

Thunderbird alum and Boeing executive Maria Laine to keynote school's fall 2025 convocation

By Nicole Almond Anderson, ASU News
December 1, 2025

[Maria Laine](#), a 1993 graduate of the [Thunderbird School of Global Management](#)'s Master of International Management program, has been selected to deliver the keynote address at the school's fall 2025 convocation.

With a career spanning more than three decades at Boeing, Laine serves as the head of business capture and operations for Boeing Defense, Space and Security in Washington, D.C. In this role, she leads a multibillion-dollar portfolio of strategic proposal development for U.S. government and international defense programs, oversees campaign and competitive analysis, and guides financial management, business operations, and workforce training and development initiatives.

Prior to her current role, she was based in London as president of Boeing United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Nordics — overseeing one of Boeing's largest international markets outside of the United States.

Laine has also demonstrated a deep commitment to advancing global industry and transatlantic collaboration through extensive nonprofit board service. She has served on the board of trustees for the Whitehall & Industry Group and on the International Advisory Board of British-American Business, both based in London. Previously, she chaired the Board of the Global Industrial Cooperation Association and served on the Board of the American Chamber of Commerce in Denmark.

Born in Helsinki, Finland, Laine's global perspective took shape early. At 6 months old, she moved with her family to Stockholm, Sweden, before relocating to the United States at age 7. Over the course of her life, she has moved across the Atlantic more than 10 times, living in Finland, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and across every U.S. time zone from Florida to California. Her native languages include Finnish, Swedish and English, and she has

studied French, Spanish and Dutch.

“Having to learn three languages by the age of 7 and navigating major global moves during my formative years made me realize I wanted to do something global,” Laine said.

That desire led her to pursue a degree in political science and international relations at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and later to a position at the U.S. Department of Commerce’s International Trade Administration.

It was there she discovered that her true interests lay in industry and global business rather than government work — a realization that guided her next step: earning a master’s degree at Thunderbird.

Thunderbird’s lasting influence

During her time at Thunderbird, Laine participated in the school’s exchange program with the Helsinki School of Economics, a partnership that would profoundly shape her career trajectory. While in Finland, she learned of a historic defense deal between the U.S. and Finnish governments for the sale of 64 F/A-18 fighter jets. Around the same time, a guest lecturer from McDonnell Douglas — now part of Boeing — visited Thunderbird to speak about offset and industrial participation, a highly specialized area of aerospace and defense contracting.

“I introduced myself after the lecture and told him I would be in Finland when the selection decision was made,” she said. “They told me to keep my eyes and ears open — they’d be needing someone with exactly my background. Sure enough, that’s exactly what happened.”

That combination of Thunderbird’s unique global curriculum, her cross-cultural experience and the strength of the school’s alumni network gave Laine a competitive edge. Before graduation, she was offered a position with McDonnell Douglas working on the F/A-18 industrial participation program — a role that would mark the beginning of a 32-year career with Boeing.

“The fact that Thunderbird even offered a course on offset and industrial participation — a niche topic that no other MBA program would have considered — was a competitive discriminator in my interview,” Laine said. “Thunderbird set me up perfectly for everything that was to come in my professional life.”

A global mindset for a changing world

For Laine, Thunderbird’s commitment to cultivating a global mindset remains as essential today as it was when she first arrived on campus.

“If everyone in the world had a Thunderbird global mindset, the world would be a better place,” she said. “Higher education has a critical role to play in advancing that mindset — especially amid today’s geopolitical challenges — and Thunderbird continues to be uniquely positioned in that regard.”

As she prepares to return to campus as a convocation keynote speaker, Laine offers heartfelt advice to the next generation of global leaders: “Work hard, never give up, and find your north star

to stay focused on. Remember that experiential learning is key to building the foundations that will eventually get you to that goal. And above all, be kind, be respectful, and maintain a positive attitude. Those traits will serve you well for a lifetime.”

This year’s convocation holds special meaning for Laine, who will share the stage with her daughter, Anna Laine, as she graduates from Thunderbird’s flagship [Master of Global Management](#) program. It’s a moment that reflects the deep Thunderbird roots within the Laine family.

Laine also met her husband, Pekka, another Finnish T-bird, during Thunderbird’s exchange program in Helsinki, Finland. The two graduated together, built global careers and raised a family grounded in Thunderbird’s values and spirit. Not only has their oldest daughter, affectionately known as their “Baby Bird,” followed in their footsteps, but Laine’s sister, Minna Rauhala, who graduated in 2005, is also a proud Thunderbird alum.

“Maria represents the heart of Thunderbird — a global leader who leads with purpose, humility and a passion for building a better world,” said [Charla Griffy-Brown](#), director general and dean of Thunderbird. “Her journey reflects the powerful foundation that a Thunderbird education provides, and the strength of our community that continues across generations. We are thrilled to welcome her home and to celebrate this milestone alongside her family.”

As Thunderbird prepares to celebrate its fall 2025 convocation, the occasion highlights a remarkable legacy — one that spans continents, generations and careers united by a shared commitment. The Laine family’s generous gift to fund the installation of the “Finland” window inside the Pub at Thunderbird further honors that bond, serving as a lasting tribute to their connection to the school while advancing student scholarships and opportunities for future T-birds.

“I am so incredibly grateful for both the life and career journey I have had, and Thunderbird played a key role in that,” Laine said. “Life has truly come full circle. We are a Thunderbird family through and through. We’ve stayed close with many friends from Thunderbird, and we’ll always support the mission — because the world needs more T-birds.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Maria Laine, a 1993 graduate of the Thunderbird School of Global Management's Master of International Management (MIM) program, has been selected to deliver the keynote address at the school's fall 2025 convocation. She currently works for Boeing Defense, Space and Security in Washington, D.C. Courtesy photo