Stamford Police Officer Solves Degree Dilemma Through IDEAL Program

STAMFORD, Conn. — Stamford police officer Mark Sinise had acquired some college credits, but with five years on the force and a challenging work schedule he was not sure how he could fit in time to finish his degree. The University of Bridgeport’s IDEAL Program proved to be the solution.

Sinise, a computer forensic examiner for the Stamford Police Department, enrolled in Bridgeport’s IDEAL Program and one year later had his degree. “I really wanted to get my bachelor’s degree,” he said. “I had taken some classes but had probably missed five years. I was thinking I might not have this opportunity again.”

Sinise acquired a general studies degree from the University of Bridgeport. The school accepted 90 credits he had earned at other colleges, and Bridgeport made the process easy for him to enroll and acquire the others he needed.

“It was so simple,” Sinise said. “It was a great school. I liked the instructors. I had a lot of repeat instructors. I try to tell my co-workers that if you’re considering going back to school, you should check out UB.”

Sinise attended classes in Stamford and Trumbull, with the schedules running five to eight weeks. “I really liked the short classes,” he said. “It was geared toward the working adults. It was challenging but not overwhelming. It was the right amount of work. You always had enough time to do what you had to do.”

Obtaining a degree is a challenge for young officers, who frequently work nights and weekends. Sinise said he switched shifts with colleagues when necessary so he could attend school.

“That was the biggest challenge,” said Sinise. “Fortunately I was able to switch shifts and everything worked out. The classes were only once a week, so it made it a little easier to switch shifts.”

He also said he liked the classroom diversity at the University of Bridgeport, where the age of students ranged from the mid-20s into their 50s and 60s. The degree has also helped financially, because the Stamford Police Department provides incentives for members who obtain their degrees.

He has taken his experience at Bridgeport and gone on to a rewarding career in police work, where he collects data from computers and cell phones to trace criminal activity.

“It’s the way of the future,” Sinise said. “Everybody uses a computer and cell phone these days. It’s trying to find the evidence and it can be hard to keep up with the latest trends. The biggest challenge is fiscal, because every community has budget considerations. It’s fun catching the bad guys. It’s very rewarding.”

by Tom Renner

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