

## **MSW grad implements policy change at the VA**

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Phaedra Pitre, MSW DaCT

In some ways, Phaedra Pitre's job at the Veterans Affairs (VA) office was a social work role even before she returned to school to complete her [Master of Social Work \(MSW\)](#) degree at Tulane.

"While working at the VA in an administrative role, I often stepped into advocacy—helping veterans navigate barriers, connecting them to resources, and collaborating with social workers to address urgent needs," Pitre said.

Pitre says that now, her MSW informs all of her decisions, from systems thinking to policy navigation. At TSSW, she learned to practice all levels of social work practice, from the individual to the community level. [Dr. Candice Beasley's](#) social work curriculum, Pitre says, trained her to "put people at the center of process improvement."

"Tulane's MSW program, particularly its focus on Disaster and Collective Trauma, aligned perfectly with my lived experiences and my professional role serving veterans in crisis," Pitre said. "Tulane's reputation for social justice, academic rigor, and community engagement made it the ideal choice."

Her choice to pursue a [Disaster and Collective Trauma \(DaCT\) focus](#) in her MSW coursework was deeply personal – her family had survived and been displaced by several disasters, including Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

"I know firsthand the long tail of disaster—the emotional, financial, and social recovery that often takes years," she said.

In her work as a Program Analyst at the VA, Pitre uses her specialized knowledge to address immediate needs while creating plans for long-term recovery for both the individual and their community. Right now, she is working to implement programs that meet the updated requirements of the PACT Act, which Pitre describes as a "historic, landmark expansion of Veteran healthcare and benefits under the Biden-Harris administration."

"The Disaster and Collective Trauma perspective informs my work every day—whether developing programs, building interagency partnerships, or ensuring accessibility in VA services," Pitre said.

During the program, she says she became more aware of how people's environments contribute to the systemic advantages and disadvantages they carry.

“Tulane deepened my understanding of how trauma impacts generations, while also affirming that recovery and transformation are possible.”

Now, Pitre is pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration in Leadership and Organizational Development. She hopes the program will allow her to further her social work practice at the VA by leading change in system design. Working full-time in a demanding role while pursuing a doctorate degree can be intense, but Pitre says she finds peace in her family, her faith, and her garden.

“Cultivating vegetables, herbs, and flowers is a way to nurture both the soil and my spirit. Gardening teaches patience, resilience, and the beauty of growth over time,” said Pitre.

The beauty of growth over time is a recurring theme in Pitre’s life. A nontraditional student and U.S. Army veteran working an unconventional social work role, she encourages students not to let themselves be limited by assumptions about their background, their academic journey, or the social work profession.

“Social work is broad, versatile, and deeply impactful beyond traditional settings. Our range extends from one-on-one interventions to influencing systems and policy,” Pitre said. “Whether you’re on the front line or in the C-suite, your MSW equips you to tackle complex, sensitive, and ignored issues with courage and creativity. Keep learning, keep growing, and don’t settle. Transformation and recovery are always possible—both for you and for those you serve.”