**NICK MEZAK**
Research Assistant, Biomedical Engineering, VA Palo Alto Health Care System

**WHAT DO YOU DO?** I am a research assistant in the biomedical engineering laboratory of Dr. Ngan Huang, PhD at the VA Palo Alto Health Center campus. Our lab focuses on the use of stem cells for tissue engineering applications that will soon be used to treat wounded veterans.

**HOW DID YOU GET YOUR JOB?** While on terminal leave I signed up for a few classes at my local community college. Not knowing what to expect on my first day, I learned that this school had its own Veteran Resource Center. It was here that I ran into a Marine I had served with who showed me around and encouraged me to join the STEM center (science, technology, engineering, math). Through this center I had the opportunity to meet a professor at Stanford and veterans advocate, who invited me to join her lab.

**WHAT’S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST TRANSITION HEADACHE?** Learning how to communicate with others without the intensity that was normal in the military.

**WHAT SURPRISED YOU ABOUT THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE?** The sense of belonging to an elite team was something I had missed as a student. Once I joined the lab I was impressed with the sense of camaraderie and the team spirit.

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Age: 30
Military Service: Sergeant (E-5), Marine Corps (2006-2011)
MOS: Flight Equipment Technician (6048)
Education: Undergraduate engineering, Cañada College (2012)