

Military OneSource Podcast — DANTES Remote Testing with Credit-by-Exam

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

Today, we're going to talk about credit-by-examination. It's a busy, busy life if you're in uniform and you're trying to meet all the demands of military life and you have also the goal of getting a degree. It is tough, but there are resources available to help with that. We're going to bring in our friends from DANTES. That's the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. And joining to us today is Matthew Schwantz, and he's an education program specialist. So Matt, welcome to the podcast.

Matthew Schwantz:

Hey. Thank you, Bruce. The way you sounded when you had explained service members and their hard military life, it almost seems like you should be working with DANTES.

Bruce:

Well, you guys are the experts, and it's great to have you with us. Generally speaking, sometimes you use an acronym so often, you forget what it really means.

Matt:

Right.

Bruce:

What is DANTES? What is it that you do for people who are in uniform?

Matt:

Well, so DANTES stands for Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. And the word "support" is very important, because all of us here at DANTES want to support the service member's educational goal and pathway. We offer lots of voluntary education programs that they can use free of charge. None of the things that we have, do they have to pay for. It's totally paid by the Defense Department.

So, we offer programs such as the credit-by-exam program. We offer academic skills training if they want to bone up on their math and English and science skills. We partner through our MOU division. We partner with the colleges and universities so that they understand how the tuition assistance works for military service members. And we have all kinds of support people that help us for our marketing program, and they make ... Everybody at DANTES make makes my job and everybody else's job possible to help the service members get their educational goals taken care of.

Bruce:

Great. Great. Let's just jump into it.

Matt:

Sure.

Bruce:

For meeting those educational goals, one of the ways to do is remote testing with credit-by-examination.

Matt:

Yes.

Bruce:

Tell us a little bit about the credit-by-exam program.

Matt:

All right. The credit-by-examination program through DANTES consists of the CLEP [College Level Examination Programs] and the DSST [formerly DANTES Subject Standardized Test] exams. Both exams are offered through contracts between the government, college board, which owns CLEP, and Prometric, which owns the DSST. Both of those vendors contract with us. I'm the one who pays all the bills and takes care of all of the costs associated with service members taking these exams.

So now, when you talk about the CLEP exams, they tend to be geared toward general ed courses at the associate's degree level, while DSST is made up of your major courses of study at the bachelor's level. Each exam, each vendor has approximately enough exams to take care of all of the gen ed and major courses of study. CLEP has 34 exams in its repertoire, while DSST has 37.

And these titles don't overlap with each other, which makes having both CLEP and DSST exams available for service members ideal to help them with their educational goals.

We deliver these exams primarily through the National Test Center program. We call those NTCs, right, for short. And these are test centers on or off base that offer in-person proctoring. The NTCs are run by college and university representatives through a memorandum of understanding with the installation commanders on the base.

So, a service member might have an NTC on base, and they can go on the websites register for either a CLEP or a DSST exam and then take that exam on base where they're stationed with an in-person proctor. That also helps with counseling and preparedness, because that representative from that NTC can also help them choose the most relevant exam for their degree path and offer the preparation material that's free to them and let them know that, "Hey, you know you can prepare in advance to take this exam."

That's what we want to stress, is that counseling aspect as well as the preparation needed for these exams.

Bruce:

All right. All right. Well, we can get into the counseling as well. Who is eligible for these programs through DANTES?

Matt:

All right. That's a good question. So, DOD, active duty, reserve and guard service members. We also have active and reserve Coast Guard members and their spouses who are able to test. And we do this through support agreements with the Coast Guard, because they're Department of Homeland Security and not DOD. They provide DANTES with the funds. We pay the bills, manage their program.

The DOD Air Force civilians are also eligible for these exams through support agreements, much like with the Coast Guard. The Air Force provides the funding for their program and DANTES manages and pays the bills. And then finally, military eligible spouses through the My Career Advancement Account or the MyCAA Scholarship program, they're eligible through sport agreements with DANTES and MyCAA. And we do the exact same thing. We manage it and we pay the bills.

And I want to point out that these exams are free to those who are eligible. Everybody I just spoke about, they're free. DANTES pays the first attempt at each test title, and retests are on the member to pay out of pocket for both exams.

Bruce:

OK. So, the first attempt is on us. The military covers that.

Matt:

That's correct.

Bruce:

And the second attempt, there may be a charge. Would this be a time to bring in the counseling that you had mentioned before?

Matt:

Right. That's why we want to stress the counseling aspect, right? If a service member or anybody who's eligible is interested in taking these exams, they first need to go talk to

their counselor or their educational professional at their base and determine what exam would be most relevant to their degree path. And then they need to know that, instead of just sitting down and taking a test, they have material available to them free that they can prepare and take these exams to help them be more successful.

Bruce:

OK. Good to know. And also, I understand there's no request process. Just explain that for me, because I don't want to miss anything. But apparently, there's no request process.

Matt:

No. That's a good point. There is no request process for those who are eligible for active duty, reserve, guard or Coast Guard, and Coast Guard spouses. You don't have to ask permission to take these exams. There's no process through your supervisor, your command you have to go to. You just need to sign up for the exam that you want to take and take them. That's it. It's not like TA where you have to ask permission, you have to have all these things in place. These exams are available right now free of charge for them to take.

Bruce:

Yeah. Thanks for making that point, because I do recall running that up the chain of command when you're asking for tuition assistance. Totally different. Totally different. So again, we're talking about credit-by-examination and you do it through remote testing. So, how does the remote testing fit into the mix?

Matt:

All right. So remote testing, it started in fiscal year 2021. So, in 2021, both CLEP and DSST were available through remote testing. And it's a game changer. In short, remote testing offers even greater access to these exams for service members anytime, anywhere. And it only adds to the mix of them being able to take a test at a test center in person, or they can take it at their house, they can take it at their barracks room, anywhere that they want to take it and anytime that's convenient for them.

Bruce:

So, I've done this. I've gone downtown to a testing center, and I sat in a little cube and somebody handed me the exam. But that was all pre-internet.

Matt:

Yeah.

Bruce:

A lot has changed in those years. So, bring us up to date. You mentioned that people can do this anywhere, anytime. How does it work?

Matt:

So, when the service members are ready to take a CLEP or a DSST, all you have to do is go to the testing agency's website, choose remote testing or proctoring. So CLEP calls it remote proctoring. DSST calls it remote testing. And schedule the exam you want to take and the day and time you want to take it.

So, you get to choose. If you want to take a general English class and you want to take it three weeks from now, you can choose remote testing, choose that exam, and then get on the scheduler, schedule the exam on the day and time that you want to take it. And all you need to do to be successful at taking a remote test is you need a personal computer. You can't have a Mac for CLEP. So, no Apple computers for CLEP. An internet or Wi-Fi connection and a private room. And that's it. Those three things: personal computer, internet connection, private room. That's all you have to have.

Bruce:

OK. Good to know. And you had mentioned the eligibility for credit-by-exam. How does that translate? Who can use the remote testing?

Matt:

Remote testing can be used by everyone we previously discussed. Anybody who is eligible to take a CLEP or a DSST now at an NTC on base can use the remote testing option for both exams. So those people who don't have NTCs or those people who can't fit in their schedule to go to the NTC on base now have the option for remote testing. And I wanted to put this out, because I don't think I talked about it before. Remote testing is a fully funded exam. DANTES pays for the remote testing exam.

Bruce:

So now, again, remote testing, and you did talk about how you can take it pretty much anywhere. If we were to talk about this, say somebody is deployed, say they're down range, would they have the same opportunities for remote testing?

Matt:

As long as they have a personal computer, internet connection and a private room, they can do it. And we've had service members successfully take remote exams in downrange locations, actually living in tent cities. There were no buildings anywhere where these guys are stationed, but they had all three things to test. They had their personal devices, their computers. And I know I said devices. No phones, no tablets, just computers. They had their personal computer, they were able to use the location's internet, and they had a tent and it was privacy for them to take the test. And they were successful at taking these exams remotely.

So, if they can do it downrange, maybe in the desert or in the swamp or wherever, you can definitely do it at your house.

Bruce:

Yeah. I would say so. All right. So, what's the future for remote testing?

Matt:

So, we're always working on plans for remote testing and all testing. And we'd really like to see if remote testing works on naval ships. We've had some interest. I had a few ship education service officers reach out to me personally, but never been able to do a pilot on one of the ships yet. And that's what we're working on. I spoke with the Coast Guard and I'm working with them to see if we might be able to do a pilot on one of their cutters, which is a Coast Guard ship, as a pilot instead, because the Coast Guard, when we talk about remote, some of their sectors or their Coast Guard stations are up to six hours away from an NTC. So, they're really interested in the remote testing program. If it can be done on one of those small cutters, the Navy should be able to do it on one of their ships, no problem.

So, if we can get that done, we can take it to the Navy and say, "Hey, this is working." And, of course, getting the word out about remote testing to as many service members as possible, that's key right now. And remote testing makes up 7% of all monthly testing. So when you think about the numbers, and I can put it in ... So, let's say that there's 3000 exams being taken. Only 7% of those exams are being taken as remote tests. The word needs to get more out. We need to let service members know that this is available for them.

Bruce:

Well, I hope this podcast episode helps. And certainly, your enthusiasm for the program is definitely coming through. I have to say that.

Matt:

Oh, I appreciate it.

Bruce:

And Matt, I'm really interested as I'm listening to you talking, because it really seems like you spend a lot of time talking to the academic world, the education world, and also the military world and how to bring those two resources together. Can you talk a little bit about what that work is like?

Matt:

Well, it's tough. I will say that, because you can email and you can put out and you can do podcasts and we can do webinars, but nothing's better in my opinion than getting face-to-face with people, and especially the stakeholders who talk directly to service members about eligible programs that they can use, right?

And why I say tough is we're constrained by funding, like everybody else is. We have to pick and choose which places and what branches we can go to and spread this word. So,

what's in credit-by-exam as a whole future right now, is to send Matt Schwantz to as many locations that are talking to service members about their education.

Bruce:

Well, we appreciate the work that you're doing and the miles that you are accruing.

Matt:

Right.

Bruce:

Any final words before we wrap up?

Matt:

No. I just want to stress that these are free. Your branch of service does not pay for them. The Defense Department pays for these exams. You can take them now. They're available now. Go to our website. Go to the vendors' websites. And remember, there's no permission needed. You are eligible to take these exams. I appreciate it.

Bruce:

Just go ahead and do it.

Matt:

Yeah. Go do it.

Bruce:

All right.

Matt:

Well, prepare and study and make sure you're taking the right exam, but definitely use this program. Yeah.

Bruce:

Okay. Prepare and study.

Matt:

Prepare and study.

Bruce:

And then go do it.

Matt:

That's it.

Bruce:

Excellent. Matthew Schwantz, he is with the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. Wonderful to have you on the podcast, and we look forward to having you back.

Matt:

Thanks Bruce, I appreciate it. And hey, DANTES out.

Bruce:

Absolutely. I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, we're a call center, we're on social media, and we are a podcast. So, sign up for us. Subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you so much for listening. Bye-bye.