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Nursing grad navigates rigorous naval commissioning route

Sacramento State alumna Sarah Blake has seafaring in her DNA. Her father served as a submariner in the U.S. Navy. Her great-grandfather, cousin, aunt and uncle were sailors as well, while her younger brother is completing submarine school in Groton, Conn.

Factor in both of her grandfathers and three uncles who also served their country in the Air Force and Army, and one begins to understand Blake’s motivation to pursue military service. She was commissioned as an ensign in the Navy Nurse Corps on Friday, March 15, at Sacramento State and welcomed as the family’s first commissioned officer by her proud parents and three sisters.

Blake’s quest to become a naval officer began in earnest in 2012, when she underwent multiple interviews, security clearance screening, credentialing and a highly selective board review process. The chances of a person being commissioned without preliminary training are slim: The process is so competitive that some naval officers warned Blake that the odds of a recent graduate being chosen from all the applicants would be akin to winning the lottery.

Then again, the 25-year-old thrives on challenges. She graduated magna cum laude with a double major (nursing and FACS/family studies) in May. Along the way, she was on the Dean’s List, in multiple honor societies, and served as president and vice president of two student organizations.

Her most cherished achievement at Sac State was receiving her nursing pin. It signifies completion of nursing school, which is “not only hard to get into but even harder to finish,” Blake says.

“Sarah combines a razor-sharp engineering/IT-type mind with a compassionate, caring heart and an inner drive to excel,” says Debra Brady, whom Blake cites along with Katherine Kelly as among her mentoring instructors. “She has contributed well over 400 hours of volunteer time in the School of Nursing, working in simulation labs, mentoring students, providing assistance to faculty and students with computer/IT
issues, and being part of community projects. Her contributions have made the school a better place.”

Kelly is similarly impressed: “Sarah is definitely an asset to Sacramento State. As a student in the School of Nursing, she demonstrated her leadership as a mentor and teaching assistant. Her infinite knowledge (of computer software) has bailed many a faculty member out at the last minute.”

Blake’s technology skills prompted Sac State’s Academic Technology & Creative Services to hire her as a consultant in October. Her nursing and technology talents also should hasten her admission to graduate school; the only question is whether she will return to civilian nursing after her initial four-year contract or remain in the service for a 20-year-plus career.

On Saturday, May 11, she will report to Officer Development School in Newport, R.I., for five weeks of intensive training. Upon completion of ODS, she will report to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the largest military medical center in the United States.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.
– Alan Miller
amiller@csus.edu

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