Michael O’Farrell awarded Bronze Star
Student soldier to return from Iraq and resume professional pharmacy program

Pharmacy student Michael O’Farrell, who has postponed his studies with the College, twice, to serve with the U.S. Army Reserves, will return home this month following a year deployment with the 872nd Maintenance Company in Mosul, Iraq.

The father of two and husband of Denise O’Farrell, an employee at the Southeastern District Health Department, will be greeted by family, friends, fellow students and faculty members at the Pocatello Regional Airport when he returns around August 15.

O’Farrell began his professional education with the College in 2001, a year after he received a commission in the Army Reserves. He already held a bachelor’s of science degree in biochemistry, along with about 18 years of enlisted military service, nine of those in the U.S. Navy. Only a few short weeks after entering the Pharm.D. program, the terrorist attacks of 9-11 placed his Army Reserve unit on active duty status.

Since then, the 2nd Lt. in the Medical Service Corps continued his studies, and training with the Army Reserves, earning a 1st Lt. promotion.

In December 2003, he was ordered to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas where he trained with the Army Reserve Medical Corps graduating from Officer’s Basic School. The assignment required the then P-2 student to miss the spring 2004 semester – setting him back a year in school.

When O’Farrell began pharmacy school, the College was in the process of introducing a new curriculum. His class was the last to use the previous curriculum. Missing a semester of classes and changes in the curriculum placed him behind. Determined to continue with his studies, he accepted the setback and returned to ISU again in the fall as a P2 student.
When he returns from his tour, O’Farrell will have to catch up on a few classes, but will soon begin his advanced practice experiences and graduate with his Pharm.D in 2007. College courses were recorded on CD or streamlined on the Website - allowing O’Farrell to continue working on some of his third-year classes while in Texas prior to deployment.

Other pharmacy students have served in the Reserves, and, administrators support each student’s circumstances when called for duty, Dean Joseph Steiner said. “The students, faculty and staff are proud that Mike was able to serve his country and we are grateful for his safe return,” Steiner said. “We try to help any of our students to progress toward their degree while they are serving in the military and Mike took advantage of these opportunities. However, this was not easy and it required strong dedication on his part. Mike will now be able to continue his studies and will become an excellent pharmacist.”

O’Farrell has been in contact with his family, and the College, via email messages sent when the soldier has an opportunity.

“I can’t believe that a year has passed since we first set foot here…,” he wrote.

During his tour O’Farrell, like many other soldiers, has seen much warfare and, at times, been in harms way along side fellow soldiers.

“Things are heating up here in Mosul, and not just temperature wise (it’s around 110-115),” he wrote. “…We go out with four gun trucks and a wrecker to pick up the broken down and blown-up vehicles within a 100 mile radius of Mosul.”

The soldier’s dedication to his company has been honorable, according to military officials. O’Farrell was recently awarded the Bronze Star Award for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service.

“1st Lt. O’Farrell’s leadership, self dedication to the mission of coalition forces and tireless pursuit of freedom, while engaged against the enemies of world peace, are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect the great credit upon him…,” O’Farrell’s supervisor wrote for the Bronze Star Medal recommendation.

Editor’s Note: The welcome home gathering for Pharmacy student Michael O’Farrell is slated for August 15; however, due to unexpected delays, the exact day and time won’t be announced until August 12. The College will send an email invitation once a date/time is confirmed.