

Dr. Allen Barclay

NSU School of Business

U.S. Coast Guard

New Jersey, Virginia, Kansas, San Francisco, San Diego and Boston: Stationed in so many places, Allen Barclay never worried about falling into a rut during his time in the U.S. Coast Guard.

“I did almost everything, everywhere,” he said.

Barclay, 42, is an assistant professor of management for the Northern State University School of Business. He served in the Coast Guard for seven years and achieved the rank of yeoman 2nd class.

Family pride and family tradition brought Barclay to the Coast Guard, as he followed in the footsteps of his dad and brother.

Barclay’s first job was at a facility in Virginia, where he was an ambulance driver and worked with electricians on building maintenance and repair. Barclay then did payroll work in Topeka, Kan., at the Frank Carlson Federal Building where, on Aug. 3, 1993, a shooter entered the building and attacked, killing one person and injuring others. Barclay and many colleagues were trapped in the building, which was cordoned off and surrounded by snipers.

Barclay, who was in the Coast Guard during the first Gulf War, said he and his colleagues had been trained to handle violent situations on a ship or base - but never expected to be attacked while working administrative jobs in the Midwest. “That was one of the very early instances of domestic terrorism – it’s something I will never forget,” Barclay said. Barclay also clearly recalls details of his final Coast Guard job. As liaison to the U.S. Navy, Barclay helped arrange war games between Navy and Coast Guard ships in San Diego.

“We did scenario-based things with fighter jets, helicopters, missiles, mines, fake fires, sometimes we’d roll the ships over - it was crazy,” Barclay said. “We would actually have planes ‘attack,’ or we would literally set up mines then send the ship through.”

If “hit,” mines would magnetize to the side of the ship, with all on that side of the ship assumed “dead” for the purpose of the games, Barclay said. “It was every scenario you could ever imagine to happen to a ship, and the ship had to pass. We made it as realistic as possible.”

With its frequent moves, the military lifestyle lost its attractions after Barclay married and had a child. He left the Coast Guard, aiming to move back to the Midwest to raise his family.

Barclay, who has worked at NSU 2 ½ years, said he’s taught at schools around the country where student veterans struggle with lingering post-traumatic stress disorder. College poses unique challenges to student veterans as well – and the contrast between military training and higher education can set student veterans up for failure, he said.

“The military doesn’t prepare you for college; college doesn’t prepare for the military. The mentality is different. ‘Failure isn’t an option’ is a military motto. In college, failure is quite rampant. If you don’t do your work, you fail.”

In the military, Barclay added, often tests can be retaken multiple times – not so at a college or university.



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Auxiliarist Rey Armstrong

“In the military, there are people there to support you, train you, invest millions of dollars in you. In college, you’re on your own – there’s no one there to hold your hand, and you’re now spending your own money.”

Military students may chafe under restrictions meant for less-experienced students, Barclay added. In the military, an individual may be responsible for a million-dollar piece of equipment, but while at school, the person wouldn’t be allowed unsupervised access to the computer lab, he said.

Military students’ experience also can be an advantage, Barclay said.

“They’ve done more. They’ve seen more. They’ve traveled more. They’ve had jobs. It gives them an advantage over those who have just been in high school. They have seen a lot of the world,” Barclay said.

Northern’s affordability is an attractive option for military students, Barclay said, adding “We have a very open-minded campus in a very patriotic state. South Dakota and South Dakotans are proud of their military.”

Barclay encourages student veterans and active military students to seek out and find someone at Northern who’s had military service, whether employee, faculty member or other students.

“One of the things that makes the military good is the team aspect: you’re never alone - but when you get to college, you are alone. I encourage them to find another student or staff or a faculty member who’s served, and just touch base.

“The student needs to take the initiative,” he said. “You learned in military to find stuff; use your skills and seek it out. Don’t come here and isolate yourself – there are other people who’ve gone through the same things you have: used the GI bill, gone to counseling, done stuff. Find those people and talk to them.”

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