

From Fatigues to Carolina Blue by Joshua Ebert

Getting accepted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was a major event for me. It marked the next step in achieving my envisioned post-military future. Mixed with the anticipation of starting at Carolina there was also the trepidation of being in such a competitive school. You are constantly reminded that you are amongst the best and brightest and I began to question if you should be there.

During my time in the military I never felt judged on my intellect. Instead I was judged by my physical conditioning, punctuality and job proficiency. So coming to Carolina was a whole new game for me. Yes I had taken courses at a community college before transferring here, but they did not really count in my mind. Fortunately I found my first semester to be both stimulating and not overly challenging. It was a nice first experience at Carolina.

My next struggle was figuring out how much to participate in class. I feel as veterans that we have a wide breadth of experience and knowledge. I constantly found myself struggling to decide how much to share or comment. Also in the beginning I was not too forthcoming about my veteran status. It was something I tried to keep separate from being a student. It was not until I took an American history course that focused on Vietnam and the Global War on Terror that I started opening up. As we discussed the feelings and emotions of veterans from our readings I wanted to my classmates to better understand these things (maybe opening with my story about having a human foot in my refrigerator for 3-months was not the best choice).

It was not until I finally found other veterans on campus that I began to feel I had found my stride here. It was a relief to hear others talk about having similar experiences transitioning and being able to hang out with people with whom you have a common bond. This social outlet allowed me to experience some of the camaraderie that we had in the service while also being a part of the student body. I would stress that joining a student group of any sort will help you better connect to the Carolina community.