

## [SoPA grad proves that it's never too late to start](#)

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Katina McGinnis, a longtime human resources professional, Army veteran, and working mother started her journey in 2018. On May 16, she will graduate with a Tulane degree. (Photo by Andrea Steudlein)

Katina McGinnis's journey back to college began with a simple but powerful question from her son: "Mom, you always wanted to go back to school. What are you waiting for?"

It was at that moment she stopped waiting.

The longtime human resources professional, Army veteran, and working mother started the journey in 2018. She enrolled part time at the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) and never looked back. The journey concludes this month as McGinnis earns a [Bachelor of Arts in General Legal Studies](#) with a minor in Human Resources Development.

Along with her degree comes a list of accolades. She has earned a place on the dean's list every semester, been inducted into Alpha Sigma Lambda National Honor Society, earned a spot among the [Tulane 34 honorees](#), and is the recipient of the Dr. Gisela Spieker Prize for first generation graduates.

Returning to school after a long absence brought anxiety, McGinnis recalls. But supportive faculty at Tulane SoPA quickly changed that. "I felt psychologically safe," McGinnis said. "Like, I'm okay to learn at my age. This is normal. This is fine."

That sense of belonging fueled her confidence. What once felt intimidating became empowering. "My biggest roadblock was fear," she said. "And once I surpassed that, learning became fun."

While excelling academically, McGinnis continued working full time as an HR manager with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), leading a virtual team of 18 employees across the country. She was also selected to serve on a national VA restructuring team and founded a Society for Human Resource Management chapter at SoPA, connecting students with professionals across industries.

"School became a relief from a stressful work environment," McGinnis said. "It was where I could reset, learn, and grow."

McGinnis's earlier attempt at college had been interrupted by military service, when her Army unit deployed overseas. For years, finishing her degree felt out of reach. Today she stands as proof that timing doesn't determine success; commitment does.

With graduation approaching, McGinnis is already preparing for the next chapter. She is currently studying for the LSAT and applying to law schools, where she will focus on federal employment law. Her extensive HR background, she believes, will allow her to advocate meaningfully in an area where representation is critically needed.

For McGinnis, returning to school wasn't just about a degree. It was about reclaiming a dream and proving that it's never too late to begin again.