

Homeland Security Student Creates Emergency Management Plan With N.H. National Guard

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STAFF SARGENT DENNIS FITTON, LEFT, TALKS WITH PROFESSOR JAMES RAMSAY, WHO FITTON SAYS HAS BEEN HIS MENTOR THROUGHOUT HIS HOMELAND SECURITY STUDIES.

After nearly 15 years away from school, Staff Sergeant Dennis Fitton decided he wanted to take a Microsoft Office refresher class. The Army veteran went to NHTI in search of such a class, and, before he knew it, he was on his way toward an associate degree in criminal justice.

A combat veteran with more than 15 years in the military, Fitton served multiple deployments overseas. For the final eight years

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he has been a member of the New Hampshire National Guard and was most recently working as a Sergeant at the N.H. State Prison for Men. Going back to college wasn't part of his plan, until NHTI encouraged him to enroll in a degree program using his military benefits.

"I talked it over with my wife who already had her master's degree, and is one of the smartest people I've ever met. She thought it was a great idea," Fitton said. "I knew I would also be setting a positive example for our daughter."

From coaching tee-ball to his passion for service to his country, his daughter is an inspiration for much of what he does.

"Ever since my daughter could talk she goes around and tells anyone who will listen, 'My daddy is in the Army and he keeps us safe,'" said Fitton.

After Fitton graduated from NHTI, he was approached by [Dr. James Ramsay](#), professor of security studies and coordinator of the [Homeland Security program](#) at UNH, who encouraged him to consider a bachelor's degree in homeland security. Fitton wasn't convinced at first, but he said, "Dr. Ramsay was very persistent." Taking Ramsay's advice, Fitton went to an open house at UNH Manchester.

"After meeting Dr. Ramsay and hearing what he had to say, personally and professionally he exemplifies all the great things that come out of the field of homeland security," Fitton said. "I became very passionate about the subject."

One of the best experiences he's had in the program so far came during an Emergency Management class when he was chosen to help Alvrine High School in Hudson, N.H., write an emergency operations plan.

"Dr. Ramsay mentored me and critiqued my work and I produced a high-quality product I was proud of," said Fitton. "I believe they

implemented many of the recommendations I had made.”

Now in his final year of the program, Fitton is doing an internship with the N.H. National Guard’s Joint Operations Center (JOC).

Working alongside high-ranking military officers and civilian staff, Fitton is researching, writing and preparing documents to contribute to an emergency management plan for the N.H. National Guard. He is also designing an exercise to test the plan for potential gaps once it’s completed.

“My goal for the internship was to see if I could leave the academic realm and compete in a real-world environment and sustain a level of competence that’s equal with people in the field. It’s a true test,” said Fitton. “When there is a group of high-ranking military officers and I interject with a recommendation or a piece of information, and they look at me and say ‘We didn’t know that,’ that is awesome. That has an immense impact on your confidence.”

Fitton graduates in December 2017 and hasn’t had any regrets about going back to school.

“My experience in the program has been fantastic. I’ve never been challenged so much to critically think, to be open minded and to be versatile,” he said. “Most people spend their whole lives being bystanders. This program provides people with the tools needed to go out and effectively be a practitioner to make change and ensure safety and prosperity.”


Following graduation, Fitton said he’s considering a move to Washington, D.C., to work in emergency management with the Department of Defense. He’s also considering a change to a civilian career in the corporate security field.

“The nice thing about corporate security is that it touches on all parts of homeland security, from cybersecurity to emergency management and everything in between,” Fitton said.

He feels confident that his experience and education will provide him with many career opportunities.

“Out of all the colleges I could have gone to, choosing UNH was the best decision,” Fitton said. “When you walk into a job interview as a graduate of UNH’s [Homeland Security program](#), it means something to people.”

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WRITTEN [Kim Wall](#) | UNH Manchester

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