SUCCESS STORY

Veteran Pursues College Degree to Help Other Veterans

SNAPSHOT
Enrolling in Northern Kentucky University (NKU) as a 42 year old freshman has been a life changing adventure for Chris Hammann, a Marine Corps veteran and father of three. Working as a Heavy Equipment Operator for the university, Hammann met and developed relationships with staff and faculty members who encouraged him to earn his college degree. After much thought, he enrolled at NKU in the Spring of 2012 to pursue a degree in Organizational Leadership.

CHALLENGES
Hammann’s biggest challenge was learning how to balance going to school, and working full time, with his family life. Family time in particular was a huge concern as Hammann’s son was severely disabled in a car accident and requires a lot of attention. So Hammann was forced to learn to prioritize and make lists. “At first, it was really tough for me,” Hammann admitted, but “once I got into a routine, everything fell into place.”

In addition, Hammann lacked confidence after being out of school for such a long time. Hammann describes himself as an unmotivated, disinterested high school student who enrolled in the Marine Corps upon graduation. After serving for 4 years (including participating in Operation Just Cause and Desert Storm), he left the service as a corporal. He tried college but was not ready to make the commitment. Twenty years later at NKU, Hammann found a support network that helped him become confident about his ability to succeed.
SOLUTION
Northern Kentucky University has an established process for transferring American Council on Education (ACE) recommended credits for military training. Hammann was able to obtain 26 semester hours of credit for his military work which gave him hope. “Once I knew that I was getting credits for my military experience, my confidence level escalated. I knew that I could do this, I felt like people really cared about me and that my experiences as a young Marine and a proud veteran meant more than just a DD214 [certificate of discharge from active duty]” said Hammann.

In addition to the transfer of ACE recommended credits, NKU has provided a lot of support for Hammann. His advisor, Dr. Victoria Berling, Executive Director, Educational Outreach & Interim Director, Norse Advising, suggested that he take a portfolio class to determine if he could receive credit for skills and knowledge that were not documented on his military transcript. Hammann received three semester credits for a 12-page essay detailing how his military work and training met the course objectives of a “Teamwork in Organization” class including examples of how he learned to analyze a leader’s role in a team-oriented environment and assess and manage team performance.

“Credit for prior learning is playing an increasingly important role” explained Dr. Berling. “Adults are definitely looking for options to prove their mastery of subjects through options that don’t involve completing the course.” In addition to the portfolio class and the transfer of ACE recommended credits for military experience, NKU also offers standardized tests (CLEP, DSST) or department challenge exams which they give to students to pass credits for proficiency.

TAKEAWAY
Through his military training and experience, Chris was able to accelerate degree completion and is on track to graduate in Fall 2015. His ultimate goal is to obtain a master’s degree in social work that will help him work with veterans.

When asked to summarize his college experience, Hammann responded “it’s taken me 20 years to make this big step. It’s a whole new chapter in my life and it’s something that I will never regret. It’s something that will make me a better and more successful individual. I’m really looking forward to the day I walk down that aisle and get my diploma from my president.”

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