

Chapter 6

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Student Overview

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Overview

This chapter provides some basic, important information to help students get started in an educational program leading to either an associate or bachelor's degree.

Why Should I Attend a SOC Degree Network System (DNS) School?

The SOC DNS is a group of member schools committed to serving the educational needs of military students at the associate and baccalaureate degree levels. SOC DNS member schools agree to:

- Provide flexible, convenient learning opportunities including online, traditional, and prior learning assessment;
- Grant credit for military training and experience and nationally-recognized testing programs;
- Provide the student with a SOC DNS Student Agreement which serves as a contract-for-degree that protects against degree program changes that may occur during deployments or other operational commitments;
- Offer degree programs with Guaranteed-Transfer credit among other member schools
- Maintain responsive student support systems;
- Require only 25% Academic Residency (30% for degrees offered completely online). Academic Residency is the amount of course work that must be completed at the college where you will complete your degree.

Steps for Getting Started at a SOC DNS School

1. Explore interests, career/degree possibilities, and college/university options with your Education Services Officer. Chapter 3 of the *SOC DNS Handbook* provides a list of SOC member schools and the degree programs they offer within the SOC DNS. Chapter 4 provides a list, by state and foreign country, where some SOC member schools offer traditional classroom learning opportunities.
2. Apply for admission to the college/university of your choice.
3. Request transcripts. Have your Joint Services Transcript (JST) sent to the college you have selected. It should list any other college work you have previously completed, as well as any test scores (e.g., CLEP, DSST, UExcel®). If your JST does not include this information, you should have transcripts from the other schools you have attended, as well as the test scores,

sent directly to the school to which you are applying. <https://jst.doded.mil/official.html>.

4. You will be officially notified of your acceptance. Throughout the course of your studies, be sure to keep in contact with your home college academic adviser. Make sure that you understand all your degree requirements, including academic residency, requirements in the major, satisfactory academic progress, degree completion time limits and any break-in-attendance policy guidelines.
5. Register for courses that are part of your degree plan. You should always be sure that the courses you take are required for completion of your degree. Check with the academic adviser at your school if you are not sure if the courses you plan to take are appropriate to your degree.
6. Apply for Tuition Assistance (TA) in accordance with current policies stated by your branch of service.
7. Request a SOC DNS Student Agreement from your home college after completion of six academic credits.
8. Follow your SOC DNS Student Agreement to complete degree requirements.
9. Learn more about taking courses at another college. Often students will decide to take a course at another school because of costs, convenience, or desire to use a different course delivery method. Request official approval from your home college before taking a course from another college. A SOC DNS Course Approval Form is provided in the Appendix (Courses sharing SOC DNS Category Codes do not require prior approval). Use Chapter 5 of this Handbook to find courses in SOC DNS Course Categories guaranteed to transfer among SOC DNS member schools.
10. Document Earned Credit: Your Joint Services Transcript will normally be updated if you have advanced in pay grade or complete significant military training. This may result in the granting of additional college credit; you should keep your school informed of any additional tests you may complete, or additional credit recommendations provided by advancement in pay grade or completion of military training.
11. Track your progress. You may indicate on your Student Agreement progress toward degree completion by notating all courses you complete.
12. When you have completed all of the requirements for your degree, file a graduation request or application with your home college.

What is a SOC DNS Student Agreement?

A SOC DNS Student Agreement is a document that your home college must provide to you upon completion of your first six credits of coursework. The home college is the school where you intend to complete your degree. This is different than another school that you might be attending for courses to transfer back to the school where you will complete your degree.

The Student Agreement will serve as your degree plan as well as a contract-for-degree between you and your home college that will protect you from any degree requirement changes. It will contain:

- list all of the courses required for your degree;
- credit you may have been awarded for military training or experience;
- any credit earned via national-recognized testing programs;
- every accepted credit from previously completed college courses; and
- It will provide you opportunities by identifying SOC DNS Course Category Codes that allow you to take certain courses with other schools and transfer them back to your home college, guaranteed.

The Student Agreement will remain in effect while you are deployed, if you transfer duty stations, and after you leave the service.

What is Guaranteed Transferability?

A key feature of SOC DNS member schools is that they have agreed to accept at least 40% of the major or major-related coursework for students transferring between SOC DNS member institutions in similar degree programs. This Guaranteed Transferability is in addition to the acceptance of military transfer credit recommendations and those recommended for nationally recognized testing programs. These transfer policies are meant to provide military students with flexibility, choices, and multiple ways of earning credits. You should always consult with your Education Service Officer and the advisement office of your home college prior to transferring schools, changing majors, or taking courses from another school.

What is Academic Residency?

Academic residency is the percentage of the degree (number of credits) that a student must complete at that school in order to be awarded a degree. Generally, an associate degree is 60 credits, 25% residency for an

associate degree means the student must complete 15 of the 60 credits by taking courses at the home college. Similarly, a bachelor's degree is normally 120 credits, 30 credits completed at that school will constitute 25% residency. Note that if a degree program is offered completely online, the school may require academic residency of 30%.

HEROES Act and Readmission Policy

What should I do if I'm deployed and my studies are interrupted?

SOC DNS member institutions, as signatories of the Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding, agree to abide by the U. S. Department of Education's Readmission Policy for military servicemembers and the *Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROES) Act of 2003*. These, and other legislation, serve to protect military students whose studies are interrupted by military commitments (e.g., withdrawal and reimbursement of tuition payments, deferment on student loans, and returning to school after a disruption because of military service).

Contact your Education Services Officer or Financial Aid Counselor if you need assistance or have questions concerning these policies. You can read these Acts in their entirety at <https://congress.gov/>.

Please note this protection is extended to active duty members of the Armed Forces, reserve, and National Guard called to active duty under federal authority.

If you cannot complete a test or other course requirements on time, there are important steps that you must take:

1. First contact the faculty member teaching the course to see if there is a way you can postpone or make up the work.
2. Notify your home college registrar's office. Every school has a formal withdrawal policy that you must follow. Have a copy of your orders ready for submission.
3. Speak with your education center to discuss necessary action regarding your Tuition Assistance.
4. Advise all holders of your student loans as soon as possible. Loan holders are required by the HEROES Act to provide you with some level of relief, such as deferment or forbearance.

Can I get help paying for school?

Most students serving on active duty are entitled to either military tuition assistance or some form of the GI Bill. Be sure to familiarize yourself with your service's tuition assistance policies and procedures.

Many military-affiliated organizations offer grants, loans, or scholarships to active duty students. Military One Source has a comprehensive website that provides links and information about these programs at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>.

Federal grants and loans are also available; information is provided at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>.

What if I have questions or encounter problems while I'm pursuing my degree?

Your military education center can provide you with assistance, especially with regard to tuition assistance or career advice.

For specific academic issues or concerns, consult your school's academic advisor. Registration problems are generally handled by the registrar's office; financial issues should be addressed to either the bursar's office (payment for specific courses), or to the financial aid office (for student loans, grants, and other assistance).