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# From an Airman to an Actuary

By Charles Hahn



Charles Hahn is a junior at Rutgers University majoring in Economics and Statistics and will be graduating in May 2015. He can be reached at [cuhahn@gmail.com](mailto:cuhahn@gmail.com).

**S**ome people know their future career goal from the time they are in kindergarten. However, for me, the journey was not as straightforward.

The typical path to college begins in high school. Students study for the SAT, apply to schools, get accepted, and eventually move into dorms at the beginning of fall semester. I attempted to conform to this societal norm, but I failed. At the time, college simply wasn't where I wanted to be, so I didn't apply myself. As a result, my grades suffered, and I decided not to enroll for a third semester.

With few options available to me, I turned to the one organization I hoped would give me some direction in life. I had seen commercials on television where people talked about how the military taught them commitment and determination; these were two traits I desperately wanted in my own life. So, I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force.

After boot camp, I received technical training to become an aerospace propulsion journeyman (a fancy term for a jet engine mechanic). While it may be hard to imagine, my path to becoming an actuary started here.

As a mechanic, I not only needed to be highly detail oriented, but also understand how those details fit into the bigger picture of the maintenance operation. I worked on what was known as a "gray whale," the KC-135 refueling aircraft. During my time maintaining these aircrafts, I worked in extremely cold, hot, and fast-paced environments while meeting all my deadlines without compromising the mission. I gained leadership skills by mentoring other airmen and teaching them maintenance practices and procedures.

Furthermore, I gained problem solving skills while troubleshooting issues daily. I remember during a red ball (an urgent aircraft service request needed to complete a mission on time) a pilot asked why he could not start one of the engines. I quickly and carefully assessed the

situation, and was able to present the pilot an immediate solution. The pilot had simply forgotten to push a button that allowed air to flow through the engine. After I showed him the quick fix, we both laughed, and I walked away a hero.

So, the television commercials I had seen were right. The military taught me life lessons and skills I would carry through life. Before I joined the Air Force, I had wandered through life somewhat aimlessly, but now I know exactly what I want and I have the dedication to get there.

As soon as my military term ended, I drove from my home station in North Dakota to New Jersey, where I enrolled in classes at Middlesex County College (MCC). This time around, I was a completely different type of student. First, I had a goal of becoming an actuary. Second, I had the soft skills needed to make me successful. Finally, I had passion. I graduated from MCC as the class salutatorian, became a member on the college's Board of Trustees, and transferred to Rutgers University.

Some people ask me if I regret not applying myself when I originally went to college. While I understand why people ask this question, as I could have been further along in my career, I don't look at those years as wasted. Every step I took in life led me to where I am today, pursuing a career I know is suited for me, and in which I will be successful. Yes, it has been a long journey to become an actuary, but I find it exciting and well worth it. ☆