

New Sailor Assimilation Course (NSAC)

Keeping the Sailors We Receive

by LT David R. Brown, CHC, USNR

The re-enlistment rate for Zone A (less than six years of service—formerly considered “first-term”) Sailors in the US Navy was 47.9 per cent in FY 2000 and currently stands at 66 per cent for FY2002. This increase is encouraging as re-enlisting these Sailors is essential to preserving the Navy’s investment in training and manpower, as well as maintaining readiness and the ability to perform its missions.

The New Sailor Assimilation Course (NSAC), a part of the Command Religious Program aboard USS SHREVEPORT (LPD-12), was developed to prevent misconduct and increase retention among first-term Sailors by providing a forum to share their transitional experiences in the Navy.

NSAC is a five-part program that takes place over the course of a Sailor’s first year aboard the ship. Every new SHREVEPORT Sailor is assigned to a NSAC class within the first week of reporting aboard. These classes are distinguished by the phonetic alphabet, i.e., “ALPHA,” “BRAVO,” “CHARLIE,” etc. The facilitators for the program are the chaplain and a command representative from the chief’s mess. The “ALPHA” class recently celebrated its One-Year Certificate Ceremony on the ship’s forecastle. During the ceremony, the commanding officer, CAPT William D. Valentine, Jr. (pictured below in coveralls), presented completion certificates to the seventeen Sailors who made up the initial class.

The first two parts of NSAC are one and a half hours each in length, and are conducted during the first two months of duty aboard ship. Part One

consists of a brief introduction of the facilitators and each Sailor, followed by an interactive PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Responsible Decision Making.” The Sailors are then led through a “Quality of Life” segment where they are encouraged to share their initial impressions of shipboard life and any specific challenges they may have encountered. Presentations from MWR, Legal, TRICARE and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society representatives are offered to give familiarization concerning available support services. The chaplain concludes this session by offering the opportunity for follow-up counseling with any individual Sailor.

Part Two follows approximately 30 days later and begins with Sailors discussing their transitional experiences during their first month aboard ship. After a break, there’s a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Support Planning: Making the Navy Work For You.” During the presentation, each Sailor is strongly encouraged to consider formulating a support plan in the following areas: Spiritual, Financial, Professional and Educational. The command Financial Specialist and the command Career Counselor assist the chaplain in briefing the last three portions of the presentation. Once again, the chaplain concludes the session by offering individual pastoral support.

The other three parts of NSAC are follow-up sessions conducted at the three, six, and 12-month point of each Sailor’s tour aboard the ship. Each of these sessions is approximately 30 minutes long and is conducted in the format of a “Quality of Life” forum. A muster is kept on each class to ensure course completion and to track retention.

In order to market the program, I gave separate briefs to the wardroom, chief’s mess and First Class Petty Officer’s Association. During each of these briefs, a common concern was raised: “Isn’t it the job of the division officers and chiefs to put out this kind of information to Sailors?” I answered this valid question by emphasizing the unique position of chaplains in the command. Our pres-



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ence and spiritual perspective alone offer an influence that no division officer or chief can convey. Secondly, these young Sailors perceive the chaplain as an ally, someone who is a benevolent character and a confidential resource within the command. With this in mind, I believe that the chaplain may provide all the leverage that is needed to keep new Sailors on the “straight and narrow path” towards retention and re-enlistment.

The first person I sought out for advice on implementing this program was the Command Master Chief. He suggested using the chief’s mess rather than a neutral site because the location alone could serve as a motivator and provide some professional incentive. I followed that suggestion by asking the Executive Officer if I could use the wardroom for Part Two and the following sessions. Once these locations were secured, I advertised the program through the Plan of the Day, distributed a 5050 Instruction signed by the Commanding Officer, and sent an e-mail to remind all Department Heads, Division Officers, Chiefs and First Class Petty Officers.

Tracking retention statistics and taking care of people are not mutually exclusive. As facilitators for the Command Religious Program, we have a

vested interest in seeing people do well in life. That includes the retention of good Sailors as well as the development of their faith relationship with God. NSAC provides abundant opportunities for ministry through direct/indirect contact with these young Sailors. Another added benefit of NSAC is that it is not “chaplain specific” in that the program design provides for future viability and does not rest upon the personality or gifts of the unit chaplain. NSAC has a simple, flexible quality that allows for embellishment and expansion. The program could easily be converted for use in the Marine Corps (“NMAC”) or the Coast Guard (“NCAC”).

In the year since it’s inception, NSAC has proven itself to be a positive force in the prevention of misconduct and attrition aboard SHREVEPORT. The accompanying box shows the statistics.

This preliminary data indicates that Sailors who have not attended NSAC are over three times as likely to receive non-judicial punishment and more than ten times as likely to have a repeat appearance at captain’s mast than those who attended. Clearly, Sailors who attend NSAC exhibit better behavior and are less prone to committing NJP offenses. This benefits the Navy, the SHREVEPORT, and the individual Sailor, most of all.

Total first-term Sailors aboard (avg.): 225		
	NSAC Participants: 93	Non-NSAC Participants: 132
Non-NSAC first-term Sailors who have been to mast only once:		50 (38%)
NSAC graduates who have been to mast only once:		10 (11%)
Non-NSAC first-term Sailors who have been to mast more than once:		38 (28%)
Total NSAC graduates who have been to mast more than once:		2 (2%)

Chaplain Brown’s NSAC materials are available on the Navy Chaplain Corps website

www.chaplain.navy.mil

under “Training/GMT Resources.”

