Student Sheds Doubts To Earn Degree From University Of Bridgeport

FAIRFIELD COUNTY, Conn. – John Stargu believes he’s the perfect spokesperson for anyone who doubts they can earn a college degree. “If you think you can’t do it, come and see me,” said Stargu, 52, who graduated last month from the University of Bridgeport. “If you really want that degree, you can get it.”

Stargu worked for five years through UB’s IDEAL program to obtain his degree in Business. He graduated with a 3.91 GPA, was inducted into the Honor Society Alpha Sigma Lambda and graduated Summa Cum Laude.

Stargu earned his degree while working full-time for Liberty Mutual Insurance. He said academic advisors Karen Lozada and Sarah Squatriglia kept him focused and encouraged him throughout his studies.

“They made it so easy for me,” Stargu said. “They helped me find the path and the direction I needed to go. They told me when to take a particular class and when it was being offered. I had doubts about myself that I could do it. They had the confidence I could do it. If it wasn’t for them, I don’t know how I would've made it through.”

Stargu also credits his wife, Diane, with helping him earn his degree. “She was my backbone,” Stargu said. “She knew I had to study. We didn’t go on vacation for three years because she knew I wanted to get my degree.”

Stargu started school much earlier in his life, but his mother, Mary, became ill and he needed to step back from college. When she died in 2006, his father, also named John, encouraged him to return to school, and when Stargu graduated, his father attended the ceremony.

“I did this for my mother, my father and for myself,” said Stargu, who is the first person in his family to earn a college degree. “My father is a World War II veteran, a B24 bomber. All he wanted to do was to go to this graduation. He told me ‘I don’t want you to have to work as hard as I did.’ He was there with my sister and my brother, and I know they were all very proud of me.”

Stargu said his experience at Bridgeport was perfect from start to finish. “The teachers I had, the mix of online and on-campus courses, every single class was outstanding,” he said. “My last class was in math, and my professor, Ricardo Martinez, understood what it was like for people in the work force. He made it understandable. He’d come in early for us if we needed help. All of the professors were truly outstanding.”

Stargu remembers starting at Bridgeport five years ago and thinking graduation was a long way off. Now that he has received his degree, he feels the time flew.

“I can’t believe how quickly it went by,” he said. “When I went to college when I was younger, it was because people were pushing me. This time, I wanted to do this. And I felt great that I was able to help others. Because I was older, other students were looking up to me as an advisor. They were listening to me. It was a good sense of accomplishment.”

by Tom Renner

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