

The best thing that happened to Jefferson Matos was that he was denied admission to Bloomfield College.

"I decided that I didn't want to just work a job, I wanted something different," he explains. So he joined the Marines. It was this experience that gave him the maturity to return to Bloomfield College four years later to study database administration (CIS) with great focus and determination.

His decision to join this particular branch of the military was based on the fact that he felt he would fully experience military life in the Marine Corps. "I didn't want to end up in a desk job," he says. "I wanted the full effect, and I was assigned to the infantry." Jefferson did two combat deployments in Iraq; the first at Camp Ashraf and the second at Camp Ramadi. In between deployments he continued intensive combat training

at 29 Palms Base which is in California's Mojave Desert. His third deployment was as a combat instructor at this base and he ended his time in the Marines as a corporal, E4.

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During his last year in the Marines, Jefferson started to plan for his future. He began investigating the various funding sources available to veterans which allow them to go to college. "I knew I wanted to go to Bloomfield College," he says. "Dan Mendoza (admissions counselor) helped me with the application process, but I had already secured the funding through the Post 9/11 GI Bill and I am a Yellow Ribbon recipient as well." Because he did his homework well ahead of time, Jefferson started college one month after getting out of the Marines instead of waiting the whole semester.

He has found that his time in the Marines has given him the maturity and discipline to focus on his studies. He chose database administration because, as he explains, "I wanted the best of both networking and programming. I am really a tech guy – I have always loved technology." His transition to college was relatively smooth, although he says that his transition to civilian life wasn't as easy. "On one of my deployments, we had a freezer full of Hot Pockets. That, and frozen microwave pizzas," he explains. Needless to say, he no longer takes for granted the food that he eats. "One of my buddies in another unit went for four months without a shower and wearing the same clothes. I have learned to appreciate the simple things that I used to take for granted."

Jefferson is an LSAMP scholar and is considering the McNair program. "I have to decide soon if I want to continue going to school to the doctoral level." Meanwhile, this Dominican native lives in West New York and spends most of his time convincing other students to buy Apple products.

Financially, Jefferson will graduate from Bloomfield College without any debt due to his military benefits and the Yellow Ribbon Program. But he cautions those who are considering joining the military. "Don't do it for the gratitude or the recognition. It is not like how you see it in *Call of Duty*," he says. "I now belong to a brotherhood and have met people from all over. I can go anywhere and find another Marine."

His future aspirations are to work either for the department of veteran affairs or for Apple. Working for the VA would allow him to continue his pension benefits as well as be in an environment in which he is quite comfortable. "There is camaraderie among those who have experienced the same things you have," he says. As far as working for Apple? "I am a little obsessed with Apple products," he says. "I am very loyal to their brand!"

Loyalty indeed. Jefferson has lived the Marine Corps motto: Semper Paratus; always faithful. He has given his loyalty to the military and to Bloomfield College. Apple, are you listening? ■

