

Faces of Success in Maritime: Catie Horne

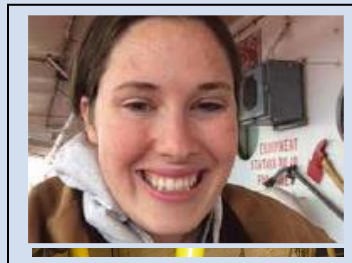
Catie Horne is what you might call an “unlikely mariner.” She laughs that when her Dad originally encouraged her to look into attending the U.S. Merchant Maritime Academy (USMMA) she wasn’t completely sold on the idea. “Even though some of my family was previously in the military, none had gone to the Merchant Marine Academy,” she recalls. “I figured I would go to ‘regular college’ like my two older siblings, but the more I looked into it though, the more sense it made.”

Catie liked the fact that at USMMA she would gain practical skills, graduate with no debt and have a job in an industry where she could make good money right out of school. “My Dad said, ‘why don’t you give it a year and see how you feel?’” Catie recalls. “By the end of my first year I had seen all the opportunities available for a merchant marine academy graduate and was sure this was right for me.”

Catie explains that there are five academic pathways at a merchant marine academy: two for students who want to work on a ship’s deck side (think “top of the ship”) and three for students who want to work on the engineering side (think “engine room”).

“During your freshman year you take a core curriculum and then pick where you’re going to focus: deck or engine,” explains Catie. “From that point on you decide on one of four majors.” At the end of their freshman year students select their major and at that point “you basically know your course schedule for the remainder of your time at the academy because everything is so regimented,” says Catie. You also end up knowing the people you’re going to spend the rest of your college career with. “You’re assigned to a section of 20 students based on your major and you end up taking all of your classes with that same section.”

Starting with a student’s second year instruction is split between time in the classroom and time at sea. “The coursework is regimented so that between your sophomore year and graduation the entire school is essentially split in half, with time divided up between time in class on land and time at sea. That’s because you need to spend 360 days at sea before graduation to get your industry credentials,” says Catie.



Catie Horne

Third Mate/Simulator Instructor
MITAGS
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Industry Segment:
Vessel Operations

Education:
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy

Quote:
“Maritime worksites are now full of both men and women and it will only continue to be more welcoming to women”



Students spend their time at sea working in pairs on projects. By the time they graduate students will have earned 18 academic credits through completion of projects at sea which are reviewed by captains and chief mates at the academy.

Catie says she chose deck in part because she was interested in navigation. If she had it to do all over again though, she would pick engine. "There are a lot more shoreside career opportunities for engineers and it's easier for them to transition back and forth between careers at sea and on land."

Catie graduated from USMMA in 2009 with a B.S. in Marine Transportation and a 3rd Mate Officer Unlimited Tonnage license. Her husband is also an academy graduate. As an engineer, however, he had an easier time finding work straight out of school.

"In the shipping industry people rotate on and off positions on vessels," explains Catie. "You learn which positions are open through the union halls. When I graduated a lot of mates (working on the deck side) weren't giving up their rotation so I had difficulty finding work at first."

Eager to get on the water, Catie eventually found work in "one of the most under looked parts of the industry: the Great Lakes." She immediately got the job and sailed on 1,000 foot long bulk carriers including the Roger Blough and Edwin H. Gott on the Great Lakes for three years. "Vessels sailing on the Great Lakes are required to have pilots and relief mates so they typically bring on one open ocean mate per ship," explains Catie. "Since I got along well with everyone my jobs were extended every time."

Due to severe winter weather, the Great Lakes are only open 10 months of the year which slowed Catie down a little bit, she says, but "it was a good introduction to industry." She developed a huge appreciation for Great Lakes mariners. "They are some of the best shiphandlers I've ever met! They don't use tugs or tows and navigate weather and water conditions that rival the open ocean."

After three years of commuting between Maryland and the Upper Midwest, she decided to take some professional development classes at the Maritime Institute for Technology and Graduate Studies (MITAGS). "They needed administrative department help so I began working part-time and then the position grew from there."

Today she's a Simulator Operator and Instructor at MITAGS. She spends two weeks out of the month running a state-of-the-art simulator that students use to practice skills they're learning in class in a "virtual at-sea" environment. She can often be found behind a large bank of computers presetting scenarios for students to navigate ships at sea or docking at port. The other two weeks of the month she can be found teaching safety courses and upgrading curriculum to always-changing industry standards.

"I really like doing new challenges each week," she says. "Whether it's teaching a cohort of 20 students or coming up with new scenarios for the simulator to test our students' knowledge, I enjoy all the different aspects of challenging, sea-related work and curriculum development."



Catie's husband recently transferred back to Baltimore after working for GE Shipbuilding in Bath, Maine and previously for Military Sealift Command (MSC), one of the biggest employers in the industry. "He made the career change to support me because I enjoy my job here at MITAGS," smiles Catie.

She explains that engineers can find shoreside work in shipbuilding and design, as port captains, traveling technicians, naval architects, and vessel inspectors. "If they want to leave the maritime industry they can use their engineering degree in just about any other type of industry," says Catie. Deck-side workers looking for a shoreside job within the industry "can go to ship brokerage firms to manage and negotiate cargo rates, work as port workers up to port captain, or go into maritime instruction and simulation." While Catie enjoyed her time at sea, she wasn't eager to be gone more than 90 days at a time. "I like working at MITAGS because it's challenging work and my supervisors encourage me to maintain my license by giving me leave of absence when I need it. Most of the people I work with went to a maritime academy or school and I think the students here appreciate learning from teachers who are fresh to industry."

Catie acknowledges that being a woman in maritime does present some challenges. "I'm pretty blunt when I talk to young women. They need to know that school will be hard but our industry needs qualified individuals and especially females. It's not your average workplace and women need to be ready to do manual and physical labor, problem solve on their own, and put a lot of time in for their education. They have to be ready to make that type of commitment but if they do, they can graduate above peers, making \$60-70,000 right out of school with no debt."

Catie sees the industry changing for the better. "Maritime worksites are now full of both men and women and it will only continue to be more welcoming to women," says Catie. "If you want to be independent, with a job that enables you to live without debt, travel the world on the 'company's dime,' and do anything you want in your area of professional expertise there is no lack of people trying to support you as a female mariner."