



Ben Berman

EOU, distance education through Southwestern Oregon University Center

Age: 27

Year: Senior

Major: Physical Education and Health, minor in History

Goal: to become an athletic director of physical education instructor at a college level

Ben Berman is currently stationed with the U.S. Coast Guard in North Bend, Oregon, where he is on active duty while pursuing his EOU bachelor's degree via distance education at the Southwestern Oregon University Center. Distance education programs have allowed him to complete his education even while balancing his active military duty and family responsibilities as a husband with two young children. He actually started his college career at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande straight out of high school in 1996-97, where he intended to study biology. He was an EOU baseball player at the time, but unfortunately suffered an injury that interrupted his education. The challenge of recuperating from the injury also made him consider altering his study path to physical education, and he decided to join the U.S. Coast Guard to help finance his education. His main challenge has been working a 68-80 hour week in the Coast Guard while balancing family and school, but he has been successful because of his personal initiative, the wealth of support he received from the University Center administrators, strong instructors, and a strong network of technical and student services support. Ben is looking forward to a graduate program through the American Military University that is also distance-learning based, and says that the personal initiative required of distance learners is actually a great benefit to students who wish to pursue advanced degrees: "It disciplines students to become self-studiers and self-researchers without the classroom environment." While lack of student interaction was an issue a few years ago, Ben says it was largely solved with the introduction of new software in the Blackboard program, which functions as an on-line classroom with an announcement board, discussion board, presentation capabilities, and other options. He speaks highly of Southwestern Oregon University Center's Ellen Riley, who has been instrumental in his successful path toward his degree, and the Center's director, Dr. Andy Duncan, whom he states is "willing to drop everything if a student is at his door." He also credits systems many others might overlook, such as the efficiency of Joann Tildon at the EOU bookstore who makes sure Ben's text books are on his doorstep within forty-eight hours, and the online reservation system with the EOU library system that allows Ben to pursue his research. Ben will be stationed in Alabama for the next two years while pursuing his Masters, but as soon as he is finished with his military service, he'll definitely be back.