

By Tom Graves

So many colleges are looking to further service members' educations that you can take your pick of universities in which to enroll. With the possibilities of online education growing exponentially every year, higher education is as close as your nearest networked laptop computer—an ideal choice for military families facing frequent moves.

Colleges want the kind of disciplined, goal-oriented students that service members make. Their admissions managers know that service members want to give back to their country, their communities and their colleges, and many have service member alumni as counselors and teachers for current or interested students to consult.

At most public colleges, U.S. service members can enroll in distance learning courses at reduced tuition, typically 20 to 25 percent off the standard tuition for civilians.

One thing you'll notice is that once you start researching colleges online, the possibilities are practically endless and it can seem overwhelming. With a specific goal in mind, your best first step is to consult with an academic advisor on base.

But if you're exploring education possibilities prior to a specific goal, you'll find that Service member Opportunity Colleges, American Military University, sites including [www.GoArmyEd.com](http://www.GoArmyEd.com) and any college that offers distance learning courses will open your eyes to possibilities for your future that you may not have previously considered.

Also, you may have achieved, or be closing in on the equivalent of an Associate of Arts degree through your military training.

"University of Phoenix acknowledges that many service members have already achieved an education equivalent to an associate degree through college coursework, military training, and national testing programs," states the University of Phoenix website. "The ... Associate of Arts Degree through

Credit Recognition allows service members to fulfill most of their degree requirements by recognizing approved college-level learning no matter where service members are located throughout the world."

The core of college choices for U.S. service members includes specialized training at military schools such as AMU. Outside that circle are programs pertaining to military subjects at public colleges that offer distance learning. But even schools that only offer standard civilian curriculum for distance learning often have discounted tuition for service members, their family members and veterans.

And AMU's ever-expanding programs cater to specific career goals for U.S. service members. One example is their Bachelor of Arts degree in Military Management and Program Acquisition.

"The degree is appealing to government contractors and other professionals involved with the military or civilian defense establishment," AMU's website states. "Graduates of this program typically go on to executive employment with the military, government or corporate environments."

The University of Maryland, University College has distance learning Academic Advisors all over the world, including some stationed on OCONUS bases. UMUC's arrangement with the Department of Defense includes DSN phones and fax numbers at UMUC offices.

"UMUC's agreement with military services requires military students to see an Academic Advisor and to develop a degree plan after completion of six credit hours with UMUC," the college catalog states. "Students who are enrolled in the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) or who have SOCAD, SOCMAR, SOCNAV or SOC-COAST agreements already have degree plans and are exempt from this requirement." Those acronyms stand for Servicemember Opportunity Colleges' branch-specific programs for Army (Degree), Marines, Navy and Coast Guard.

The SOC consortium of colleges formed in 1972 specifically to address the education needs of service members who needed to complete degrees while mobilizing for active duty or making a PCS.

The new Post-9/11 GI Bill is available for distance learning, according to the VA, but is subject to the same payment limits as outlined for traditional colleges and universities. Visit [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov) for more information.

More than 1,100 colleges, universities and schools across the country have entered into "Yellow Ribbon" program agreements with the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve financial aid for veterans participating in the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

This commitment shows the growing number of schools that are eager to attract U.S. service members as students and faculty. For deployed service members and spouses on the home-front, there is no reason to let distance to a college campus stop you from furthering your education goals. ●

## Surfing the Schools

Service member Opportunity Colleges:  
[www.soc.aascu.org](http://www.soc.aascu.org)

**GoArmyEd.com:** *The College of the American Soldier works in conjunction with this website and colleges whose degrees participate in the Career Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Degrees Program.*

American Military University:  
[www.amu.apus.edu](http://www.amu.apus.edu)

University of Maryland, University College: [www.umuc.edu](http://www.umuc.edu)

Allied Schools:  
[www.alliedschools.com](http://www.alliedschools.com)

University of Phoenix:  
[www.phoenix.edu](http://www.phoenix.edu)