



Command Sgt. Maj. Rory Malloy, commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, shakes a graduate's hand as he crosses the stage in June 2013 during a ceremony recognizing the collegiate accomplishments of USASMA graduates. (Photo by David Crozier)

With Army Tools, NCOs Can Help Soldiers Achieve Their Educational Goals

By Meghan Portillo

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Did you know it's possible for an enlisted Soldier to earn a degree by the end of his or her first term of enlistment? The framework is in place and the degree programs are available, but Army officials say Soldiers often don't learn of the opportunities until they have been in the Army for years.

According to Jeffery Colimon, chief of the Learning Integration Division at the Institute for NCO Professional Development, NCOs need to not only make sure their new Soldiers are aware of the degree programs, but also inspire them to take action early in their careers. They

can do this by mentoring each Soldier and by pursuing their own educational goals to provide an example, Colimon said.

"The real vision is that, by the time a Soldier reaches the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, they should be working on an advanced degree," Colimon said. "But you cannot get this advanced degree if you do not 'build a bench' and start early."

On average, active duty Soldiers take from 4 to 6 years to complete an associate's degree, Colimon said. However, NCOs who encourage new Soldiers to set educational

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)

SOC was founded to provide educational opportunities to service members who, because they relocate frequently, find it difficult to complete a degree. SOC consists of approximately 1,900 academic institutions that enroll servicemembers, their families and veterans in associate, bachelor's and graduate-level degree programs through distance learning programs and on school campuses, armories and military installations within the United States and abroad.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Army Degree (SOCAD)

SOCAD institutions are a subgroup of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges selected by the Army to offer certain associate and bachelor's degree programs via traditional and distance-learning methods for servicemembers and their families. As part of the SOC Degree Network System, member institutions have flexible policies that allow individuals to relocate while retaining the maximum amount of credit.

SOCAD Army Career Degree (ACD) Program

The Army Career Degree Program operates within SOCAD to provide degree options directly related to a Soldier's military occupational specialty. Institutions offering these degree programs guarantee the award of specified credit based on military training and experience.

College of the American Soldier (CAS)

The College of the American Soldier is an extension of the SOCAD Army Career Degree Program, open to Soldiers of all MOSs. It offers degree options geared toward Combat Arms Soldiers that provide American Council on Education recommended credit for NCO Education System courses taken throughout their careers. There are two programs that fall under CAS: the Career NCO Degrees Program and the Enlisted Education Program.

Source: SOC website

goals for themselves and start on a degree plan as soon as possible set those individuals up for success in their Army careers and in their retirement as well.

SOCAD Army Career Degrees

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, or SOC, is composed of more than 1,900 academic institutions that pledge to deal fairly when evaluating for credit Soldiers' military training and experience, academic residency, credit transfer, and testing.

SOC Army Degree, or SOCAD, colleges and universities award credit for military experience and training based on American Council on Education, or ACE, recommendations and standardized tests, such as the College-Level Evaluation Program test and the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support program test, and provide distance learning course options for Soldiers to complete remaining requirements. Soldiers can receive ACE college credit recommendations for the typical training experiences in their MOS — from basic training to the Sergeants Major Course.

A select group of about 120 SOCAD institutions offer Army Career Degrees — degree options directly related to a Soldier's Military Occupational Specialty. Army Career Degree plans are available for more than 95 MOSs and new ones are being developed, according to the SOC website. To view SOCAD Army Career Degrees listed by MOS, [click here](#). Printed copies of the SOCAD Army Career Degree plans are distributed to students during Advanced Individual Training, but Colimon emphasized that it is the first-line supervisors who need to make sure new Soldiers are aware of the opportunities related to their MOS.

"We expect the first-line supervisor to know, based on their MOS, what degree programs will yield the largest number of credits for that Soldier," he said.

To maximize the number of credits a student can transfer and use toward a degree, colleges and universities within the SOCAD network have agreed to take credit from one another. Individuals do not have to physically attend the university, allowing for both online and traditional face-to-face class options, no matter where a student is stationed.

"For example, let's say my degree program requires a class in [the programming language] Visual Basic. A course like that will probably require a high level of instruction — more than a virtual online course. I may be able to find a Visual Basic course taught by a partner college on my installation, then go and take it as a face-to-face course, and I'll receive full credit for it through my host college," Colimon said.

Each post usually has a number of colleges with agreements to teach on the installation, Colimon said. To find out about classes at a particular installation that will meet the requirements for a specific degree program, Soldiers can contact their post's education center. Counselors at post education centers can also help Soldiers review their options to make sure they choose the path that will grant them the greatest amount of recommended credit.

College of the American Soldier: Credits for combat arms MOSs

Some career management fields, such as medically or technically oriented ones, provide training that closely mirrors a civilian college classroom, allowing Soldiers to earn a greater amount of credit. Soldiers with an MOS in infantry or artillery, on the other hand, are given a great deal of training, but their areas of expertise do not relate to a particular civilian degree. To remedy this, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command created the College of the American Soldier as an extension of the SOCAD program. According to the SOC website, CAS was developed to "identify specific college and university degree programs that enhance Soldiers' leadership and warfighting capabilities and grow the multi-skilled NCO characteristics."

CAS degree programs are open to Soldiers of any MOS. However, they offer Soldiers in combat arms specialties in particular the best opportunity to earn credit from their military training. The Army has pre-negotiated the amount of credit to be awarded by CAS institutions for NCOES courses, but students are limited to certain business- and management-related degree programs designed to leverage the leadership skills an enlisted Soldier acquires while in service.

There are two programs that fall under the College of the American Soldier: the [Career NCO Degrees Program](#) and the [Enlisted Education Program](#). (Click for a complete list of degrees offered through each program.) The Career NCO Degrees Program maximizes credit for military training and education, minimizes residency requirements and allows for flexibility of completion time to provide NCOs with degree options not tied to an MOS. The Enlisted Education Program offers entry-level Soldiers in Career Management Fields 11 (infantry), 13 (artillery), 14 (air defense artillery) and 19 (armor) the opportunity to achieve an associate's degree during their first term of enlistment.

"There have been problems in the past with colleges accepting credit, and I was a prime example of that," said Colimon, a retired sergeant major. "At one point when I was in uniform, I had well over 180 hours of recommended credit, but I still didn't have a degree. The schools said, 'We can only give you 40 out of your 180.' Now, through the College of the American Soldier, we negotiate the credit upfront. An NCO who has completed the Advanced Leader Course, the Senior Leader Course, Structured Self-Development and so on *must* be given a certain number of credit hours [from a CAS institution] toward a specific degree program. So there is no guessing game when they present their paperwork to the school."

In CAS degree programs, Soldiers receive credit for the training and experience they've gained as part of their Army careers, including Basic Combat Training, Advanced Individual Training, the Warrior Leader Course, ALC and SLC. In addition, there are three universities that give credit toward a master's degree for completion of the Sergeants Major Course through the College of the American Soldier Advanced Degree Program.

Excelsior College Credit Awarded for Army Training

Excelsior Faculty and ACE Evaluated



MOS	Basic Training Credit	AIT Credit	Skill Levels 10/20 Credit	SSD1 Credit	WLC Credit	Total Credits
11B	5	2	8	9	3	27
11C	5	1	8	9	3	26
13R	5	3	1	9	3	21
13T	5	7	3	9	3	27
14H	5	0	2	9	3	19
14J*	5	4	2	9	3	23
19D	5	1	8	9	3	26
19K	5	3	8	9	3	28

The College of the American Soldier Enlisted Education Program is designed to enable junior enlisted Soldiers in combat arms MOSs to earn an associate's degree during their first term of enlistment. Excelsior College is one of the institutions participating in the program and has conducted a faculty credit evaluation of SSD 1 and combat arms MOSs at skill levels 10 and 20 to maximize the credit Soldiers can earn for their military training. As part of the Enlisted Education Program, Excelsior also awards college credits for Basic Combat Training, Advanced Individual Training and the Warrior Leader Course.

*According to the Excelsior College Center for Military Education, the school would award the same credits to those with a 14G MOS as a 14J, since the 14G MOS has yet to be evaluated by the American Council on Education. (Image provided by Excelsior College Center for Military Education)

Excelsior College Sample Timeline

Associate in Science Liberal Arts

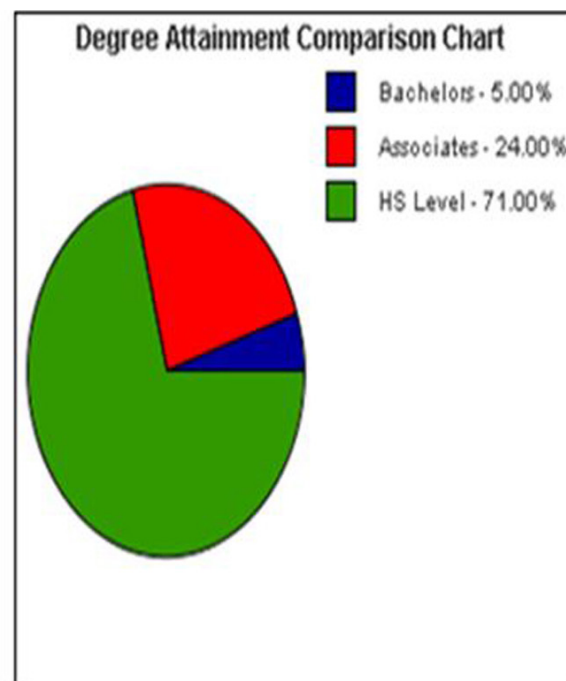
60 semester credits



1+2 Excelsior College's 1+2 model = Earn 1 credit for selected groups of TSPs in SSD1 for a total of 9 credits for the SSD course. Then follow-up with customized Excelsior College course for an additional 2 credits that builds upon Army training.

Year 1 15 credits	Year 2 15 credits	Year 3 15 credits	Year 4 15 credits
Army Basic Combat Training - 5 credits	1+2 COMM 131 Business and Prof Communication - 3 credits	MAT 112 Introductory Algebra - 3 credits	Humanities Elective - 3 credits
AIT School - 3 credits (average # of credits for Army career field)	Army MOS Experiential Learning - 3 credits	BIO 110 Biology (non-lab) - 3 credits	1+2 PSY 131 Health Psychology - 3 credits
Army MOS Experiential Learning - 3 credits	1+2 MIL 131 Military Science I - 3 credits	1+2 POL 131 Intro to World Politics - 3 credits	1+2 MIL 132 Military Science II - 3 credits
CCS 112 Success Strategies for Military and Vets - 3 credits	ENG 101 English Composition - 3 credits	1+2 COMM 132 Strategic Communications - 3 credits	Army Warrior Leader Course - 3 credits
INL 102 Information Literacy - 1 credit	1+2 HIS 131 Intro to Military History - 3 credits	1+2 BUS 200 Applied Mgmt I - 3 credits	LA 298 Associate Degree Capstone - 3 credits

Above is a sample timeline for a student enrolled at Excelsior College through the College of the American Soldier's Enlisted Education Program. The 1+2 model refers to Excelsior courses that build upon Structured Self-Development 1. Nine credits are awarded for SSD 1 toward nine classes. For each course, 1 credit is earned through SSD 1, and the other 2 credits are earned through 8-week online courses. Excelsior College is one of many institutions participating in the Enlisted Education Program. (Image provided by Excelsior College Center for Military Education)



My Degree Status

Degree	Major	Status
HS Level		Completed - 2011

Civilian Education Status

The above graph, comparing a Soldier's level of education with that of his or her peers, appears on the Army Career Tracker home page when a Soldier logs in. It is one of the many tools within ACT that may aid NCOs in encouraging Soldiers to pursue their education. Jeffery Colimon, chief of the Learning Integration Division at the Institute for NCO Professional Development, said they are working to add more features to the system. "We are currently building functionalities into the ACT system to provide Soldiers with early notification. As an example, once a Soldier completes AIT, the system will send a notification to them stating that they have completed AIT and have now accumulated 'X' number of ACE credit recommendations that they could potentially put toward a degree. And we will continue to do that throughout the lifecycle of the Soldier. That notification system will start in March 2014."

Colimon encouraged NCOs to lead by example and pursue educational goals for their own good. Roxanna Taylor, the education adviser at USASMA at Fort Bliss, Texas, agreed, noting how beneficial it is for NCOs to complete undergraduate degrees sooner rather than later.

"I hope NCOs will realize the importance of getting their undergraduate degrees before they get to this stage [SMC] of their career, so that when they get to

the Academy, they are ready to go with their master's program," Taylor said. "They will have about 10 months while they are here [to concentrate on their education], and then they are back out in the field doing their jobs. It will be a lot harder for them to complete their education at that point."

Utilizing the Army Career Tracker

If NCOs begin talking about educational options with new Soldiers right away, those individuals will be more likely to reach their goals during their time of service, will become better-developed Soldiers and will find more employment opportunities once they leave the Army, Colimon said. One of the best ways for first-line supervisors to mentor their Soldiers is through the Army Career Tracker, he said.

ACT is a leadership-development tool that allows Soldiers to search multiple Army education and training resources, such as goarmyed.com and the SOC website, manage their career objectives, and monitor their progress. It allows leaders to monitor a subordinate's education, career and goals, as well as send career and training recommendations. It is always the Soldier who should make the final decision as to the course of their own education, Colimon said. But squad leaders can use ACT as a tool to help them discover what opportunities are available.

Goarmyed.com and the SOC website provide degree maps for each degree plan, with the institution's contact information listed at the top of each. To search for degree maps by school or degree within the Goarmyed.com portal, [click here](#).

Once Soldiers identify the colleges and degrees they want to pursue, they can contact the military education department at the institution for more information and apply through goarmyed.com. According to Taylor, most institutions will provide Soldiers with an unofficial evaluation to get an idea of the credit they have earned through their military training and other courses. Once they apply to the university and submit their transcripts from other institutions and their Joint Services Transcript, the student will be given an official evaluation.

Taylor said she sees many NCOs come through USASMA who have cobbled their education together piecemeal: a history class here, a music class there. NCOs can help streamline their Soldiers' education, she said, by encouraging them to start with the core classes — English, math and science — that will be required no matter what degree they end up choosing. It will be easier for Soldiers to move forward if they begin taking classes with a plan and an end goal in mind.

"The main thing is for NCOs to start this with their Soldiers early on," Colimon said. "With new Soldiers, they should be going into the Army Career Tracker

and assisting them in building an individual development plan — setting those goals and objectives for educational and professional development. We provide the framework through the Army Career Tracker, but we need assistance from the NCOs to assist the Soldier, coach and mentor them, and review their progress on an annual basis to ensure they achieve those goals.

"The chain of command needs to make education a priority and not look at it as something that happens after 5 o'clock, but instead as part of the overall devel-

opment of the Soldier," Colimon said. "It's a win-win. It's a win for the Soldier and a win for the Army if we provide the individual the opportunity to develop while serving."

Taylor said she is glad to see so many NCOs at the Sergeants Major Academy who prioritize education — for themselves and for those they lead.

"As senior NCOs, they pay attention," Taylor said. "They are really schooling themselves on what they can do to help their Soldiers, and that is absolutely what we want." ■

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