



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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**Release No. 03-01**

**March 11, 2002**

### **AIR FORCE EDUCATION'S BOOTSTRAP PROGRAM GETS 'THE BOOT'**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** – The Bootstrap Program that used to allow Air Force personnel to attend college in a full-time status while still considered active-duty members is no longer.

Bootstrap was discontinued Feb. 22 after an Air Force judge advocate general reviewed the program and determined it could not continue without compliance to the Air Force Educational Leave of Absence Policy.

According to a memorandum for major command directors, the Bootstrap Program has been replaced with an updated version of the Air Force Educational Leave of Absence Policy. All of those already attending school under Bootstrap, and those who have been approved by a unit commander for an upcoming Bootstrap Program, will be grandfathered under the old policy. However, new applicants will see considerable changes under AFELA.

The two biggest changes, according to the memorandum, involve the service commitment after school is completed and the benefits while attending school.

Bootstrap participants used to have a three-to-one active-duty service commitment. Basically, every month of school attended under Bootstrap equaled three months of additional military service. AFELA participants only have a two-to-one service commitment after completion of school. Although the service obligation is slightly less under AFELA, the participant, in addition to the two-to-one service commitment policy, must complete any other period of obligated service.

The second major change under AFELA puts program participants in educational leave status instead of permissive TDY status. Bootstrap participants collected basic pay, basic allowance for housing, basic allowance for subsistence, and all special pay and allowances authorized. AFELA participants will now receive only basic pay.

All students will be required to fill out the Air Force Form 204, Educational Leave of Absence Request, and the AF Form 988, Leave Request/Authorization form.

According to Diana Roebuck, 437th Education Services Flight chief, seven Charleston AFB members were selected under Bootstrap in 2001 alone. Ten people total were selected in the previous two years.

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“There are a minimal number of people who would have used Bootstrap,” said Roebuck. “The Air Force is the only service that used Bootstrap, and conforming it to meet public law was a necessary step.”

Even those who were considering Bootstrap may still benefit under AFELA, according to Roebuck. Montgomery GI Bill benefits are currently at \$800 per month, and Roebuck said she expects to see them raised to \$900 per month starting in October. Since AFELA participants, who are eligible for GI Bill benefits, can use the full amount of the bill, the loss of BAH and BAS may be moot.

“The spirit and intent of these two programs is to provide an educational opportunity for those people who aren’t able to pursue normal, off-duty education due to personal or mission circumstances,” said Senior Master Sgt. Matt Harless, 437th Airlift Wing career assistance advisor. “I think AFELA will help ensure that only people who are sincerely trying to get an education and otherwise can’t go to school will apply.”

Harless went on to say a decline in the number of participants wouldn’t necessarily signal a lack of success, and it may even help further retention because it requires the participant to re-enlist prior to accepting AFELA.

Anyone interested in earning a commission will still have ample opportunity, according to Harless.

He said AFELA will not affect any other commissioning programs already in place, and there are still programs for everyone’s needs and desires. Roebuck echoed his sentiments.

“There are no limits to the options available right now,” said Roebuck. “There are many ways other than Bootstrap to finish your degree and earn a commission. Please come in and talk to a professional counselor who will work with you to meet your educational goals.”

No matter what educational goals a Team Charleston member may have, Harless recommends talking to him before making a hasty decision.

“Often people initially choose commissioning programs because they are unaware of the many other career opportunities that exist, such as retraining and special duty assignments,” said Harless. “That’s where I step in and help.

“I can talk to people, and their dependents, and get an idea of what their goals are,” continued Harless. “Then I can point them in one of several directions based on their personal situation.”

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