avoidance to the military tuition assistance program.

Of equal value to Army is the third-party review process conducted by the American Council on Education referred to as the Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER). Army participates in MIVER as a formal process to assess the quality of services provided by academic institutions and related support services available to Soldiers on military installations. During the period 2005 to present, ACE has conducted a review of programs on ten Army installations. With the planned expansion of MIVER to include distance learning and off-post providers, Army expects

to have greater assurance that Soldiers and the Army are receiving quality and value for its tuition assistance investment. In addition, we fully support the DoD policy initiative to require all institutions participating in the Tuition Assistance program to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DoD. Schools that fail to meet the terms of the MOU can be denied Tuition Assistance funding, helping to further ensure quality educational opportunities for Soldiers. Assessing the quality of education provided to the Soldiers is an on-going priority for Army.

The Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript Service

The Army's transcript service for Soldiers and Veterans officially articulates each Soldier's military course completions, the respective ACE-recommended college credits as well as other learning experiences. The transcript serves as a counseling tool for academic and career counselors to assist in estimating the experiential credit that translates to a specific course of study. Colleges and universities use it as the official military transcript once the Soldier is accepted for admission. In addition, the Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript Service (AARTS) transcript serves as an invaluable aid in assisting Soldiers in preparing their resumes in obtaining civilian employment. Military training and work history on the AARTS Transcript is described in easily understood language. This is especially helpful to potential employers.

Conclusion

We are confident that our VOLED program provides every Soldier the opportunity to meet their professional and personal educational goals. We further believe we provide a balanced approach that enables success on the job and in the college arena helping to ensure Soldiers are fully prepared to meet the challenges in a global environment.

It has been my pleasure to tell you about Army Education and ACES. We thank you for your continued support for Army continuing education programs.