

# ASU Law grad discovers new path through lifelong learning

By Andrea Marisa Estrada, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

When the pandemic opened an unexpected door into a new career, Kelly Mannes chose to walk through it with intention.

As a compliance consultant for the University of Arizona, she loved the work — the problem-solving, the human dynamics and the opportunity to support people and processes behind the scenes — but she wanted to understand it on a deeper level.

That motivation led her to the [Master of Human Resources and Employment Law](#) program at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, where her coursework didn't just introduce new concepts; it reshaped how she thinks, communicates and shows up in her professional life.

As she approaches her fall 2025 graduation, Mannes stands ready to carry this deeper understanding into every space she leads, strengthens and serves.

Read on to learn more about Mannes' journey at ASU and her plans for the future.

*Note: Answers may have been lightly edited for length and/or clarity.*

**Question:** What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

**Answer:** I think there are two ways to approach education: You can pursue a degree as a doorway into a career field, or you can pursue a degree to further an existing career path. In my case, I changed career fields during the pandemic and realized that pursuing a degree would not only help me build a strong knowledge foundation to grow and succeed in my new role, but it would also provide me with a credential that would show others that my career change was intentional and that I was qualified for my current position and future job opportunities.

**Q:** What's something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

**A:** This whole program changed my perspective on how I engage with my work. The classes provided me with the knowledge to identify where and when certain concepts come into play, as well as the language to acknowledge and address these concepts in practice.

The classes that surprised me the most were the electives I took, specifically the Psychology of Conflict, and Organizational and Workplace Dispute Resolution. I initially signed up for these electives because of my personal interest in psychology and sociology, but I discovered that the topics and applications were equally relevant to my work environment. Organizational and Workplace Dispute Resolution especially felt like an extended professional development opportunity where I didn't just learn concepts but also the self-awareness and skill set to begin navigating conflicts more effectively.

**Q: Why did you choose ASU?**

**A:** As an employee of the Arizona public university system, I have the opportunity to receive a tuition discount within the system, which was a strong motivator for choosing a program at one of the Arizona public universities.

With that said, any degree program still requires a significant financial and time commitment, and I wanted to be sure it would be worth the opportunity cost. Among the Arizona schools, ASU's program was the one that best matched my unique needs. I also compared ASU's program to the limited number of other programs across the U.S. that seemed to offer a similar course focus, and ASU's program came out on top in terms of reputation and affordability (even without the tuition support).

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?**

**A:** Professor Joel Friedman's class on Employment Discrimination was probably one of my favorite classes, and it wasn't because the class was "easy," but because he made the topics straightforward, accessible and interesting. I took many lessons away from his class and from my other professors, but he taught me a valuable lesson on how these topics can be broken down and simplified when you truly understand the material.

**Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to those still in school?**

**A:** For anyone just starting out their program, my most practical advice would be to have at least two computer monitors if you have the means to do so. Being able to have my notes and assignments on one screen and my lectures and reference materials on another made the coursework and studying significantly easier to manage.

If your program offers electives, I would also recommend exploring topics outside of your main focus area. You never know what new interests you'll uncover or how that information could help you gain a new perspective in your studies.

**Q: What are your plans after graduation?**

**A:** I completed this program while working full time, so I plan to continue to work and apply the knowledge I learned to my role. Outside of work, I have put many of my personal interests and hobbies on hold so that I could devote my time to this program. After graduation, I look forward to diving back into those personal passions.

**Q: How has this degree helped you in your professional journey?**

**A:** Because I work full time in a field directly related to this degree program, I can say with confidence that the education I received in this program has expanded the scope of my knowledge, skills and abilities within my field. I can use this degree to qualify for promotion within my current career track and to be a more competitive candidate if I choose to apply for other positions in my field. Most importantly, this degree has helped me feel more confident and capable in myself as a person and professional.

**Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?**

**A:** I am a big proponent of animal welfare. Many of my current and former animal companions were strays or rescues. If I were given \$40 million, I would use that money to fund spaying and neutering programs, educate communities on the health and ethical concerns of backyard breeding, and support rescue and foster services that can help alleviate pressure on shelters and reduce the number of animals in low-adoption regions.

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

**Main image**



This fall, ASU grad Kelly Mannes earns her Master of Human Resources and Employment Law (MHREL) from ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College. Courtesy photo