

Health Physics Student Prepares for Life on the High Seas

Pete Sprenger is a master's student in the health physics program but, come this spring, he'll transition from academics to naval officer. A graduate of Montana State University with a degree in mathematics, he served in the Navy as an electrician working on submarines before coming to Colorado. As he considered his career options outside the Navy, Sprenger's father brought to his attention the Graduate Program in Health Physics in the Department of Environmental and Radiological Health Sciences at Colorado State University.

Intrigued, Sprenger interviewed with Dr. Tom Borak and made the decision to come to CSU. When he first arrived, he wasn't too sure his decision was the right one. The health physics program was in a state of flux as key professors were transitioning to retirement and few new students were being recruited.

"When I first arrived, two students were in the program and two had just graduated," Sprenger said. "The next year two more students came in, and this year we've seen the whole program absolutely turn around with new faculty driving the re-establishment of the CSU health physics program as one of the premier in the nation. It's been very exciting to be a part of the turnaround and watch the opportunities grow."

The CSU Student Chapter of the Health Physics Society, which was disbanded in 1995, is now back and more active than ever. With Dr. Tom Johnson as the faculty advisor, health physics students have established an interactive health physics review program for individuals who want board certification. Students are responsible for developing course material and delivering lectures to an audience of more than 50 coming in online from around the world. Funds raised from the course are being used to cover the costs of professional annual meetings and student field trips (including a planned trip to the Los Alamos Laboratories in New Mexico).



Pete Sprenger, graduate student in the health physics program at CSU.

Sprenger also has noticed that in the last three years, with concerns over the pending retirement of many health physicists looming, job postings and advertisements have increased for students in the health physics program. Sprenger, who remained in the Navy Reserves while at CSU, already has his path set. Upon graduation this spring, he'll attend officer training school and re-join the Navy as a health

physicist. The Navy particularly needs specialists in radiation dosimetry and medical-related health physics. He expects one of his early deployments to be at a naval hospital or shipyard, and then he'll most likely spend two years on a nuclear-powered carrier.

"The carriers have two nuclear reactors and my primary role will be as a radiation safety officer," said Sprenger. "It's an incredible opportunity and I'm looking forward to being a part of the Navy officer corps. The carriers are like small communities with amazing camaraderie among all on board. It will be a big transition from the mountains of Colorado to the open waters of the ocean, but I'm looking forward to the experience."