

FEATURE

Education Center: using innovation to serve students

By Staff Sgt. Michael Duhe
437 AW Public Affairs

With a staff of only six serving a military population of thousands, the base Education Center's coming up with new ways to better meet the needs of its customers.

The Education Center offers a variety of programs, including four on-base colleges and universities and distance learning. Education counseling is also available.

However, only one full-time counselor is available, so the Education Center staff is using the Internet to help customers help themselves.

For example, an enlisted person interested in earning a commission can visit the Education Center web site to learn about the various commissioning programs available before scheduling an appointment.

"That way, when they meet the counselor, they're prepared," said Master Sgt. Laurence Brooks, superintendent of the 437th Education Services Flight. The web site address is:

www.charleston.af.mil/chas/437aw/sptg/edu/cecweb1.html

The Education Center also offers an intranet web site, which offers public folders with more than 40 links to sites on distance learning and other topics.

The goal of the web site and the public folders is to have information on all education programs available at the customer's work site. "We want to make it easier for them at their desks," Brooks said.

The redesigned web site was commended at a recent Department of Defense Worldwide Education Symposium.

"They asked us if they could use our web site as an example of excellence, and we're delighted," said Diana Roebuck, education services flight chief.

Another innovation at the Education Center is a Learning Center with remedial skills programs, vocational interest inventories for those who are unsure of a career field, and study materials for testing.

With the help of volunteer instructors, the center has offered more than 30 mathematics College Level Examination Program preparatory classes since 1994. According to Roebuck, most were taught by Master Sgt. J.D. Williams, saving the government \$222,000 in tuition assistance. Other volunteer instructors are Capt. Jim Bishop, Staff Sgt. Kevin Hunt and Master Sgt. Edie Getz,



Staff Sgt. Michael Duhe

Master Sgt. Laurence Brooks assists 1st Lt. Anna Stanley.

who taught an English CLEP preparatory class.



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In addition to CLEP prep classes, study skills seminars are offered at the Education Center six times a year and the center also holds monthly commissioning briefings and weekly Community College of the Air Force briefings.

Brooks said the primary focus of the Education Center is to promote CCAF to the enlisted force. He said, "It's a crime for a person to leave the Air Force without a CCAF degree."

Staff Sgt. Nina Campbell, 437th Operations Group, recently graduated from Southern Illinois University with a Bachelor of Science Degree and had nothing but praise for the education center and its workers. "The education center staff is 110 percent willing to support and advise you on educational opportunities available because that's what they're there for and I encourage both officers and enlisted members to take advantage of all of those opportunities."

Brooks said, "We can offer the services with the manpower we have available but there's more that goes on here than what happens at the front counter. We can only do so much."

That's why the education center closes each day at 3:30 p.m. and is closed for half day on Fridays.

Roebuck said other tasks include handling large amount of administrative work, such as updating educating levels, re-filing records and researching customer problems, contacting CCAF or other schools, as well as planning and implementing special projects, such as CCAF graduation ceremonies. Time is also needed for staff meetings and weekly training.

The Education Center facility offers only seven classrooms, which restricts the number of classes offered on base. To overcome this, Roebuck said the staff had to be innovative. They negotiated with representatives from Webster University, who agreed to hold management classes at their off-base location for on-base fees for eligible students.

Another innovation at the Education Center is distance learning opportunities. With distance learning, the Education Center is equipped with the capability to downlink a variety of classes via satellite through the Air Force Institute of Technology.

Staff Sgt. Marva Thomas, NCO-in-charge of Education Resources, has taken a pro-active approach to offering distance learning by creating links on the center's web site to distance

learning programs, from undergraduate to master's degrees.

The center has also made improvements in its testing program, saving \$200,000. "This is calculated by AMC," Roebuck explained. "They figure that the average cost of undergraduate course work in AMC is \$216 per course.

The cost to DANTES (Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support) for testing service is \$10 per semester hour. They deduct \$30 per course; therefore, the savings is \$186 per course that is taken via testing. Savings for the period from Apr 99-Sep 99 was \$117,738."

The center tests about 140 people a month. Active duty and guard/reserve members may participate in a test program that awards credit by examination. Available at most bases worldwide, the testing program covers a gamut of different subjects and is made available through a contract with the DANTES based in Pensacola, Fla.

Tests available include CLEP, general and subject examinations; DANTES subject examinations; Scholastic Assessment Tests college admission test; Graduate Record Examinations, PRAXIS formerly National Teacher Examination, Automotive Service Excellence, interest inventories, typing and Air Force Institute for Distance Learning (formerly Extension Course Institute), end of course tests. Civilians may test some exams on a pay basis and by prior coordination.

Afternoon testing twice a month was recently added to meet the needs of shift workers. "We'll continue to expand our testing," Roebuck added.

Four on-base colleges and universities offer programs for military members: Southern Illinois University, Trident Technical College, City College of Chicago and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

In addition to Roebuck, Brooks, Herzog and Thomas, other full-time staff members are education technician Edna Grainger and counselor Anessa Hamilton-Woods. Part-time contractors include test examiner Kim Folk and counselor Roslinda Green.

"We're small, but there's a lot more that we've done to provide outreach to the community through distance learning and through our web site," Roebuck said.

For more information, call 963-4575.