

Dennis Devery, Thomas Edison State College, Graduate Alumnus, 2005



Dennis Devery, vice president for planning and research at Thomas Edison State College (TESC), has a work environment radically different from the work environments he experienced for the three decades prior to the time he joined the TESC team in 2012. At TESC, he has a corner office with a chair, desk, small conference table, and windows that look out onto West State Street, where he can watch cars going up and down West State Street and people in professional office attire meandering in and out of the New Jersey State House. All these qualities of the TESC workplace took "a little getting used to," said Dennis, a

TESC alumnus, earning a Master's Degree in Management from the college in 2005. His former work environments featured helicopters, guns, people in helmets and military fatigues; chairs were optional since he usually worked standing on his feet or sitting in a cockpit of a helicopter or on the ground in a tent. Before landing at Thomas Edison State College, Dennis had a distinguished 30-year military career, retiring at the rank of Colonel, after beginning his military service as a Private.

In spite of the major contrasts in work ambiance, Dennis points to the similarities of his jobs at TESC and in the military. "It all comes down to strategic planning, planning for the future, assessing different pieces of information, and being able to pull everything together into a cohesive plan of operation ... And I have to thank my graduate degree from Thomas Edison for giving me the skills to do exactly that. I had inspirational teachers who instilled the value of strategy and thinking out of the box to solve problems ... to solve the puzzles most effectively and efficiently. My favorite course was 'Organizational Leadership' which explored how organizations function and how to make them function more effectively."

As TESC vice president for planning and research, Dennis is responsible for development and coordination of the college's strategic plan, market research programs, institutional surveys of students, graduates and staff, the college's quality assurance plan and compliance with state and federal reporting requirements. He participated in the college's very successful 10-year reaccreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Since 2012, TESC has engaged in more data-driven decision-making, more trend analysis, and better triangulation of data from multiple sources to analyze whether the courses provided are responding to the market. "I am always looking at all the different pieces of the puzzle and how to put the pieces together in a way to best serve the students, get the best outcomes, while keeping down the costs," he said.

His military responsibilities have far more complicated sounding titles than his TESC title. Most recently from March 2011 to January 2012, he served as commander of the New Jersey Army National Guard's Joint Training and Training Development Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, where he led a team of training experts who provide strategic, operational and tactical instruction to U.S. military forces, state and federal law enforcement professionals and various allied military forces. And in 2010, Dennis served as deputy director and chief of staff of the Afghan National Security Forces Development Assistance Bureau for NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he was responsible for the development and implementation of strategies to staff, equip and train the Afghan National Security Forces. In this capacity, he advised Gen. David Petraeus, former commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Lt. Gen. David Rodriguez, commander of International Security Assistance

Force Joint Command in Afghanistan, on growth and development issues related to the Afghan National Security Forces. And in 2008-2009, Dennis served as chief of staff for the New Jersey Army National Guard, where he oversaw the daily operation of 1,000 full-time and 5,000 part-time Army National Guard personnel in New Jersey.

"But to be successful in my military career and in my post-military career, I have had to rely on education that taught me how to think strategically in the overarching goal of making the world a better place - whether it be through troops on the ground or education in or outside of the classroom. I will be forever grateful to TESC for providing a flexible environment that allowed me to obtain the skills and education I needed to do all my jobs to the best of my ability," said Dennis, who lives in Mt. Laurel and is the father of two children, one of whom is currently a student at TESC.

Dennis, also an adjunct professor for the Political Science Department of Rutgers University and a member of the Veterans Advisory Council of Rowan University, is a poster adult for New Jersey state public higher education. He started his higher education journey at Burlington County College, went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in Management from Rutgers University, Master of Science in Management from Thomas Edison State College, and has just completed his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Rowan University. (He did manage to have one non-NJ public higher education degree - a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College, based in Carlisle, PA.)

On September 30th he defended his dissertation "Individualized Learning Practices in New Jersey Higher Education," which explored why and how faculty and administrators at three New Jersey higher education institutions use individualized learning practices to help students progress toward their degree. The NJ higher education community is lucky to have Dr. Dennis Devery back from Afghanistan and on New Jersey soil working - strategically - on behalf of New Jersey students.

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