



## The Deployed Professor

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Sailors assigned to the guided-missile cruiser USS San Jacinto (CG 56) listen to Professor Heather Crosby during a college course provided by the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Alexander Delgado)

Professor Heather Crosby began her lecture the same way most classes for her American History course begin.

“Let’s review,” Crosby said. “Can someone describe to me what led to the Barbary Wars?”

Though the class began like any other college course, the setting was vastly different from any college lecture hall.

The walls were decorated in pipes with different colored knobs, while the ceiling exposed layers upon layers of intersecting wires and even more pipes. In the silence, you could hear the hum of large machinery from the engine room below, but it was suddenly interrupted by an intercom system with the sound of bells.

In this case, two bells announced that it was nine o’clock in the morning. During the announcement, the classroom continuously rocked back and forth, but the students and professor seemed unaffected by the movement and bells because these seemingly uncommon distractions are, in fact, daily occurrences.

This unique classroom sat in the belly of the guided-missile cruiser USS San Jacinto (CG 56). A part of the Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group (Ike CSG), San Jacinto deployed to the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleets to protect the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) (Ike) and her escorts.

Crosby, who has been a history professor at the College of Charleston for the past 10 years, volunteered for the first time to spend her summer teaching for the Naval College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE).

“I didn’t know if it would suit me or not,” Crosby said. “I think it was the simple fact that it was something so far from anything I would ordinarily do. Plus, I love history, and I get to be amongst the military, which has an illustrious history.”

To Crosby’s surprise, teaching on a U.S. warship had more meaning to it than she first realized.

“I’m teaching on a living platform right here that unbeknownst to me would be making history,” Crosby explained.

While Ike conducted strikes on the Islamist State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), San Jacinto interacted in an encounter with a Russian frigate. During encounters like these, it’s her students who man the watch, drive the ship and respond to casualties. In other words, they are the ones who are actually making the history.

“Being on this floating history is wonderful,” Crosby said. “But the takeaway is these kids.”

Battling watches, sleep and the jobs they need to take care of on the ship, the Sailors are still responsible for the subject like any other college

student.

“When I get back to Charleston and start teaching the fall semester, those students are going to have big shoes to fill,” Crosby said. “I’ve taught some exceptional students in the 10 years I’ve been teaching college, but this by far is just unlike anything I’ve ever experienced.”

According to Crosby, some of her students were living off food stamps and needed something better in their lives, and the Navy gave it to them. She also had students that were nothing but trouble, and the Navy gave them their structure.

“I look at each of them and the reasons why they’re here and then look at them trying to better themselves by taking advantage of NCPACE classes,” Crosby said. “I know they are going to be driven, dedicated, intelligent. They know what they want out of life, and I know that they’re going to succeed. Those are the kind of students who I like to teach.”

While classes were not in session, Crosby found time to sit with each of her students and build a bond that will last a lifetime.

“I’ve gotten to know each and every one of them very well,” Crosby said. “I know their life stories, and I can honestly say they’re all my heroes. It has been a blessing to be on this ship. This has been refreshing and has rejuvenated me as an educator. I needed this as much as they needed this class.”