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Special to the Hood Herald

Cheryl Seymour and Michele Dano, two students in the Army Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), will receive their bachelor's degrees and become full-time employees of the U.S. Army Operational Test Command this May.

The program allows college students to work as student trainees in a government organization while they complete their college degrees.

After they graduate, the government organization has 120 days to decide if they'd like to absorb their students.

When Debbie Criminger, the command's funding section director, and Gail Sadler, section deputy director, learned about the program from a colleague, they decided to see for themselves if the program could be a benefit to their directorate.

"This is a program that has been around for a while," Criminger said. "We took another person's good idea, and made

it into a great success."

Criminger accepted Seymour, a local accounting student, into the command's funding section as a budget student trainee in August 2008. She then picked up Dano, Seymour's classmate, for the same position the following year.

"She has indeed hit the ground running," Sadler said, referring to Seymour. "The work she does is fantastic. For the next year, we figured if one was good, two would be even better."

"It has been so good to get these young, enthusiastic and talented people in here," Sadler added. "They have fresh ideas and an eagerness to learn."

Seymour and Dano will graduate from Texas A&M University-Central Texas Friday at the Killeen Civic and Conference Center. After graduation,

the funding section is working to place them in recently vacated budget positions.

"What is so great about this program is that when they graduate, if we have positions, they can be placed non-competitively," Sadler said.

Seymour said the program requires a good deal of commitment.

"The biggest thing is juggling work, school and home all at the same time," Seymour said. "Michele and I, we both have kids, and my husband is away in Albuquerque. But you do what you have to do in order to better your future for yourself and your kids."

One of the main projects that Seymour and Dano have worked on at the command is the spreadsheet for the command's new financial plan, the baseline budget.

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