Saluting Chicago Booth Veterans

Thanks to increased veteran recruitment efforts and the generosity of Chicago Booth donors, there has been a nearly 300 percent increase in veteran MBA students enrolled at the school since 2006.

This Veterans Day, Booth would like to highlight four of its many veteran students. Below is the story of four soldiers who have benefitted from veteran scholarships.

Shaliya Dehipawala
Full-Time MBA Program

As he commuted in from Queens to his high school in New York City, Shaliya Dehipawala would exit daily at the World Trade Center stop. Dehipawala feels that might have been part of the reason he became a paratrooper with the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division.

“I’m a first generation American, my parents are from Sri Lanka, and there are not a lot of folks who look like me in the military, so I was very curious and also felt a sense of duty to my country,” Dehipawala said. “In the military, I got to live in places that I wouldn’t have been exposed to and serve with such a diverse group of Americans that it really broadened my scope in a way that I don’t think would have been possible in any other situation.”

“I COULDN’T BE MORE PLEASED WITH THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AT BOOTH, IT CANNOT BE MATCHED.”

—Shaliya Dehipawala, MBA Candidate

After graduating from Cornell University with a math major, Dehipawala joined the service and was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During that time, Dehipawala estimates he made 20 jumps as a paratrooper.

“I was nervous every single time,” he said. “Jumping out of a plane is stressful because it’s so unpredictable. You hit the ground in the dark and you have to learn to lead in uncertain circumstances. But I think being nervous is a good thing—it’s a signal that what you’re about to do is very important and you have to focus. That’s helped me in other
areas, such as problem solving and getting ready for interviews. I’ve learned that being nervous is okay.” Dehipawala eventually envisions himself working for the government.

“I would love to use what I learn at Booth and in the private sector to help the government run more efficiently,” he said. “There are also amazing opportunities throughout the university for me to learn more about politics and public service from the civilian side.”

Dehipawala applied to a handful of business schools, is proud to have landed at Booth, and is very appreciative of the scholarship he received as a veteran.

“I couldn’t be more pleased with the academic environment at Chicago Booth; it cannot be matched,” he said. “Even with all my savings, and I was a frugal person in the military, the scholarship made a really, really big difference for me, allowing me to get out of school debt-free.”

Adam Hogg
Executive MBA Program - London

Adam Hogg has always loved a challenge. It’s why he became a fighter pilot in the Royal Navy, and the reason he choose to enroll in Chicago Booth’s Executive MBA Program, Europe.

“I wanted to fly aeroplanes since I was a child, and being a fighter pilot in the military was the most demanding and exhilarating type of flying I could find,” Hogg said. “I chose to study an Executive MBA at Chicago Booth because I wanted to learn the fundamentals of business and finance from the best. The combination of the subject, the people, and the challenge was exactly what I was looking for and the best way to equip myself for a great and successful career after the military.”

Hogg attended the University of Bath, majoring in aerospace engineering. He then spent almost 20 years as a military fighter pilot, flying the Harrier and F-35 Lightning stealth fighter jet. He was stationed in the United Kingdom but served three tours of duty in Afghanistan and was deployed all over the world, from the Arctic to India, most recently spending three years with the US Marines in South Carolina.

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—Adam Hogg, MBA Candidate

“Being on a squadron is like being in a Formula 1 team. Although it’s only me in the jet, it’s still a team game: managing and coordinating wingmen, other aircraft and agencies, and troops on the ground, whilst also working with engineers, intelligence officers and support staff to get ready for the mission,” Hogg said. “In the later years, as you become more senior and experienced, your time is split between flying, leading and mentoring teams, driving strategy, and managing stakeholders. At times it can feel like a huge responsibility, but the training we receive is great at normalizing some very strange and unique situations.”

As he prepares to transition out of his military career, Hogg decided to attend business school and chose Booth’s Executive MBA Program. He was awarded a scholarship, created in honor of the 75th anniversary of the world’s first MBA Program which started at the University of Chicago. One exceptional candidate from each campus receives the 75th Anniversary Alumni Scholarship each year, and Hogg was chosen from the London campus.
“I may not have been able to attend the program if it weren’t for the scholarship assistance I’ve been so privileged and proud to receive from Chicago Booth donors,” Hogg said. “With help from the 75th Anniversary Scholarship, I’ve been able to realize this unique opportunity. I wanted to attend Booth because of its stellar reputation as a ‘proper’ world-class MBA institution. As someone who wishes to transition into a new industry at the end of the program, it was critical that I found a degree that would give me the credibility, knowledge, and confidence I needed to step into a challenging role in business in the future.”

Mitchell Pulver
Full-Time MBA Program

Mitchell Pulver of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, grew up with a respect for service to his country and an admiration for strong leaders. He saw his father, a career FBI agent, volunteer for a stint in Iraq to conduct investigations and interrogations. While in high school, Pulver’s older sister, an athlete, was recruited by the US Naval Academy.

“It was while I was visiting my sister that I gained an early appreciation for the Naval Academy, which is designed specifically to appeal to leaders,” Pulver said. “I knew that I eventually wanted to be a leader in some capacity in the private sector, and that business school would set me up for that.”

Pulver decided to fast track his leadership training, and upon graduation from the Naval Academy, chose to serve on a destroyer and was soon deployed to the Middle East.

“You can typically spend another six months to three years in schools to become a pilot or get into an operational unit to lead sailors or Marines,” he said. “In the surface warfare unit, I was immediately able to serve as an officer on the USS Decatur. During my deployment, I spent many months in the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea in defense of our coalition partners, with the ship serving as a deterrent to our adversaries.”

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—Mitchell Pulver, MBA Candidate

He also added another two years to his naval commitment to become an adjunct professor of naval science at the academy, again honing his skills.

“The Naval Academy was such a great opportunity for me when I was a student and midshipman there, I wanted to give back to that institution,” he said. “It’s also where I developed my leadership style.”

He applied for three business schools but the scale was tipped toward Booth because of its strong entrepreneurship program and his being awarded a scholarship. Pulver plans to pursue entrepreneurship through acquisition once he graduates from Booth.

“The additional resources that Booth has been able to provide, both through the scholarship as well as the entrepreneurship curriculum, has really allowed me to do what I want to do,” he said. “Heading into business school, I thought I would have a large debt burden, be financially constrained, and would be compelled to take a job with a higher starting salary. But now I will be able to pursue my dream of being the leader of a small company. The scholarship has opened so many doors for me.”
Elliot Thomas  
*Full-Time MBA Program*

When Elliot Thomas was a child growing up near Youngstown, Ohio, he would listen to his grandfather talk about his time in the US Army during World War II, recounting his Battle of the Bulge experience with an all-black tank unit in the then-segregated army.

“I would listen to his stories and think that was something I could potentially do,” Thomas said. “But I put it on the back burner, thought I wanted to be a doctor until, for a high school assignment, I had to do a report on one school. I chose West Point, then attended a leadership seminar there the following summer and from that day forward, I knew West Point was the only place I wanted to go. I felt it was where I could build my leadership skills and make a difference in the world.”

Upon graduation, Elliot emulated his grandfather and commissioned as an armor officer. He was assigned to the 1st Cavalry division and stationed in Fort Hood, Texas, and also spent 18 months in South Korea, doing combined reconnaissance and security operations in support of furthering the South Korean alliance and deterring North Korean aggression. Eventually Elliot realized he wanted to further the leadership training the army provided, and applied to business schools. When he was notified of his acceptance at Chicago Booth, he also received word that he had been granted a scholarship.

“I knew that Booth was the place I wanted to be, and getting the scholarship was just the icing on the cake,” he said. “It felt like validation that the school wanted me just as much as I wanted them. The scholarship affords me financial flexibility, greatly reducing the burden of student loans when I graduate. It’s been a relief and a larger blessing than I could have ever imagined.”

Thomas plans to graduate in 2020 and hopes to work as a consultant.

“As veterans, we have learned the soft skills, like leadership training,” he said. “But I knew that if I was going to be successful post-military, I needed the qualitative rigor that Booth provides. Everyone here is such a high-achieving individual, exceptionally unique, and a great source of knowledge. I think if my granddad were still alive and could see me as an army Captain and now at Booth, he’d be exceptionally proud. I wish I could talk to him about it.”

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In 2018-19, Booth had 71 veterans enrolled in its four degree programs—Full-Time, Evening, Weekend, and Executive MBA. Since veterans often have little savings, substantial scholarship support is necessary to finance a Booth education. Thanks to the support of the alumni below, Booth is on the path to becoming the premier destination for academically accomplished veterans.