

ARNG Education News

Excellence Through Education

A Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Communiqué

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Scholarship Gives Idaho NCO Additional Incentive to Finish Her Degree

SGT Julie Jones had to admit that she ignored the first e-mail from COL Anthony Wickham, J-1 for the Idaho ARNG, which encouraged her and other Soldiers to consider a number of options available to them to complete their college education.

As an AGR Soldier, and a single mother with a three-year old son, SGT Jones said she felt unready to take on yet another commitment. Besides, she'd taken courses at several excellent traditional universities in Idaho and discovered that the challenge of meeting class attendance and assignment deadlines made her life more complicated than it needed to be. She knew that her son and her career would have to be her first priority, and at that time a college degree just didn't seem to fit her situation.

It was upon receiving COL Wickham's second e-mail that SGT Jones started to look at her options more closely and to reconsider them. She even stated that COL Wickham's persistence played a part in her rethinking college.

SGT Jones joined the Guard in 1996, completing her MOS training as an Intelligence Analyst. After 11 years in the Guard, she is currently an Administrative NCO with HHC 116th Cavalry Brigade in Boise, ID. Reflecting on her service, SGT Jones knew that she planned to retire from a career in the ARNG, but she also thought "what next," after leaving the Guard? Perhaps more importantly, she thought about her son, and realized that the best thing that she could do for him was to complete a degree program.

Grantham University, which was featured on COL Wickham's e-mail, seemed to address SGT Jones' situation well, with its many on-line degrees, including a Bachelor's degree program in Criminal Justice that interested her. She decided to enroll in the summer of 2007 and even submitted an essay for a \$34,000 scholarship co-sponsored by Grantham and *GX® Magazine* (see <http://www.grantham.edu/educatetheguard/> for scholarship information). Soon after beginning her studies and sending off her scholarship application, SGT Jones said that she pretty much forgot about the application. Her busy life had taken over again.

Months after submitting her scholarship essay, SGT Jones went grocery shopping and was approached by a friend in the Guard, who congratulated her on her \$34,000 scholarship. At first doubting her friend, she was led to the most recent issue of *GX® Magazine*, where her name was indeed listed among the scholarship recipients.

These days, SGT Jones knows that she will complete her degree program in the next four to five years, thanks to Grantham's on-line classes and the generous scholarship,

which will pay for "everything," tuition, fees, books, and software. With her GI Bill benefits, she hopes to also purchase a new computer. "I know I'll need one," she said, as she adds full-time student to her many accomplishments. Most of all, she said, "I had to ask, 'What can I do for my son?'" Considering all that SGT Jones is doing, one could say very much indeed.

Deployed ESO Returns Home with Lessons Learned

CW3 Bradley Nelson had only a "couple of weeks" between learning of his deployment and actually leaving for Afghanistan in September of 2006. That didn't give him much time to prepare himself, let alone his office. As Education Services Officer (ESO) for the Montana Army National Guard (MT ARNG), Chief Nelson found himself providing "down-and-dirty" training for his interim replacement. Little would either of them know at the time that this first replacement would serve just four months, replaced, herself, by another interim ESO for the rest of Chief Nelson's year-long deployment.

Meanwhile, Chief Nelson also had to prepare to join the Utah ARNG's I Corps Artillery Unit in a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Afghanistan. Once there, he would function in his primary MOS, 420A Military Personnel Technician. However, it wasn't long until he'd begun weaving education benefits counseling into his personnel briefings for incoming Soldiers at the FOB. Initially, he focused during these sessions on asking Soldiers about their educational experience and interests while updating them on their GI Bill benefit status.

As a result of those briefings and word-of-mouth circulating that an ESO was serving in the personnel office, more Soldiers began to arrive as walk-ins, inquiring about their benefits and asking other education-related questions. One of those inquiries led to an experience that Chief Nelson recalled with both pride and gratitude.

According to Chief Nelson, life at the FOB posed major challenges to Soldiers in their pursuit of on-line and on-site classes. Internet access was often difficult to maintain, and with the FOB's distance from the Education Center (EC) in Kabul, on-site classes were unthinkable due to travel limits for prospective instructors and Soldier/students. Fortunately, Chief Nelson was able to identify a Soldier at the FOB who held a Master's degree and qualifications to teach a course, in a field of interest to other Soldiers.

In addition, Chief Nelson noted with gratitude that two excellent U.S. postsecondary education institutions were operating out of the EC in Kabul. One of those colleges

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gladly sent course materials to the FOB, which Chief Nelson relayed to his new instructor, who now had four students in his "classroom." He emphasized that this example represents a heartwarming and practical reminder of what a partnership can achieve. Such achievement is something that people might take for granted back in the states, but at the FOB, far from home, an otherwise simple cooperative activity paid great dividends.

Returning home in September of 2007, Chief Nelson concentrated on tackling the "full range of ESO duties," such as quality control, marketing, interaction with education institutions and networking with other ESOs. Soon after "hitting the ground" in Montana, he initiated outreach to schools, fellow-ESOs, and SOCGuard, planning his annual education benefits workshop, to which he will invite schools from across the state to the armory at Fort Harrison. The workshop will feature education benefits briefings, a college fair, and VA certifying official updates.

Aside from all of this activity, Chief Nelson placed particular emphasis on the most important thing he'd learned from his deployment. This lesson involved empathy with what Soldiers experience in a combat zone. Going to Afghanistan, he said, has allowed him to "actually see what it is like for Soldiers" who deploy. While he'd been speaking to them for years at Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP) briefings and counseling sessions in Montana, he didn't fully understand how deployment might affect their educational choices.

Now, having lived life at a FOB and seen the challenges Soldiers face in continuing their education while deployed, Chief Nelson literally sees his job differently. By experiencing and witnessing others as they face the personal and technological stresses of serving during a deployment, he can "visualize more of what life will actually be like for them."

These days, Chief Nelson provides "more realistic instruction as to what to expect and how to prepare for it." Perhaps, he said, "Soldiers listen more closely than before because they know I've been where they're going."

"Counseling," Chief Nelson concluded, "has a new flavor."

When he tells Soldiers what they can or can't do when they get deployed, he can also prepare them better for what they can do once they return home.

For additional information, contact CW3 Bradley Nelson, MT ARNG ESO, at 406-324-3237, or via e-mail at Bradley.Nelson4@us.army.mil.

GI Bill Supplemented by Philanthropists

According to a recent *USA Today* article by Mary Beth Marklein, some well-known philanthropists have decided to "fill in some of the gaps" between what GI Bill benefits provide to veterans and what college actually costs (See "College-bound GIs get extra help," November 14, 2007, at http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20071115/1a_bottomstrip15_dom.art.htm).

Originally, the GI Bill provided World War II veterans with funds sufficient to cover tuition and books, as well as a living allowance that, taken together, covered the full cost of an education. "Today," according to the article, "the maximum benefit for a nine-month academic year is \$9,609. That covers about 66% of the tuition, room and board charges and estimated costs for books and supplies at an in-state four-year public university, estimated this year to be an average of \$14,577."

Seeing that GI Bill benefits were not keeping pace with college costs, billionaire financier, Jerome Kohlberg, himself a World War II veteran, decided to take action to supplement those benefits. Kohlberg expressed anger "that our country doesn't express their appreciation for what these people are doing for us."

To help make up the difference between what the GI Bill provides and the actual cost of education, Kohlberg developed an initiative, the national Fund for Veterans' Education, to which he donated \$4 million. The Fund provides needs-based scholarships to cover tuition, books, fees, and education supplies to "at least one veteran in every state and Washington, DC." The national scope of this program should interest ARNG Education Services Officers (ESOs) across the 50 states and four U.S. territories, who should consider advertising it to their Soldiers (see <http://www.veteransfund.org/> for more information).

Other initiatives, which would interest ESOs in Connecticut and Maryland, respectively, also received mention in the article.

Two alumni at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, have contributed "substantial gifts" to create need-based scholarships for up to 10 former Servicemembers, beginning with students entering next fall.

In addition, the non-profit Hodson Trust (go to <http://www.hodsontrust.org/>) developed a scholarship, begun this fall, for Veterans enrolled in four private Maryland colleges. Currently, five veterans attending either Washington College in Chestertown or Hood College in Frederick are participating this semester."

The Wesleyan University scholarship received additional coverage in the *Hartford Courant*, which noted that among Wesleyan's 2,900 students, perhaps only two have military backgrounds. The veterans' scholarship is designed to

address this lack of diversity, or under-representation of veterans (see <http://www.courant.com/news/opinion/editorials/hc-wesleyannov22,0,2800167.story?track=rss> for additional information).

Donors Frank Sica, a 1973 Wesleyan graduate and university trustee, and Jonathan Soros, a 1992 Wesleyan graduate and son of billionaire philanthropist George Soros, did not disclose the amount of their donations. However, the fund will provide scholarships for 10 former Servicemembers. Soldiers attending Wesleyan University can learn more about the scholarship at the university's Web site (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/newsletter/campus/2007/1107veterans.html>).

Related programs have occurred elsewhere in the country. For example, California developed a state-wide campaign, "Troops to College," to double the number of veterans enrolled in the California State University system.

Scholarships that help raise the number and visibility of Veterans on campuses are viewed as mutually beneficial to veterans who receive the funds and the academic communities that they join as scholarship recipients. A number of students at institutions attended by veterans say that "they welcome the perspective of those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan."

"A lot of the students here don't even know people who have served," said Eugene Wong, a junior from Needham, Massachusetts, and president of the Wesleyan chapter of College Republicans. "All they know is George Bush, the war and oil." Wong concluded that "They don't see the human aspect of the war because they are clouded by the rhetoric."

Another student, senior Izaak Orlansky, said that students with military experience would bring a wealth of real-world experience to classroom discussions and late-night debates.

"There's a war going on right now, and most of us at Wesleyan are pretty far removed from it," Orlansky said. "The voice of veterans isn't a voice we often hear on this campus." Veterans represent, for Orlansky, young Americans "who made a choice to give up their personal safety. That deserves recognition."

2008 CCME and ARNG E&I Conference Convene in San Francisco

On 18 - 22 February, the Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) will host its 2008 Annual Conference at the Downtown Marriott in San Francisco, CA. Coinciding with the CCME event will be ARNG's Education and Incentives (E&I) Conference, which will take place on 17 - 19 February, at the same location.

Those seeking additional information or wishing to register for the CCME conference should visit the organization's Web site (<http://www.ccmeonline.org/>). Further information about the ARNG E&I Conference will be forthcoming from NGB.

National Guard Bureau Education and Incentives Branch (E&I) Announces Arriving and Departing Staff

Recently joining NGB is Mr. Jerome Carter, who retired after 21 years active duty in the Army. After retiring, Mr. Carter served for two and one-half years with AT&T Government Solutions in various positions in support of the NGB. His previous NGB assignments have included ARM-S, AVS-S, and ASM. Presently, Mr. Carter is assigned as a Business Program Specialist in support of NGB-ARM-EI.

Also joining NGB is 1LT Richard McIlrath, who comes to NGB-ARM-E&I from the Indiana ARNG Education Services Office, where he served as a Guidance Counselor and Test Control Officer. 1LT McIlrath will be the Section Chief for Bonuses and Incentives. Welcome to our new team members!

The E&I Family bids a fond "farewell" to Ms. Beverly Harris, who served as Education Services Specialist. Ms. Harris will be taking a position with the Defense Intelligence Systems Agency (DISA) to work in the professional career development arena. Good luck, Beverly!

To learn more about ARNG education go to:

<http://www.virtualarmy.com/>
and follow the "Education" link.