Educational Highlights: My journey at the College of Charleston began in 2017 after serving for ten years in the Army. Several deployments to Afghanistan provided me with the unique experience of training Afghan women to serve in a US-military partner unit. A tremendous honor it was to have empowered a marginalized group of women with a sense of purpose, dignity, and self-respect; however, I decided it was necessary to further my education in sociology in order to apply corrective strategies that address social problems at their root cause. My time CofC has allowed me to reflect upon these experiences and under the guidance of some outstanding professors, I completed several independent studies involving IRB-approved qualitative research. I have developed a body of research driven by my past experiences that is personally-relevant and focuses on the impact that I would like to achieve in the next chapters of my life.

Research Focus or Project: My research has been focused on the psychosocial challenges faced by service members after separating from the military. Since the evolution of an all-volunteer US military force, men and women willingly place themselves in harm’s way for the greater good of society. Those same men and women often experience hardship in life after separating from the service when they become cut off from their sense of contribution and identity as service members. The media often portrays veterans in the contexts of unemployment, homelessness, or suicide, often relating these issues to Post Traumatic Stress. It is my personal commitment to dispel inaccurate stereotypes or misconceptions of veterans through proper analysis of the problems that result when veterans become disconnected from a sense of purpose, identity, and connection to others. Through meaningful dialogue, my hope is to determine ways in which to better support veterans by reconnecting them to a renewed sense of purpose and belonging within the communities of which they reside.

Future Plans: My next steps are vacationing to my favorite spot in Mexico before starting a master’s degree program in Social Work. My long-term goal is to enact social change through the methods of participatory action research.

This award is presented by Gibbs Knotts, interim dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Department of Sociology at the College of Charleston, at the end of the spring 2020 semester.