

*"Getting your degree online is not easy. You have to be organized. You have to read the books. You have to write the papers. You have to make the deadlines. If you don't, it's not happening."*

**ERIC  
BIEL**

**About Eric:**

**Class of 2013**

**Major:** Criminology

**College:** Behavioral and Community Sciences

**From:** Seffner, Florida

**Awards:**

- Graduated with distinction

**Eric Biel**, '13, is the first to say that his route to a bachelor's degree from USF was "very eclectic," as one might gather from his major in criminology coupled with a minor in biomedical physics.

But he's equally **quick to characterize the experience as being "completely awesome."**

"There's just something about being among **all the great academic minds at USF** that makes you want to plug into that as much as possible. I'm interested in so much," says Biel, who transferred to USF after completing his associate's degree at nearby Hillsborough Community College.

Having long been a volunteer science and math tutor for his fellow students both in high school and at HCC, Biel started out at USF thinking about a major in secondary education, but later switched to mathematics, until the highly structured nature of that curriculum and its in-class requirements proved not a good fit with his work responsibilities as a staff assistant with the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program located in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences.

"My schedule really didn't permit me to go to school full-time," Biel recalls. He credits HIPPY State Director Dr. Mary Lindsey with continuing to emphasize that he persist with his education by finding a more flexible course of study.

"She was **very proactive in pushing me toward success**, for which I'm very grateful. And I couldn't have been more thrilled to find a place in the criminology program, which allowed me to complete almost all of my courses online."

In fact, Biel says he needed to attend only one class in person to complete his major. The math credits he'd accumulated earlier in his USF career also meant he could finish his minor in biomedical physics with just two additional courses, also taken online.

He received his diploma in May 2013 as one of only four students in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences **to graduate "with distinction,"** as determined by the faculty of the college based upon the four criteria of scholarship, research (for his work with HIPPY), service to the community (as a tutor, local PTA volunteer, and staff advisor to the USF skimboarding club), and overcoming adversity (the loss of his left eye as the result of an accident during batting practice with an area softball team he managed while at HCC, also as a volunteer).

Although, because of his somewhat circuitous route, Biel took slightly longer to graduate than more traditional students, he says the opportunity to work on campus while pursuing his degree also meant that **he was able to walk across the commencement stage with zero debt.** In addition to increasing the number of courses available to students online, the university has made initiatives to raise the prospects for on-campus employment and limit the amount of debt incurred by students high priorities of its student success planning.

"I think it's absolutely accurate to say that I feel like **USF has been an active partner in helping me** toward my educational goals," says Biel, now a graduate student in the College of Business' MBA program. "Everyone here is always trying to make students aware of the opportunities available to them. Everyone is always so positive. I don't know how much I would have wanted to continue with school without all of that encouragement and support."



2013 rankings by both the Guide to Online Schools and U.S. News & World Report identify the University of South Florida as a

**NATIONAL LEADER IN ONLINE EDUCATION.**