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STUDY IN PERSISTENCE

Globetrotting Marine earns an online degree in dietetics while on active duty.

MASTER SGT. KEN ROBERTS had just started taking online college classes in 2001 when his studies were interrupted by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He continued to take online classes over the years and just completed his bachelor's degree in dietetics in May 2016 at the Kansas State University Global Campus.

In the 15 years it took to earn his degree, Roberts studied online from all over the world – Japan, Thailand, Korea, Guam, Philippines, Tinian and on board USS Nassua while deployed to the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf and Galveston, Texas. He even studied during a four-month goodwill cruise to South America. “I recall doing chemistry in Thailand after working 14-hour days, doing organic chemistry while traveling through Korea and Saipan,” he says.

While he initially pursued a busi-

ness degree, Roberts' focus shifted while working as a Marine Corps drill instructor at Parris Island. He was selected to train other martial arts instructors and began a self-study on nutrition. “I learned the impact food has on physical performance and mental clarity,” he says. He applied what he learned to his martial arts students, and eventually to running, Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) and triathlons.

Roberts will retire from the Marine Corps in June 2017, going on terminal leave in April. He hopes to complete an internship with the VA in St. Louis and attend graduate school. He is married to an Air Force veteran and has three children.

We talked to Roberts about the challenges and advantages of earning an online degree while on active duty. ▶

“I needed an online program that was accredited and worth the time and money.”



STUDENT VETERAN

Ken Roberts

Age: 37

Military Service: Master Sergeant (E-8), Marine Corps (1996-Present)

Current Duty Station:

Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, Calif.

Expected Retirement: 30 June, 2017 (on terminal leave 28 April-30 June)

MOS: Logistics Chief (0491)

Degree:

Bachelor's degree, dietetics, Kansas State University Global Campus, Spring 2016

Other degrees/diplomas/certs/licenses:

15 certifications



► **Why did you opt for an online degree program as opposed to an on-campus or hybrid program?**

Roberts: I knew I was going to be active in the Marine Corps for quite some time, and had no plans to separate until I retired. I was good at my job and a good Marine, so why get out when you're still having fun. I needed an online program that was accredited and worth the time and money.

How did you research your options?

Roberts: I researched online programs with AND, and found Kansas State University. They offered a 2+2 program where you could complete the prerequisite work through Barton County Community College all online, and guaranteed the transfer of those courses to the Didactic Program in Dietetics with K-State.

Why did you choose Kansas State University Global Campus?

Roberts: From what I could tell, K-State was one of the first colleges in the country to begin teaching dietetics as well as the first to teach it online. They are in my opinion a top-notch university.

Did you deploy overseas while working on your degree?

Roberts: Yes, absolutely. Most of my degree was performed overseas in some region of the world. Very little work was done within the United States.

What was your biggest obstacle in earning a degree online? How did you overcome it?

Roberts: The biggest obstacle would have to be balancing family life, work and learning a new profession. It was challenging, because none of the three things were cohesive to each other. It was difficult to determine which one would take the priority on a given day. I realized quickly that many of the distance (online) students were career changers, and for many of us we were missing that college experience where you connected with your fellow students. Realistically those classes were one of the stresses that unbalanced my family and work. They were the new addition to the mobile of my life. In order to balance my three obstacles I thought to create a group on Facebook that allowed distance dietetic students from K-State to join and connect with each other. In 2012 I sought permission to do so from ►