



# COAST TO COAST

Sailor earns graduate degree from Oregon State while stationed in South Carolina.

BY TYLER HANSEN

There are a million reasons to not do something. Take college, for example: It's an arduous process. It's time-consuming. It challenges you daily. It also requires a financial investment.

The list goes on and on.

U.S. Navy veteran Colby Mangini saw things differently. When he enrolled in Oregon State University's online graduate program in radiation health physics in 2006, he saw green lights everywhere telling him to go for it.

"There was really no reason not to take advantage of the opportunity," says Mangini, 31, who was working as a nuclear power school instructor while stationed in Charleston, S.C. "I was teaching courses very similar to what are in the field, and the course options available online through OSU were better than anything I could find elsewhere."

Within two years, Mangini earned a Master of Health Physics degree online through Oregon State Ecampus. It was an experience he still raves about. One of his online classmates helped him land a job after graduation, and a trip to the OSU campus in Corvallis spurred him to enroll in the university's Ph.D. health physics program soon thereafter.

Now he's a health physicist at a nuclear power laboratory in upstate New York, and we recently caught up with him to discuss why he chose the path he did and why he thinks all veterans would be wise to capitalize on the educational opportunities in front of them. ▶



► **Why did you decide to pursue an education while you were active duty?**

**CM:** I went for an advanced degree while I was in the Navy because they were really strong advocates for pursuing an education. There also was a strong financial package to assist me in that pursuit. The position I was in, in terms of me being stationed at a nuclear training facility, I was able to do course work that was related to my job function at the facility. I spent two hours a day at work doing course work, and it was fully supported in terms of my chain of command.

**What military education benefits were you able to use?**

**CM:** Navy Tuition Assistance and the GI Bill. "They paid for my education almost in full; I'd say 75 to 80 percent. In my experience outside the military, when it comes to continuing your education, that type of financial package from an employer is hard to come by.

**How would you describe your experience as an online student?**

**CM:** My experience with Ecampus was great. If I'd had the opportunity to take all my classes online, I would have done that. The ability to access the courses when you want them and need them was really great. I wish during my Ph.D. program (on campus at OSU) that I had access to archived footage of lectures like I did in my (Ecampus) master's program, because sometimes your notes aren't that great and you want to go back and listen again. To me, that aspect of my online education was truly amazing.

**How did your experience in the health physics online program prepare you for your current job?**

**CM:** Since getting out of the Navy, I have applied for four jobs and have received four job offers. I say this not to toot my own horn, honestly, but I think that the combination of military experience

**COLBY MANGINI**



**Residence:** Schenectady, N.Y.

**Age:** 31

**Degrees:** Master of Health Physics, 2008 (completed online with Oregon State Ecampus); Ph.D. in Health Physics, 2010 (completed on campus at OSU)

**Military Service:**

Navy (2005-2009)

**Highest Rank:** Lieutenant (O-3)

**Military Job:** Nuclear power school instructor

**Civilian Job:** Health physicist (dosimetry), Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory

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and a quality education is seen as such a valuable commodity in today's workforce. ... Not only did this set me up for getting a great job at Knolls, but it (also) helps me tremendously on the job. I now feel prepared from both a knowledge standpoint and a capability standpoint.

**How did your military experience help you as a student?**

**CM:** Having that military training and experience helped because you become more disciplined and you're held to a higher standard. You're more accountable. It helped in getting my work done. When you're an online student, you don't have the oversight that you do in on-campus courses. You need to be disciplined every day.

**What advice would you give other veterans who are considering pursuing their education?**

**CM:** It's difficult to carve out the time to study whether you're active or no longer in the military. If you can make the commitment to yourself to say, 'I'm going to spend this much time after work to do the course work and complete this degree,' you'll be glad you made the effort. The fact that the support is there, financial and otherwise – it's a big opportunity missed if you don't take advantage of all the assistance you're given through Veterans Affairs.