

**First & Last Name:** Karen Y Giraldo

**Anticipated Graduation Date & College:** December 2018, UT Austin

**My educational journey:** Hola! My name is Karen Y Giraldo and I just graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in December 2018 with a BBA in Marketing and a BS in Communication. I graduated Valedictorian of my high school class and had a lot of success throughout my first four years at UT, but had to take a leave due to becoming ill just one class shy of graduating with three degrees (my third major was Psychology).

Throughout my absence from the university, I felt like a failure for not finishing my education, but I slowly started to take steps in the direction that took me away from my illness being completely debilitating to becoming empowered by the effort it took to overcome so many hurdles in my journey. There was one thing missing – no matter how much I accomplished, I could never shake away the self-defeating roar in my mind of having failed due to not having completed my education.

That deafening roar began to be silenced as I found Upgrade and they helped me in my journey back to graduating. Upgrade helped me with the new process of re-admission, financial aid, and, most importantly, helped me gain a solid vision of my capability to go back and conquer what I started before.

Now that I have graduated, I work for the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. In my journey, I gained a passion for mental health; therefore, I am currently working with a mental health program in an effort to start a better treatment plan for people experiencing a mental health need, as well as a broadcasting station, and a life coaching business in the realm of marketing and fundraising for better mental health.

**My advice to someone thinking about returning to college:** I would have to say that small steps in returning to college add up to a lot of momentum. Each step compounds and before you know it, time flew by and you have graduated. Schedule your meeting and speak to an Upgrade advisor. Pick up that phone with your academic advisor. You will find that they genuinely want to help you return and will work for and with you. I wish you all the best in your journey!

