

A second act of service

They began their service in the U.S. military, now they go beyond by serving the FAU community.



Angela Nichols (left) and Justin Eggen (right) during their time in the U.S. military.

Military Friendly, the military ratings division of VIQTORY, has recognized Florida Atlantic University as a “[Military Friendly](#)” College for several years. The recognition functions as a standard to measure the university’s ability to create opportunities for the military community.

This not only applies to the student life aspect, but employment as well.

Several staff and faculty members are veterans and their service transcends into their work supporting students.

Justin Eggen



Eggen stationed overseas.
Courtesy of Justin Eggen.



Eggen in the Student Support Services building.
Photo by Ma. Emilia Santander.

As a form of patriotism, Justin Eggen, coordinator of Family Engagement & Mentoring within the university's office of [New Student Transitions and Family Engagement](#), decided at a young age that if there was still conflict and war over 9/11 that he would enlist.

He signed up for the Marine Corps in 2008.

Eggen deployed to Afghanistan in the 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion where his main duties included identifying IEDs or Improvised Explosive Devices. Spending much of their time in jeopardy still sticks with Eggen.

"A lot of times what you're thinking about is your next step, because your next step in Afghanistan could be your last step," said Eggen.

After his time deployed in Marjah and Sangin, he planned to reenlist in the Special Forces. However, he was unable to proceed due to an injury and his rank's "boat spaces" had already been filled –so he opted to be honorably discharged in 2012.

"Boat spaces" is a slang term referring to the certain amount of spaces for each rank in that job, or Military Occupational Specialty, because the Marine Corps is a department of the Navy.

"I think [my parents] might have been surprised that I came back because I was on the front lines," said Eggen. "A lot of my friends didn't make it back, or a lot of my friends lost their legs or their arms, or they made it back and they lost their fight to the their demons, you know, to like suicide. So, I think that my parents were just happy that I was home."

For the next two years, he dedicated himself to his education at Palm Beach State College learning architecture but soon realized that he was not in a state to be in an academic environment.

"War is chaos. War is nothing but nonsense, is insanity, actual insanity, and action. When you see what humans do to each other through violence, it changes your perspective. It changes how you operate your life," he described.

Eggen put himself in therapy through the Department of Veterans Affairs for the next four years. While working manual labor jobs, he started writing poetry inspired by his time in the Marine Corps.

Then in 2018, Eggen became a father and on his son's first birthday he began to reconsider his path.

"Fatherhood is the best thing, honestly. I love it to death. I love my son more than anything. That's why on his first birthday I was like, 'alright, well, how's my son going to view me in 20 years?'" he said.

Eggen applied to FAU as a political science major where he thrived as a community leader Eventually, he would become the president of the Veterans Owls Club for the Fall 2021 semester.

Donald Gabriel, director of the [Military and Veterans Student Success Center](#), said Eggen was "exceptional" during his time as a federal work-study employee.

Additionally, he was president of the Veteran Owls Club in the Fall 2021 semester.

Djery Clement, a graduate student in accounting, is a Marine veteran who was vice president and treasurer of Veterans Owls alongside Eggen.



Djery Clement, Marine veteran and graduate student at FAU, in front of the student Union.

Photo by Ma. Emilia Santander.

“His company was very enjoyable. He was very disciplined. He was laid back, professional, well spoken,” said Clement. “But he was a type of person that, you know, you could kick it back with, but you can also work together with them in terms of courteousness and professionalism.”

Eggen eventually decided to become more involved in the FAU community and applied to a job in the Career Center, while he worked on his master’s degree in political science and government.

By then, he had already published five poetry books and won the [Marine Corps Heritage Foundation](#)’s Robert A. Gannon Award, which recognizes a Marine poet dealing with Marine Corps life, in 2019 and 2020.

After a year, Eggen transferred to his current position.

“I just wanted to continue growing and into a better individual and just keep moving forward, and everything that I’ve been doing, I feel like has been a proper step in that direction,” said Eggen.

Eggen feels poetry has helped him translate his trauma. He also believes that exposing this area of literature could help other veterans.

Clement read Eggen's "Outside The Wire: A U.S. Marine's Collection of Combat Poems and Short Stories" and described it as "pretty damn good read" which resonated especially well with him.

He has written 10 total [poetry books](#).

Currently, Eggen is applying for the Ph.D. political science program and helping prepare for "Owls in the Outfield," an April 29 event to help bring parents and families together with student affairs professionals at the university.

"I love being here. I love the University," he said. "My opinion is that because everybody's been positively impacting and influencing the things that I've done."

Angela Nichols



Nichols won Battalion Soldier of the Quarter for the 314th Military Intelligence Battalion in San Antonio, Texas, in 2003.
Courtesy of Angela Nichols.



Nichols in the intersection between the Breezeway and Diversity Way.
Photo by Erika Fletcher.

Angela Nichols won Battalion Soldier of the Quarter for the 314th Military Intelligence Battalion in San Antonio, Texas in 2003. Courtesy of Angela Nichols.

While she did not intend for her career in the Army to be a long one, that didn't make Angela Nichols' transition to civilian life any less difficult.

Nichols, a political science professor at FAU, enlisted at 18. Born in a poor working-class family, who offered help with heavy strings attached, she sought independence and education through the military.

After five years of service, Nichols' divorce made her consider reenlisting, but her unwillingness to give up custody of her newborn son was a deciding factor not to do so.

Nichols retired as an Army E5 Sergeant with no combat experience.

She felt guilty for not being deployed with fellow soldiers during the Iraq conflict. Her transition to civilian life required her to accept the lack of relative discipline and order.

"For me, the fact that it was difficult was sort of a surprise. I honestly thought it would be easy," she said.

As a first generation student, she continued her education with the goal of going to law school to become a politician.

"[Ann Richards] was a real inspiration for me as a young woman because she came from a working class family, she rode a Harley. She was a 'do no harm, take no shit' kind of woman. And she was like a really powerful Texas lady, like the way I identify. And so I thought I could make a difference in the world by being a politician," she said.

However, Nichols had a change in plans when one of her professors at Pennsylvania State University challenged her thinking. Her new aim was becoming a professor.

For years, she worked as a substitute teacher at her old Texas high school while raising her son and working towards her Ph.D.

In 2014, Nichols applied to 36 jobs in academics. Yet, she chose FAU.

"I decided the position here was a better fit for me. I was going to be allowed to teach the classes that I preferred, to teach in my own way here in South Florida. And who doesn't want to move to the beach, right?" she shared.

Nichols teaches multiple classes on topics including human rights, comparative politics and research methods. She also is the assistant director of the [Center for Peace, Justice, and Human Rights](#).

Currently, she is [researching](#) women's engagement in Colombia's Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, the largest Colombian rebel group.

Political science professor Kevin Wagner described Nichols as a great colleague and fantastic teacher.

"I think that she really allows students to open up their own minds in their own assumptions about how the world works. And I think that's a great thing to see from a professor at FAU," said Julian Rey, senior political science major.

Nichols believes dignity is the most essential quality a person can have and discussing aspects of it is difficult, but by retelling personal experiences she is able to get across to them.

"In order to get dignity, I think we have to have empathy. And so through the stories, you're able to elicit a kind of empathy that you can't get when you're just teaching a sterilized set of facts," she said.

Jeniffer Lopez, a junior political science major, says that Nichols' classes touch sensitive subjects, but she manages to make them "light" and relatable.

Nichols strives to make her students aware that they are part of a bigger world.

She feels the military community is very isolated and misses the sense of comradery and loyalty. She advises everyone to consider the various reasons veterans enlist in the military and that "patriotism" comes in different forms.

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