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Joelle Griffin Judice

GRADUATION YEAR
2025

MAJOR
General Studies

HOMETOWN
Ponchatoula

Regardless of the job description, success in the hospitality industry requires adaptability, strong work ethic, and some creative problem-solving skills.

That may be why JoElle Griffin Judice was a natural fit. Her passion for hospitality led her to leave her home state the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to pursue a culinary arts certificate.

Over a decade later, those qualities carried her back to UL Lafayette, where she **finished her bachelor's degree** with support from the UL System, UL Lafayette Alumni Association, and encouraging faculty.

"Going back, you think, 'I don't even know where to start,' but the support is there," she says. "Returning as an online student, it was pleasantly surprising how much your professors want you to succeed, and how much they're willing to help you."

A Penchant for Service

During Lafayette's farm-to-table boom, Judice balanced classwork with back-to-back shifts in local cafes and restaurants.

"I worked at the Rusted Rooster from 6 to 10 a.m., went to class from 11 to 3, then worked at Saint Street Inn from 5 to 10 p.m.," says Judice. "During that time, I fell in love with hospitality and food."

So, she cut her degree program short and left Louisiana to earn a certificate in culinary arts in Boston. Judice returned less than two years later to work in Copeland's New Orleans test kitchen, launching new concepts with the Louisiana mainstay.

It was there that she also reconnected with Nick Judice, whose family's restaurant, Judice Inn, has been a Lafayette hamburger hub since 1947.

The two married after JoElle returned to Lafayette during the COVID-19 pandemic and began working with hospitality company Social Entertainment.

That's when she learned about **CompeteLA** and saw her opportunity to finish her bachelor's degree.

Following the Signs

CompeteLA was introduced by the UL System to help Louisiana adults with college credit to complete their degrees through added support and reduced tuition.

"I had always talked about going back to school, but I couldn't quite wrap my head around how I would do that," Judice said. "So that kind of piqued my interest, and I started the process. I got connected with my advisor, who was super, super helpful."

With her advisor's guidance, Judice realized UL Lafayette's **Bachelor of General Studies online degree program** would be a great fit for her goals.

"General studies was the best use of the classes I had taken. It gave me the freedom to take classes that relate to the career route I was taking," she says. "The ability to do everything fully online was huge for me. I wouldn't have been able to finish if it weren't for that opportunity."

Judice started slowly, taking one full-semester, 16-week course at a time. Eventually, she found her rhythm by pairing 16-week courses with consecutive 8-week sessions.

"I was never in more than two classes at a time, because I was working full time and pregnant with my son," she says. "It was super doable."

But once her son was born, Judice hit pause once more and shifted her focus to family.

When the UL Lafayette Alumni Association announced its Comeback Scholarship in 2024, she took it as a sign to keep going.

Managing Coursework, Time, Staff

The **Comeback Scholarship** is designed for UL Lafayette students who haven't finished their degree and haven't been enrolled for two semesters or more.

For Judice, the scholarship's impact was more than monetary. Coupled with relevant coursework, it kept her motivated.

"To have that support from the University was super helpful," she says. "Plus, I was taking courses that were in line with my career. That helped because I could apply what I was doing at work to what I was doing in my classes and vice versa."

While at Social Entertainment, Judice progressed from general manager to director of operations, overseeing events and upwards of 60 staff members.

"I would meet with management, and we looked at inventory, system, and processes. I rewrote handbooks and procedures," says Judice. "For events, I did a lot of planning with vendors. Being their contact and set us up for whatever we would need to be able to run a full-scale event."

Courses like MGMT 350: Behavioral Processes in Organizations and MGMT: 365 Human Resources Management gave Judice insights she could apply right away.

"It helped me interact with people; to support and lead them at the same time," Judice says. "We did not have an HR department, so it was nice to get that perspective."

The skills Judice had gained in her professional life also helped her thrive as an online student.

"Being a professional forced me to stay organized," she says. "I communicated with my professors constantly; I emailed them questions all the time. I always used the online forums. I over communicated so that I knew I wasn't missing anything."

She continues applying those skills in her role as communications and engagement manager for Downtown Lafayette Inc., overseeing membership, stakeholder engagement, and events.

"It's very cool because I get to work closely with UL Lafayette," she says. "We just had the Ragin' Cajun Downtown Alive, which I helped to plan and execute. So, I got to go meet with the whole team from UL Lafayette to get involved."

Exceeding Expectations

As a newly minted Ragin' Grad, Judice's brick on the Walk of Honor is in good company.

"My entire family are UL Lafayette alumni — my mom, my dad. That's where they met. So, I had a bunch of people who were really excited for me."

Most of all, Judice says she was excited for herself and what she was able to accomplish. She expects that may be a shared experience for others ready to complete their degree.

"I had a 4.0 the entire time I came back. That's such a world of difference from the student I was when I first started school. It was my time, it was my money, and so I just constantly wanted to impress myself through the process," she says.

"It may seem tough, but you're capable of more than you think. You'll continue to surprise yourself and be more and more proud of yourself as you go through the process."

If you've attended UL Lafayette and meet re-entry admission requirements, you may qualify for the **Comeback Scholarship**. **Request information today** to see how your credits can count toward your degree.

NEWS