Kevin Gannon

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL MAINTENANCE CENTER, U.S. NAVY

"An intellectual gem"

Based at the San Diego Naval Station, the Southwest Regional Maintenance Center (SWRMC) provides maintenance support and maintenance training to more than 50 surface ships, aircraft carriers, and submarines of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. This is a weighty responsibility for Captain Kevin Gannon, Commander of the SWRMC—as is the complement of roughly 3,000 sailors and civilians under his command.

Captain Gannon, who describes himself as a "lifelong learner," holds an undergraduate degree from Tulane University in mathematics, an MS in Mechanical Engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, and an MS in Systems Engineering from University of Virginia. But he is quick to point out that his education is not confined to formal schooling; in each of his positions in the Navy, Gannon has worked to keep abreast of new developments in his fields of expertise.

Gannon describes his main responsibilities at SWRMC as overseeing lots of industrial processes (anything from fixing a pump to overhauling a gun)—and he is constantly looking for ways to streamline these processes. This quest led him to MIT's OpenCourseWare several years ago, while browsing for information on lean manufacturing.

"Lean is a tool that industry has been using for the last couple of years," explains Gannon, "focusing on process improvement, and minimizing waste. I was looking generically for lean information, and stumbled across OCW. I was really impressed. This site is a true intellectual gem. They have a couple of lean classes in the engineering section, such as Course ESD.60 – Lean/Six Sigma Processes, that were very useful."

MIT OCW has also proved helpful in other areas of Gannon's job. For example: leadership training for the sailors under his command is one of his major concerns. So, soon after discovering the MIT OCW Web site, Gannon browsed through the MIT Sloan School courses on OCW to see if any of these courses could be helpful. "The Leading Organizations course [Course 15.322] has turned me on to all sorts of useful references," Gannon says. "We've used a bunch of books mentioned in the syllabus. And the lecture notes are also an important tool. They include documents on the problems and prospects of a changing organizational world, and models of organizational change. We've used these for our discussion and our teaching here."

"OCW has definitely accelerated our ability to train," Gannon continues. "As far as I'm concerned, these courses are already tried-and-true. They've worked with a high-performing group. They're a nicely bundled package, and they're free. How can you beat that?"