

Wednesday, December 17, 2008

Dedicated student aims to help war veterans

Unbelievable. That's how Jamie Wright describes the experience of earning his bachelor's degree from Oakland University.

"If someone would have told me a few years ago that I would be graduating from college and heading to graduate school, I wouldn't have believed it," says Wright, a sociology major, with a specialization in criminal justice, who graduated this December.

A nontraditional student, Wright didn't begin his college experience immediately after high school. Looking back, he says he didn't have the mindset or interest he needed to apply himself. His focus shifted, however, while serving in the United States Army. He entered the service in 2002 and was eventually deployed to serve in the Iraq war. He fought on the front lines as an artillery crew member and later earned the rank of sergeant.

"I realized that the only difference between me and the officers was a bachelor's degree," says Wright. "Officers with degrees received better treatment, more respect and increased pay."

Wright's unofficial post-high school educational experience began in Idaroberstein, Germany, where he was stationed before and after his 15-month stint in Iraq. He traveled to several countries during his free time, exposing himself to as many cultures as possible.

In 2006, Wright returned stateside and, with the help of the GI Bill, set his sights on a college education. Within a year he earned an associate's degree in criminal justice from Oakland Community College. Soon after, he was immersed as a full-time, year-round student at OU, maintaining an overall 3.8 grade point average.

Initially, Wright says he was drawn to OU because of its great reputation, affordability, location, and the ease of transferring credits from OCC. Moreover, an on-campus veteran's representative helped him navigate the financial paperwork with the government.

Once Wright's studies were underway, he was confident he had chosen the right university. The first of his siblings to earn a college degree, Wright humbly and modestly credits OU with much of his success.

"I appreciated being taught by professors, rather than graduate students," Wright says. "The instructors were attentive and actually cared about helping me obtain my goals."

Professor Albert Jay Meehan, sociology/anthropology chair, was particularly helpful in Wright's educational journey. "Professor Meehan encouraged and motivated me. He helped me to have a rounder experience so I wouldn't get locked into one area."

Wright's well-rounded education included an internship with the Community Relations office of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, one of the largest in the nation with 1,200 employees. This gave Wright the chance to witness firsthand the criminal justice system as well as the opportunity to network professionally with people at all levels, including Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard.

"Jamie is impressive and he has a great future ahead of him," Bouchard says. "Oakland University did a great job advising him in combining his skills and interests with a career goal."

Earning a master's degree is Wright's next order of business, though he is undecided on where he will study. Wright plans to pursue a master's degree in social work with a specialization in clinical mental health and interpersonal skills. Ultimately, Wright hopes to use his education and personal experience to work with veterans who have returned from war.

"Male social workers are difficult to find in the military," says Wright. "It is also unusual for a social worker to have served in combat."

Wright's success isn't unbelievable, as he once thought. It's just unbelievably good.

SUMMARY

Unbelievable. That's how Jamie Wright describes the experience of earning his bachelor's degree from Oakland University. "If someone would have told me a few years ago that I would be graduating from college and heading to graduate school, I wouldn't have believed it," says Wright, a sociology major, with a specialization in criminal justice, who graduates this December.

Created by Sandra Dykstra (dykstra@oakland.edu) on Wednesday, December 17, 2008
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, July 22, 2009
Article Start Date: Wednesday, December 17, 2008