

## ***MS Guardsmen, Spouses Find Virtual Path to Higher Education***

JACKSON, Miss. - On two evenings each week, members of the Mississippi National Guard and their families go to college. Unlike most other students, they do not have to deal with long commutes, on-campus parking, and crowded classrooms. In fact, they don't even have to leave their local community.

Instead, they are brushing up on their study skills from the comfort of their local Distributive Training Technology Project (DTTP) classrooms, taking courses offered, via video-teleconference (VTC), by Hinds Community College in Jackson.

This spring, Hinds offerstwo courses via VTC: Study Skills and Western Civilization II. Classes began Jan. 7th, 2003, and are open to Mississippi Guardsmen and their spouses. Currently, 26 students across the state are enrolled in the program.

According to Dave Thomas, Educational Director for the Mississippi National Guard, the two instructors from Hinds Community College lead the classes from Jackson and connect to students at Camp Shelby, Camp McCain, and Tupelo. Each class meets once a week for 16 weeks.

"This is a win-win situation for everyone involved," said Thomas. "This is a tremendous educational opportunity for our Guardsmen and their families." And, it's virtually free to anyone in the program. Hinds Community College offers students the option to pay their tuition through the Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA) program, a federally funded and grants tuition assistance program for Guardsmen for use toward classroom, vocational or distance learning courses.

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The Mississippi National Guard has maintained a strong relationship with Hinds Community College through the years. This program received the highest level of support from both the Guard and from the Hinds administration and academic dean. As a result, the program is already expanding. Psychology and English classes are being added to the schedule this coming fall, along with a Master's program in Science Management.

To be eligible to take courses offered at Hinds, students must apply for and be accepted into the program. The school has actively supported distance learning since the early 1990s and offers courses designed for the non-traditional student.

"This is the latest example of collaboration between DTTP and institutions of higher education," said MAJ Stephan Picard, DTTP Policy & Liaison Chief. "These programs are extremely important because they help us meet one of our primary goals - to promote lifelong learning and education. DTTP is the ideal delivery tool for courses like these, because our classrooms are accessible to everyone. Some are located at National Guard armories, while others are in public buildings, at schools, and on university campuses."

You can find out more about Hinds Community College by visiting their website at [www.hinds.cc.ms.us](http://www.hinds.cc.ms.us).

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