

College Fair offers educational opportunities to military, civilians

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The Naval Operational Support Center Drill Hall became college central Aug. 5 as representatives from nearly 20 colleges and universities converged upon NAS Meridian for the installations College Fair. The purpose was to recruit military personnel and civilians seeking to further or begin their education.

More than 100 civilian and military personnel, including students from Naval Technical Training Center and Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One walked around the drill hall interacting with admission representatives from a wide range of post secondary schools to discuss course offerings (online and classroom), admission requirements and other information pertinent to the student.

Participating schools included well-known institutions including the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University-Meridian Branch, East Mississippi Community College, Meridian Community College, University of West Alabama and Troy University in Alabama. Representatives from other popular institutions which usually cater to military personnel such as Coastline Community College and the Navy College Program were also in attendance.

"This fair allows personnel on base the opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives from different colleges," said Navy Counselor 1st Class Tim Bridges. "Students should take advantage of their tuition assistance because all classes are 100 percent paid for. Many of these

schools give credits to military personnel for what they do on a daily basis. A lot of people could be close to completing a degree without even knowing it."

Bridges said this is the first fair NAS Meridian has hosted in recent years. He said the reason for that is because the Navy College Office on base, which usually sponsors the free event, closed.

"It's an issue of funding," Bridges said. "The Navy is cutting back on all the Navy College Offices at other bases and having one central college office in Virginia."

However, the success of the fair this year was enough to bring smiles to Bridges and admission representatives like Julius Minor from the University of Mississippi Department of Independent and Online Learning.

Minor said the event was a worthwhile trip. "I'm excited that they are doing this for today's military," said Minor, who was stationed at NAS Meridian 30 years ago as a Marine. "We were told that the (education) benefits were there but there were no steps in how to use it. This fair gives students the chance to learn how to use their benefits and makes for a good flow of applicants for us."

NTTC students such as Logistics Specialist Seaman Kenneth Williams from The Bronx, N.Y., made sure he got his minutes worth at the fair as he talked with Minor about the opportunities at Ole Miss.

"I came today because I wanted to check out my options," said Williams, who took online courses through Central Texas College at his last command. "I wanted to continue my education because in order to be competitive in the real world, you need to have a college degree."