
Show Me the *Building Great Engineers* Money



By Lieutenant Colonel Scott C. Johnson

There are several venues engineer Soldiers can take to obtain certifications and licenses and to get technical-related training. Funding is available now through the tuition assistance (TA) program and through the GI Bill. Units cannot use operations and maintenance funds for individual training and certification, but those funds can be used to pay for mission- or contingency-related technical training for Soldiers.

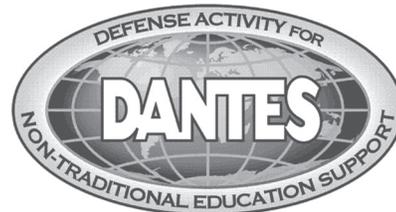
Programs

There are three programs—Army COOL (Credentialing Opportunities On-Line), DANTES (Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support), and AVOTEC (Army Vocational/Technical) Pilot Program—that provide information, training that leads to certification, and/or testing for Soldiers using TA and/or the GI Bill. The licenses available through these programs include engineer, construction, and technical certifications and licenses. Two of the three programs can be used to fund the Professional Engineer (PE) license exam.



Army COOL (www.cool.army.mil) provides information and some training resources that can lead to technical credentials. This site focuses on enlisted Soldiers and directly ties unique credentials to specific military occupational specialties (MOSs). Many of these are relevant to engineer commissioned and warrant officers. For example, the 21Z MOS (combat engineer senior sergeant) links to the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) and the Project Management Professional (PMP) credentials. Army COOL also points to training and funding sources such as TA,

eArmy U, and the GI Bill. PMP training and testing are available online now through eArmyU.



DANTES (http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes_web/certification/Calendar.htm) is a Department of Defense (DOD) program that lists multiple credentialing organizations and licenses that can be tested for, or administered through, Army and other Service education centers. Test costs may be covered by TA or the GI Bill and include certificates in building construction, construction materials testing, geotechnical, land management/water control, transportation, and underground utilities construction by the National Institute for Certification Engineering Technology. The Certified Professional Constructor certificate is from the American Institute of Constructors.



Army Vocational/Technical (AVOTEC) Pilot Program

AVOTEC (<https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/education/index.html>) is a 2009 Army pilot program funded via TA for credential-producing programs and license and certification examinations. The pilot ends in September 2009, and according to the website, Soldiers must be enrolled in a credential-producing program before that cutoff date. AVOTEC offers online and traditional education programs on a state-by-state basis. Right now there is an online program that leads to certification as a professional home inspector. Traditional certification and licensing programs offered by a local or state institution must be registered with AVOTEC for Soldiers to receive funding. There is an opportunity for each

installation to develop credential-producing relationships with local vocational institutes, community colleges, and other continuing education programs. Additionally, Soldiers can use the AVOTEC system to pay for certification and license examinations by accredited organizations.

TA is available for lifelong learning and continuing education courses in technical-related fields for all Soldiers. The GI Bill will pay for certification and licensing fees and renewals and approved courses leading to the same. Soldiers must be eligible to receive GI Bill benefits. The good news for non-prior service officers is that the GI Bill that kicks off in August 2009 is open to all Soldiers. According to the latest information from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs website, the new GI Bill will pay for one certification test.

Another venue for technical-related training can be pursued via a unit's operations and maintenance funds. These funds can be used to send Soldiers to approved courses such as the United States Army Corps of Engineers Proponent-Sponsored Engineer Corps Training (PROSPECT) program. Unit commanders can also establish Soldier technical skills training courses according to Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*, through the Army

Education Center via a contractor, although Department of the Army approval may be required if a contractor is used. This type of training could be developed to contribute to the overall body of knowledge required to successfully pass a technical certification or license exam. This technical training could also be tailored as required for contingency missions.

Summary

While the programs and resources described above aren't comprehensive or well-known, they provide a funding source and venue for both technical training and certification for a large proportion of engineer Soldiers. As leaders, we need to know and understand these programs and encourage Soldiers to take advantage of them. Certification, licensing, and the associated training will significantly improve our overall technical competence and capabilities. 

Lieutenant Colonel Johnson is the United States Army Engineer School Chief of Staff. He commanded the 1-3 Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, from 20 June 2006 to 17 June 2008.