Nearly 30 years ago, Carolyn Smith ’83 graduated with a degree in political science and went on to spend the bulk of her career working in the financial sector. These days, Smith is back at Regis, hitting the books once again. But the banking world is in her rear-view mirror. In May, she is graduating with a master’s degree in health administration.

On the surface, it may seem like a complete non sequitur. But her new career choice is actually a rather organic fit.

“My younger sister Patricia is disabled and I’ve been the guardian of her,” Smith says. “And our mother has Alzheimer’s disease and I have been her caregiver as well. Caring for others became very natural for me and I thought that if I could do this in my personal life, I could do this for my professional life as well.”

For the past five years, Smith had been eyeing a career shift. After investing so many years with management roles in retail and mortgage banking, Smith was ready for a 180-degree change. But for her the timing was never right. When, in 2010, her company consolidated and shifted operations to Connecticut, her position was eliminated. Suddenly the timing had to be right.

Frankly, it was a blessing in disguise for Smith. She could finally go after her dreams. She would go back to school and retrain. But where? What program?

When Smith read an issue of Regis Today and saw a profile on Catherine Wilson, BA ’83, MS ’11, a former classmate from their undergraduate days, she learned that Wilson was a student in the health administration program (she graduated this past winter). This new Regis program looked very promising to Smith.

Besides having all the benefits of a school she knew and loved, it was an 18-month program. It would be intense, she thought. But it wouldn’t be too much of a life commitment. She looked at other programs in the region and thought many relied too much on online courses. Ultimately, Regis was her ideal match.

At the beginning of 2011, she began taking classes full-time. From taking classes in policy to getting the chance to work in the field at an assisted-living facility, Smith is enthusiastic about her experience in the MHA program.

“I’ve really enjoyed my time back at the school. My professors and my classmates come from such a wide variety of backgrounds—not all of them are from a health care background. There are a lot of people like me who are making a career transition themselves. Plus it’s allowed me to reconnect with the college. My mother is a Regis grad, too, so I guess this degree makes it a triple pride.”

The MHA program launched just over a year ago. Its structure is flexible, allowing individuals to spend roughly 16 months (for full-time) and two years (part-time) to complete the necessary coursework. According to Smith, that is one of the most beneficial aspects of the program, as she has to balance her caretaking responsibilities.

As much as Smith loved her second time around at Regis, the affection has been mutual. For program director Mary Ann Hart, having someone with Smith’s expansive resume is an immense asset to the program, as she is able to make the classroom a much more dynamic place.

“Carolyn’s professional background in business and her extensive experience navigating the health care system as a consumer advocate in caring for...
elderly relatives have made her an invaluable contributor to the health administration program at Regis,” says Hart. 

“Like many of our students who come to our graduate program embarking on a second career, she has brought her rich life experience, an enthusiasm for learning, and a commitment to applying her people skills and wisdom to the expanding, dynamic field of health care.”

Smith currently lives in Plainville with her husband, Brad, who has been fully supportive of her seismic shift in careers. 

“My husband has been my biggest cheerleader since I entered the program,” says Smith. “When I first started out, he was proofreading and critiquing all of my papers. But these days, he doesn’t need to. He just reads the first paragraph and says, ‘You’ve got it.’”

After she graduates, Smith has a number of different goals she is interested in exploring. When she entered the program, her dream was to be the executive director of an independent or assisted-living facility. But she says that the last two years have opened her up to contemplating other career paths that she had never considered before. Entering the field of policy is something she is weighing. Working in geriatric care and consultation are also possible options for Smith. No matter what area of health care she enters, Smith says that her ultimate goal is to spend her days helping others.

“I’m excited for this new beginning. Right now, I’m figuring out what I want to do when I grow up.”