Defense Report

from AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare

eArmyU:
Army Distance Education

This award-winning, state-of-the-art, virtual learning program revolutionizes education by eliminating barriers to postsecondary opportunity by providing academic access, anytime and anywhere, across the Army.

2005 Army Modernization Plan[1]

Introduction

In the tradition of the Montgomery GI Bill, eArmyU offers comprehensive educational opportunities for Soldiers to achieve their educational goals. The program reaches out to a new generation of Soldier-students via the Internet. The Army founded eArmyU on the principles of flexibility and access for connecting Soldier-students to postsecondary education outside the traditional classroom.

What It Is

The Army launched Army University Access Online (AUAO) in January 2001, just six months after the initiative was first announced by then-Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera. Otherwise known as eArmyU, it is a state-of-the-art electronic-learning program offering eligible Soldiers the opportunity to obtain a college degree or certificate anytime, anywhere.

Designed as a recruitment tool, eArmyU serves as a retention tool as well, helping the Army to maintain a high-quality, experienced force. By facilitating post-secondary education, eArmyU supports the Army's com-mitment to an educated, technology-savvy force that can work effectively in the network-centric missions and battlefields of the 21st century.

The Army initially implemented this program at Fort Benning, Georgia, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Fort Hood, Texas. Expanded Armywide in 2005, eArmyU allows eligible Soldiers to enroll wherever an Army Education Center is located. Prospective students can choose from 29 participating colleges and universities (known as home colleges) and 147 online certificate and degree programs. All eArmyU education partners are members of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC),[2] allowing Soldier-students to continue their online education regardless of duty station and

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[1] United States Army, *2005 Army Modernization Plan* (Washington, D.C.: February 2005).

[2] Participating schools offering undergraduate certificates, associate or bachelor's degrees are required to be members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Army Degrees (SOCAD). These education partners follow the American Council on Education (ACE) guidelines for awarding maximum credit for military experience and training.

mission requirements. Therefore, those enrolled in the program making a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) need only visit their new installation Army Continuing Education System (ACES) counselor to obtain further guidance. ACES administers eArmyU under the Adjutant General Directorate, U.S. Army Human Resources Command.

What It Offers

Because eArmyU is a web-based learning initiative, "all eligible enlisted Soldiers have an online capability to earn a degree without regard to duty hours, deployment schedule or family issues."[3] The program offers academic access, choice and flexibility. Through state-of-the-art virtual learning, the Army is able to offer eligible Soldiers access to convenient postsecondary education. In addition, students have access to aca-demic mentoring and support services.

Prospective Soldier-students are given unparalleled choice in transferable certificate and degree programs, allowing students to transfer credits between participating academic institutions. Soldier-students have the flexibility to work on course studies at times most beneficial to them because they have global access to an education web portal (http://www.earmyu.com/) 24 hours a day seven days a week (24/7) and are not tied to a rigid classroom schedule.

Through eArmyU.com, Soldier-students are given a single point of entry to a virtual learning environment. While logged into the portal, Soldier-students have a vast array of academic and technical support at their fingertips:

- connection to Army Continuing Education Counselors and program mentors;
- contact with instructors in addition to scheduled courses;
- 24/7 tutoring services and writing resources;[4]
- the Army Library Program, a network of libraries pooled together via the Digital Army Library Service; and

- technical assistance through the eArmyU Helpdesk.

With all of these tools, eArmyU gives students comprehensive support to encourage academic success.

Besides academic and technical support, Soldier-students can also gain financial support of up to $250 per semester hour or 100 percent tuition assistance, whichever is less. Tuition includes textbooks, Internet Service Provider, 24/7 technical support, a "boot camp" tutorial and online academic tutoring and mentoring. The Army does not place a limit on the number of courses a Soldier-student can take, but tuition assistance is limited to an annual ceiling of $4,500 per student.

Eligibility

As of October 2005, more than 60,000 Soldiers have taken courses through eArmyU. Since its inception the Army has adjusted eligibility requirements to promote Army educational opportunities to an expanded Soldier population.

Effective 1 October 2005, the Army changed reenlistment criteria to broaden the eligibility for enrollment in two eArmyU options—eCourse and the Technology Package. The eCourse option was extended to include all officers, and specific reenlistment requirements for the Technology Package were dropped.[5]

A course-by-course enrollment program, eCourse is offered to all eligible Soldiers who have their own computer or computer access. Regular Army and Active Guard and Reserve Soldiers may be eligible to enroll through eCourse. Soldiers who enroll in eArmyU through eCourse are not required to reenlist but must have enough time in service remaining to complete the selected course. Commissioned officers and warrant officers will incur a two-year active duty service obligation.

The Technology Package, or laptop package, provides participants with Army-purchased laptops. Those who enroll with the Technology Package are

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[3] *2005 Army Modernization Plan.*

[4] Many online educational programs and service provides have teamed up with eArmyU to build a user-friendly learning infrastructure. SMARTHINKING.com is one such providers offering live, online, just-in-time tutoring and academic support.

[5] Under the previous requirement system, Soldiers had to reenlist in combat forces and specific operational units to become eligible for the Technology Package.

required to successfully complete at least 12 semester hours of coursework in three years. Regular Army E-4s through E-7s with less than 10 years of active service and E-6s through E-9s with more than 10 years of active service[6] may be eligible for the laptop option. Regular Army E-3s with less than 24 months' time in service may also be eligible. Soldiers must have a three-year minimum Service Remaining Requirement (SRR) to enroll under the laptop option but may reenlist to meet the three-year SRR. The number of applicants who receive laptops is constrained by available funding.

Additional information about eligibility requirements is available online at http://www.earmyu. com/docs/Soldier_Orientation_Flyer.pdf.

Summary

Soldier-students can participate in classes as they transfer from post to post because eArmyU is a portable educational program. Through eArmyU the Army gives Soldiers who are unable to attend traditional classes the opportunity to pursue educational goals. Since 2001 the Army has been widening this virtual doorway to learning opportunities. Advancing the concept of distance learning to a globally based Army, eArmyU extends postsecondary educational opportunities to many Soldiers and supports the Army's dedication to a versatile and ready force.

Key Points

- Expanded Armywide in 2005, the program allows prospective students to choose from 29 participating colleges and universities and 147 online certificate and degree programs.

- Effective 1 October 2005, all officers are eligible to enroll in eArmyU through a course-by-course enrollment option. At the same time, the number of Soldiers eligible to receive an Army-issued laptop increased.

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[6] Active Army Soldiers E-6–E-9 must be in active service in an indefinite status and have more than three years remaining to Retention Control Point (RCP). Soldiers not in an indefinite status must reenlist for indefinite status. Indefinite status refers to those Soldiers on active duty whose service status is not tied to a specific number of years.