

# Dr. Alan Neville

## NSU School of Education

### U.S. Army

Having enlisted in the U.S. Army for “purely mercenary reasons,” Alan Neville had no plans to stay longer than the minimum six-year term.

20 years later, after serving in the National Guard, Army Reserve, and on active duty, Neville retired as a sergeant first class. Now 51, he’s a professor of education at Northern State University, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses; department chair for elementary, secondary and special education; and president of the Faculty Senate.



Neville appreciates his military students’ advanced understanding of hard work, deadlines and getting things done.

“For enlisted people it’s all about doing the mission. In my mind, that’s a lot like homework or doing assignments,” he said.

He also values military students’ diverse experiences, often revealed in class discussions. Their perspectives are broader than those of students who never have ventured far from home, he said.

“ ... [They’ve] maybe been to war, been shot at, had friends who possibly have died or been injured, they’ve seen poor children in Panama or Iraq or Afghanistan. They’ve been around people who speak a different language, have different religion and a different value system ...

“We really have a surprisingly diverse campus – I think [military students] have a lot to share in our courses, especially in the School of Education, where we tend to emphasize more group discussions and projects.”

Neville said he enlisted in 1987 – “kind of late” – during his first year teaching. After spending summers attending annual training and traveling, Neville was on active duty for eight years during early Desert Storm. During that time, he used the military’s financial incentives, including tuition assistance and the GI Bill, to earn a master’s degree.

Neville secured a position as a full-time administrator for three different units in South Dakota, working in Brookings and Mitchell. He was sent twice to Panama and once to Italy, and was mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom, spending that time at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Neville's many military roles included legal non-commissioned officer, saxophone player and observer/controller trainer. Under the Combat Lifesavers program, Neville taught battlefield medicine to military members on their way to Iraq or Afghanistan.

He most enjoyed his trips overseas and the people with whom he worked. After "being immunized for every known thing that's out there," Neville was sent to Panama to live among farmers near the Costa Rican border.

"We were up by Noriega's hometown, so the country was still a little uneasy," Neville said. "In Panama City, it was a little bit unsafe and they would take shots at people now and then."

The soldiers enjoyed the local cuisine – including monkey on a stick – and went to cockfights.

"For the most part, the folks in the country appreciated us being there, but the city people weren't too happy about Americans being in their city."

Neville's unit was on rotation to be mobilized every three years. The frequent mobilizations didn't mesh with marriage and family life, and Neville retired from the military in 2008.



"I would have stayed in longer, but my wife was in the military too, and with five children and a full-time job that I generally enjoy, getting mobilized again wasn't terribly appealing."

Neville said that military students – all students – are more likely to succeed at Northern if they come to school with a clear vision and sense of purpose.!



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