



Alumni



MICHAEL JERNIGAN, USMC BA, *HISTORY '12*

Courageous. Steadfast. Intelligent. Tenacious. Loyal. These words are a mere fraction of the many admirable qualities that Michael Jernigan embodies. A St. Petersburg native, Mike spent his first 14 years moving with the military before returning to his hometown and graduating from St. Petersburg High School. He is a proud third generation Marine. Mike enlisted in the Corps on his 24th birthday in 2002 and was sworn in by his father, Michael V. Jernigan, also a USF alumnus. Active duty commenced in Okinawa where he also completed Jungle Warfare School. Deployed to Iraq, Mike served as a squad leader in

Mahmudiyah, Zaidon, and Fallujah during the deadly summer of 2004. In late August, Mike's humvee was struck by a roadside bomb. He lost both eyes, suffered a crushed cranium and additional severe trauma. Mike subsequently received a Combat Action Ribbon and the Purple Heart. Following extensive rehabilitation, Mike attended Georgetown University for a short time before transferring to USF St. Petersburg.

Majoring in History, Mike was an inspirational presence on campus, both inside and outside of the classroom. His amazing guide dog Brittani journeyed beside him, ever alert. In 2010, Mike was awarded the John B. Allwein Wounded Warrior Scholarship at a ceremony that also marked the dedication of the Veterans Memorial on campus. Following USFSP Commencement in May 2012, Mike started a new job as Community Outreach Coordinator for Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Along the way, Mike co-founded Paws for Patriots at Southeastern Guide Dogs, received the Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero award, and was featured in the HBO documentary Alive

Day Memories, produced by James Gandolfini. His advocacy for veterans is resolute and enduring. Mike is a motivational speaker and a contributing writer for the New York Times blog "Home Fires." In 2012, Mike received the prestigious George C. Alexander Volunteer Award from the national Blinded American Veterans Foundation.

Semper Fidelis.

"I left Georgetown University because the school was not ADA compliant; for this reason, it was not the right school for me. The University of South Florida in St. Petersburg accepted me with open arms. The disability office was very pro-active in working with me to better facilitate my education. The campus is gorgeous and the learning opportunities are exceptional. USFSP was undoubtedly the right school for me. Instead of walking around frustrated and not able to find my classes because of accessibility deficiencies, I was able to focus on my education. As a result, I did not just survive college — I thrived at USFSP. The school even had a graduation gown custom-made for my guide dog, Brittani — now that is going above and beyond. I will always be grateful to the administration and staff who made my college experience one that was truly extraordinary."

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Contact Us

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