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PORTABLE PROFESSOR: Distance Learning in Your Pocket

Deployed troops may soon have a college degree in the palm of their hands. PocketPC technology allows Coasties to attend lecture, watch full-motion videos and will soon allow them to take tests and quizzes online.

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Coastline Community College, in collaboration with the USCGI (US Coast Guard Institute), will offer college courses -- complete with instructional audio and video -- on the latest handheld PDA's or PocketPC computers. These will be usable by servicemembers even when out of touch with distance learning facilities ashore. Dubbed PocketED, Coastline's innovative program will literally put distance learning in a very convenient place -- the servicemember's pocket.



The PocketED Program offers unique educational opportunities for military personnel in all service branches, anywhere and at anytime.

Slated to launch early in 2005, the PocketED courses under development at Coastline will have all of the same components of a feature-rich online Internet course. For example, Coastline's Management & Supervision 100 PocketED course contains more than 90 screens of content, 65 full-motion video interviews and instructional video clips, 23 audio reviews of textbook readings, in addition to support screens, navigation tutorial videos and interactive exercises.

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All the info is stored on a postage-stamp sized SDRAM card that can be read on the PocketPC or any suitably equipped desktop or laptop computer. As PocketPC computers continue to add features, processor capability and memory (while decreasing in price), it will be practical to incorporate even more course information in a handheld package.

The goal in DL (Distance Learning), employed by colleges and universities nationwide, is to give students—including service personnel on active duty access to distance education opportunities utilizing the Internet, cable TV, and CD-media, using desktop or laptop computers. Now, DL reaches a new dimension. As a leader and innovator in the field of "Anytime, Anywhere" learning, Coastline Community College has developed courses that students can take on any commercially available Windows Mobile device or PocketPC, a pocket-size computer that can be held in one hand.

"The next round of what we're going to attempt to do is build a 'synching' process," said Shawn Mann, Lead Developer of the PocketED program at Coastline. "The Soldier, Sailor or Coastie can go online and download that next period of class content, work on that content at their own pace and when they're ready they can synch up, load up their answers and download the next set."

The PocketED Program offers unique educational opportunities for military personnel in all service branches, anywhere and at anytime. Coastline recognizes the difficulties facing actively deployed students in continuing their studies, because of restrictions that may be imposed by military operations. Now with the PocketED Program, whether as a student in Iraq, on a submarine, aircraft

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All the information you need is stored on a postage-stamp sized SDRAM card that can be read on the PocketPC.

goals, we hope the PocketPC will provide a viable option for continuing their studies without 'short changing' them on features or content. We've taken all the features and content of an online distance learning course, combined that with one of our 13 hour Emmy Award winning Telecourses -- and migrated it to a handheld device."

This kind of technology was simply not possible even a year or two ago, when Coastline first envisioned this method of delivery. "As these devices become more robust, standardized and with more memory and faster CPUs, this method of delivery has become extremely effective. Conceivably, we could have 10 to 20 of our courses available in a mobile, handheld format within the year. That puts a person's degree or certificate, literally, at their fingertips," Mann said.

But as PocketPCs continue to add more and more features, Coastline is challenged with keeping the platform education-focused. "You can't have some of the features in a secure installation, like Bluetooth and built-in cameras. Every 18 months they come out with a better model and a faster CPU. But really the low-end PocketPC is the best platform, since it doesn't have all the unnecessary bells and whistles."

PocketED and other similar Distance Learning programs not only make it easier for servicemembers, but also for proctors and Military Education Officers at installations and on deployed vessels. "Sometimes, for these officers, it's not their major role -- they'll have six or seven other roles. So they might not have a lot of time to devote directly to the education area. Hopefully the PocketPC program is a way to alleviate some of that."

About Coastline Community College: Coastline's education program is designed to help students develop the knowledge and skills that will contribute to their intellectual, personal, and professional growth. The College offers programs, both on site and through distance learning formats, leading to the associate in arts (A.A.) degree and lower-division coursework that will transfer to a four-year college or university. Coastline also offers short-term education, training and technical services in order to meet community and business needs beyond the instructional credit program. Coastline Community College is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an institutional accrediting body recognized by the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education.

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carrier or even commuting on a subway to and from your civilian job, you can take your course by reading, watching videos, listening to audio recordings, or through interactive exercises and quizzes offering instant feedback.

Mann has stated that, "recognizing the increasing difficulties of actively deployed military students to continue working toward their educational

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