



## Airmen learn through distance education

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As soon as the ball dropped on December 31st, many Americans turned their thoughts to the New Year and the changes they wanted to make in 2005. Be it shedding bad habits or getting in shape, millions of people across the country make resolutions every January.

"Whatever goals you may have for the coming year, January is the perfect time for military servicemen and women to think about getting a college degree," said Tom Macon, Chief Executive Officer, Grantham University. "Whether you want to start college for the first time, resume an education interrupted by deployments, or earn a Master's degree, now is the time to take control of your life and make it happen.

"A college degree will help you advance in your military career, and it can prove invaluable if you plan to look for a job in the private sector after retirement from the military," said Mr. Macon. "And with the education benefits the military provides, it just makes sense to get a degree while you're active duty."

In addition to the military administered programs (such as the Community College of the Air Force) and the many universities and community colleges in the Washington area, students at Andrews can take advantage of hundreds of accredited distance learning programs. Distance learning can be especially useful if your job description requires an unpredictable work schedule or frequent travels.

One Andrews student taking advantage of distance education to earn his degree is Master Sgt. John Nichols, Presidential Airlift Squadron presidential aircraft security non-commissioned officer. He's one of twelve Airmen that handle security aboard Air Force One, and he's earning a degree in Business Administration from Grantham University, located halfway across the country in Slidell, Louisiana.

He'd previously earned an Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice through the Community College of the Air Force, but was concerned that further education would be impossible with his travel schedule. Then he found distance education.

Since beginning his coursework in April, Sergeant Nichols has never set foot in a classroom, and he's able to fit his classes in between his trips with the president. On long trips, he can even complete coursework aboard Air Force One. Grantham is a distance education university, and all of his educational needs, from completing assignments to consulting professors, can be met online and at his convenience.

"I signed up with Grantham because another guy in my unit turned me onto it," said Sergeant Nichols. "He said, 'you've really got to try this.' I'd wanted a degree for a while, but didn't think I'd be able to make college fit into my schedule. It worked for me, so I told the other guys I fly with about it, and now there are seven of us doing

distance education through Grantham. It's great because we can study together, bounce ideas off each other, and help each other out."

According to the U.S. Department of Education, enrollment in distance education courses has more than doubled since 2000. In the past, distance learning meant taking courses through audio or video feeds. Today's technology has allowed schools to offer more and more courses using the Internet. This new distance learning model is ideal for military personnel who are deployed, move frequently because of temporary duty assignments, or whose duty schedules make it difficult to attend traditional evening classes.

When considering distance education, it's important to remember that not all schools are the same. A recent General Accounting Office investigation of federal employees' degrees made that point clear.

The investigation uncovered at least 28 senior-level federal employees in eight agencies who have degrees from "diploma mills" or other unaccredited schools. Diploma mills operate without state or professional oversight, and require little or no serious coursework.

The base education office can provide a list of recommended distance education programs, or help find a local university that's right for you. Whatever the goal, now is the perfect time to take control of the future by adding college coursework to New Year's Resolutions.