

Policy Change Opens Door for Individual Augmentees to Take NCPACE Courses

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VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (NNS) -- The Navy has waived Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE) eligibility to allow individual augmentee (IA) Sailors stationed outside of the continental United States to participate in NCPACE distance learning beginning early this fall.

"We don't want any Sailors to become disenfranchised with the educational opportunities available to them due to duty station location," said Capt. William Dewes, commanding officer of the Center for Personal and Professional Development. "Through this policy change, leadership is showing through their actions that the Navy doesn't undervalue Sailors who are taking on IA assignments. Is it more challenging? Yes it is, but the main thing is we are providing yet another opportunity for our Sailors to better their lives."

NCPACE has been a popular program for Sailors in Type II Sea Duty (deployed on ship) and Type IV Sea Duty (attached to a deployed Seabee unit) who wish to further their education. Instructors either live aboard the ship with the Sailors and deliver the courses in a classroom setting, or Sailors may choose to take courses using self-paced distance learning. Aside from paying for their own textbooks, Sailors enrolled in NCPACE courses do not have to pay anything out of their own pockets. In contrast, shore-based Sailors must use tuition assistance or their Montgomery GI Bill to pay for their education. With this new initiative of opening NCPACE to foreign-deployed IAs, Sailors deployed on the ground can now reap the same benefits as their shipmates at sea.

Builder 2nd Class Justin Troutman, an IA out of Atsugi, Japan, who is currently serving at Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan, in the J7 Engineering Department as part of the new Navy's Expeditionary Team Trainers, said NCPACE fits perfectly with the environment in which he is serving.

"NCPACE is great for this location because it does not require Internet access," he said. "That way, when I go down-range, I can take the course material with me to different locations. I'm glad I found out about this

special program for IAs.”

NCPACE has also proven useful for officers working on their graduate degrees. Lt. Mike Meeker is working on his master's degree in Engineering Management (ENMA) while performing an IA assignment at the Multinational Forces Iraq Strategic Headquarters in Baghdad. He recommends the program to any IA who has access to a computer, proctor and enough free time. He also said the process of enrolling was simplified by the excellent support he has received from the command, because IA Sailors have too much on their minds to get bogged down in paperwork and administrative matters.

“Our NCPACE ordering officer is always quick to respond, and my command is very supportive by allowing me whatever time they can for studying,” he said. “I am at my desk 14 hours a day, seven days a week, working on job-related projects, but there are gaps in the day that allow ample time for coursework if you are willing to put in the work and take advantage of the opportunities.”

There are currently 37 IA Sailors enrolled in the NCPACE program, evenly split between the enlisted and officer ranks. Oct. 22, the Navy College Office in Bahrain received a preliminary NCPACE IA order for 51 courses, reiterating Dewes' point that the Navy is committed to providing IA Sailors with educational opportunities. Dewes said Sailors who are going on IA assignments can go ahead and register for courses through their local Navy College Office prior to deploying or continue courses they are currently enrolled in, but cautions there is a downside to being proactive.

“I am always in favor of anything that can bring education to Sailors, and we encourage Sailors to sign up for their college courses before they go on an IA,” he said. “The downside is that there is so much uncertainty about what IA assignments will require of Sailors. Before they are in theater, they have no way of knowing if their command's mission will allow them the time, if learning materials, computers or proctors will be available to them, and if they will be too mentally and physically exhausted. All that being said, signing up before deploying is a positive step toward taking charge of their careers.”

Sailors assigned to Bahrain who are not on an IA assignment are not eligible for NCPACE distance learning, but they can access any school they want through their distance learning programs by visiting the Navy College Office.

For more information on NCPACE, Sailors should visit their local Navy College Office or the NCPACE Web site at <http://159.115.100.97/NCPACE/>.

For NCPACE information specific to IAs, Sailors should click the following links:

https://wwwa.nko.navy.mil/portal/download?lib_documentId=782900061
and

https://wwwa.nko.navy.mil/portal/download?lib_documentId=782900060
and log on to Navy Knowledge Online.