

# After 2 decades as a stay-at-home mom, first-generation student earns history degree and Dean's Medalist honor

By Mariana Lozovanu, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

After more than two decades as a stay-at-home mom, Kimberley Ruble returned to the classroom with determination, curiosity and a passion for history. Now graduating with a bachelor's degree in [history](#) from Arizona State University's [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#) on the [West Valley campus](#), Ruble has been named a Dean's Medalist, a recognition that reflects both her academic excellence and her inspiring journey.

In this Q&A, Ruble shares what it means to return to college later in life, the mentors who shaped her path and her hopes to make a difference through research and writing. Ruble's journey is a testament to resilience, lifelong learning and the power of support — proving that it's never too late to pursue your goals.

**Question:** What inspired you to study history?

**Answer:** I've always loved history — even as a kid. I remember being about 10 years old, fascinated by Indiana Jones and wanting to learn about the past.

When I first started college, I was a religious studies major, but when I returned, I switched to history. What I love about New College is its interdisciplinary approach. I've been able to take courses in philosophy, political science, religion and history, which allows me to explore how all these fields connect. That broader perspective has been incredibly fulfilling.

**Q: Who has had the biggest impact on your academic journey?**

**A:** My family has been my foundation. My husband has supported me completely, working full time so I could focus on school. I also have three children — two are already in college, and one is finishing high school — and they've all been part of this journey with me.

At ASU, several professors have gone above and beyond, but [Dr. Bertha Manninen](#) has had a particularly strong impact. I took her philosophy of religion class, and she became both a mentor and a friend. When I shared my anxieties about returning to school, she reassured me and gave me practical steps to succeed. Her encouragement stayed with me throughout my time here.

**Q: As a first-generation college student, what has that experience meant to you?**

**A:** Both my husband and I are first-generation college students, and I'm also a citizen of the Comanche Nation. Higher education hasn't always been accessible for many members of my tribe, so earning this degree carries a deeper meaning. ASU's commitment to Native students — including awarding a high number of degrees to Native populations in the Western U.S. — made a strong impression on me. Being part of that progress is something I'm very proud of.

**Q: What does being named a Dean's Medalist mean to you?**

**A:** I'm still processing it, to be honest. I came back to school with a lot of self-doubt, wondering if I could handle everything — my coursework, my responsibilities at home, and caring for my family, including my child with special needs.

This recognition feels like confirmation that I can do hard things — that I'm capable. It's been a meaningful moment of validation.

**Q: You've balanced school while homeschooling your children. What was that like?**

**A:** Homeschooling has been a full-time job for the past 16 years. My husband and I made that decision after navigating challenges within the school system, especially related to special needs education. Balancing that with my own education wasn't easy, but I'm proud to say my children have thrived, two are already in college on scholarships, and the third will be heading to college soon. Being able to return to my own academic goals after supporting theirs has been incredibly rewarding.

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

**A:** I plan to pursue graduate school, possibly in communication. I want to become a researcher and writer focused on the intersection of politics, religion and society. There are many complex issues facing our world, and I want to help make research accessible to the public — to inform, engage and hopefully contribute to meaningful change.

**Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**

**A:** I hope to be established as a researcher and writer, publishing work that explores important social issues. Writing has always been a goal of mine — whether books or articles — and I'd love to contribute to conversations that matter.

**Q: If you could solve one global issue, what would it be?**

**A:** It's hard to choose just one. Food security is a major global issue. I also care deeply about mental health support for unhoused individuals and about ensuring dignity and safety for LGBTQ+ communities. Ultimately, I want to use research and writing to help address these kinds of challenges and contribute to solutions.

**Q: What is the most important lesson you've learned at ASU?**

**A:** That success isn't about talent, it's about persistence. So many professors reminded me that if there's something you want to achieve, you can figure out the steps and make it happen. That mindset changed everything for me. As someone who didn't grow up with this technology, I never imagined I'd be using AI to analyze historical or political data. But now I see how it can enhance research and productivity while still maintaining academic integrity. It's exciting to think about how these tools will shape the future of these fields.

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**Text image(s)**



Kimberley Ruble is a first-generation college student graduating this spring with a bachelor's degree in history from Arizona State University's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. Courtesy photo