Meet Estevan Baza

Former Marine Estevan Baza’s history of being a part of “the few, the proud” continued at USF as a member of the first graduating class (2013) of the Patel College of Global Sustainability. Today, this hard-working, dedicated vet is putting his knowledge, skills, and passion to work to make the City of Oldsmar a more sustainable community.

“I attribute my successes to not only my experiences in the Corps and education, but also the support I received from the USF Office of Veteran Services,” said Baza in a recent interview when he returned to campus for a sustainability conference.

As a Marine, Sergeant Baza served seven years as an airport firefighter and crew chief, embassy security guard, as well as a company administrative assistant—duties which stationed him in Arizona, Norway, Venezuela, Tunisia, California, and Afghanistan. Taking advantage of the military’s education benefits while on active duty, Baza became the first in his family to earn a college degree when he graduated with a BS in Business Administration and Management through Colorado Technical University.

With interest in a career in sustainability, Baza decided to leave the Marines to pursue an advanced degree, and returned home to Tampa to attend USF and be close to his family. Early on, he visited USF’s Office of Veteran Services (OVS) and tapped into the staff’s ability to navigate the Veterans Administration (VA) to fully access the benefits he had earned. The best part was Baza found camaraderie among the vets in the office—something he missed from his years in the military—and soon joined the crew as a VA work study student.

Additionally, Baza enrolled in the unique Strategy for Vet Success class for veterans only taught by OVS Director Larry Braue, Ed.D (LTC, US Army, retired). One of the most important takeaways from the class was the value of mentorship in his career field. With Dr. Braue’s assistance, Baza was matched with a mentor and, subsequently, landed an internship with the City of Tampa. The internship gave him experience that he credits for helping land his current job as a Sustainability Coordinator.

Today, Baza is deep in the development of the first sustainability plan for the City of Oldsmar, here in the Tampa Bay area. He also oversees the city’s solid waste operations for collection of garbage and recycling, is exploring opportunities to improve the energy performance of city buildings, and is responsible for community outreach, which includes planning Oldsmar’s first participation in National Plug-In Day in September 2014.

“I really feel that I can contribute the most to global sustainability here on the local level,” Baza said. “Although I can’t predict where my career will go—policy maker, city official—I believe making changes here is where I will find the most satisfaction.”

When asked what advice he has for vets attending USF, Baza quickly offered, “Take advantage of the opportunities and services on campus created just for you. If I hadn’t walked into Veteran Services, I probably would not have had a mentor and would have not gotten the internship that led me to the job I wanted.”