

SoPA grad drew on experiences as a Marine while studying design

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Raul Fuster used his experiences in the U.S. Marine Corps when studying for his major in Digital Design and minor in Interactive Design from the Tulane School of Professional Advancement. (Photo courtesy of Raul Fuster)

When Raul Fuster retired from the U.S. Marine Corps after 20 years in 2019, he decided he wanted to go back to school. Originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, Fuster went to high school in Bay St. Louis where he developed an interest in film and photography. He then attended the University of Southern Mississippi where he eventually switched his focus to computer science but left, before earning a degree, to enlist in the Marines.

Throughout his career in the Marine Corps, Fuster adopted various roles and amassed a considerable breadth of experience. He worked as a technician working on the avionics on utility and attack helicopters. He worked as a recruiter in Massachusetts and an avionics instructor aboard Camp Pendleton, Ca. He worked as a substance abuse control officer and suicide prevention officer with various units. He served at the Naval Air Station New Orleans in Belle Chasse for six years with HMLA-773 Det. A as an avionics technician.

He also saw five combat deployments as a Marine. The latter resulted in him suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as well as anxiety and depression. When he retired and was contemplating a return to school, Fuster wanted to find a program that could provide accommodations to help him manage his PTSD symptoms. He also has attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) which makes it harder for him to learn just by reading information.

Fuster worked with a Department of Veterans Affairs program called Veterans Readiness and Employment that collaborates with veterans who are interested in pursuing new careers or studies but have a service-related disability that can limit their ability to work. Fuster said his VA counselor recommended Tulane's School of Professional Advancement (SoPA).

This week he will graduate from SoPA with a major in Digital Design and a minor in Interactive Design.

"My education experience until now was that everything taught in school was theoretical. With this program, everything is very hands-on. I saw that there was a practical application for what I was working on and was able to be very engaged with that," he said.

This semester he was the graphic design lead for Studio 4150, the program's Capstone course, and was able to draw from his experience with the Marines to work

with his team.

“You learn working on a team that you have to be able to work together, learn from each other and communicate. Sometimes plans change and you have to adapt and overcome to move forward,” he said.

Fuster said that his professors were very flexible and able to guide him and provide direction in a way that helped him manage his stress.

For instance, Professor Rebecca Carr, director of the Media + Design program insisted he reschedule his upper-level review in April when it fell on the same week as a trip he had planned to visit family in Puerto Rico.

“She insisted on moving it and I’m glad because otherwise my anxiety would have been through the roof. This is the way it has been. There has been so much support,” said Fuster.

Right after graduation Fuster will travel to San Francisco to participate in the final AIDS/LifeCycle ride in June. It is a 545-mile charitable bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles to raise funds for HIV/ AIDS services in San Francisco. Thanks to the skills he learned during his time at SoPA, Fuster created a series of posters to commemorate the final ride of AIDS/LifeCycle and is selling them to supplement his fundraising efforts. Fuster participated in the event for the first time in 2019 and is excited to join in the group’s last ride in June.