**When did you graduate from Oregon State and what was your specialty in?**

I graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences in January of 2016. While a specialization was not yet a requirement, my coursework focused on enforcement.

**While an Ecampus student, what was your life like? (family, job, life balance issues; what factors led you to consider a FW degree).**

Like most non-traditional students my path was anything but a straight line. I had two prior careers: 10 years in the food service industry and 20 years active duty military service in the U.S. Coast Guard. Although I grew up in the inner city, I always had a love of the environment, but it was not a career “people like me” did. Joining the military helped change my negative self-image and gave me the economic opportunity to pursue an academic education. During my second assignment in the Coast Guard in the summer of 2000, I was stationed in Astoria, OR. There, I had the chance to take a free class at Clatsop Community College. I chose an introductory class on field observations, a class that ultimately changed the direction of my life. After completing the course, I immediately investigated OSU’s fledgling online Fish and Wildlife degree, but it would take over a decade and a degree name change before becoming fully achievable on-line. Fast forward to 2012, I was a Chief Petty Officer second in command on a Coast Guard ship, a professional boxer, and married with a teen and two pre-teen children at home. When my acceptance into OSU came, it came with conditions: I would need to attend Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College to gain a stronger biology and math background. After finishing the required courses with academic honors, I was at last able to begin classes at OSU. I moved to a training position with the Coast Guard and instructed across an 18-state territory. Traveling turned out to be a wonderful blessing. I was able to get hands-on experience in regions from the Great Lakes, West Virginia, dry plains in Texas and Oklahoma, to the wetlands of the Gulf Coast. All blessings do have their cost: many test and assignments were completed at wi-fi hotspots and hotel lobbies. Just when I had everything settled, and I was down to my last four classes, my assignment officer called to offer me a once in a career assignment for two to four years on a new ship joining the fleet in Puerto Rico. Knowing that when the vessel became fully operational, taking classes would have been impossible due to work tempo and no reliable internet. I decided to work full time and take on full time classes. While a challenge, it was my most enjoyable term. Island ecology and agriculture were amazing to be immersed in and working across cultures and in several different nations broadened my perspective. I truly encourage anyone living oversees not to shy from the school because of language or local familiarity.

**What jobs have you done since graduation?**

I just retired from the military and started my first job in the field on the 14th of Dec. I am currently working for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as a Fish and Wildlife Technician at the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area. We manage over 82,000 acres dedicated to improving natural opportunities for the people of Florida today and in the future.

**What is my normal day like, what do you find rewarding and challenging?**

The best part of the job is there are no “normal” days. In my first month, I have worked on engines, repaired fences, assisted senior biologist in oyster surveys, dissected deer heads to test for chronic wasting disease, learned protocol for surveying invasive plants and native salamanders, and even learned to be part of a prescribed burn crew. I’m in a learning phase so every task comes with formal and informal training. I’m part of a team with four other, more experienced, scientists. They are always eager to help me “get it right.” My biggest challenge is being patient with myself. FWC has a one-year onboarding program to help new employees finish their qualifications and explore the agency. It was not meant to be finished in a month.

**How often do you work with animals and in an office?**

The work is seasonal. We are equally responsible to each species as we are to the whole community and the environment they live in. We also have a strong commitment to the people of Florida to maintain their access and enjoyment of this public land. This dynamic means some days are filled with hands on work with animals, and others by interfacing with the public at an educational event or building an access for wheelchairs. Office work is kept to a minimum, for example office work is mostly cleaning and prepping gear at my level.

**What organizations do you partner with and in what capacity?**

Although there are more than I can list we work closely with several other state and federal agencies that manage land that is abutting or near us, and several non-profit agencies that share an interest for the species found on the area we manage.

**What advice can you give someone entering the field?**

Do as many and as broad-spectrum internships as possible. It is never too early to start or too small of an opportunity. Do not overlook volunteer work especially if you gain a skill. Unless you can gain a year of practical hands-on experience in your specialty, realize that you will most likely need to start as a tech to gain the skills needed to be a biologist. I was originally against going on to further education: I was content to be done with school. Now I am looking at graduate programs and gaining professional certification. Why the change? When you have experience in a specialty, upward mobility is faster and more linear through further education, peer-reviewed publishing, professional certification and further specialization. I also recommend commercial licenses, and applicable certification courses that will be used in your specialization. Some example certifications could include master diver, ATV safety, hunter safety, state boating license, or commercial pesticide applicator. These “short courses” are also continued education and can separate you from someone with equal college education and experience. Lastly, be willing to move; this is a field of chance, and when that chance presents itself you need to be able to jump on it. Please take this advice with a grain of salt; I am new to the field, and there is always more than one way to skin a beaver!