

Going pro

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Following all the pomp and circumstance of commencement ceremonies, most graduates begin to focus on what comes next ? using their degrees to get a job. For Tulane University class of 2013 grad Lydia Hand, this summer will mark the next step in her path to becoming a professional fighter.



Lydia Hand, who graduated summa cum laude in economics, plans to follow her dream of becoming a professional fighter now that she's done with school. Hand will fight in her last three amateur tournaments this summer before going pro. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

The summa cum laude graduate in economics took up kickboxing at the Reily Student Recreation Center when she was in her first year at Tulane, as a way to stay in shape and quickly developed a passion for the martial art.

After two years, she began to fight competitively in amateur tournaments, ultimately winning the International Chinese Martial Arts World Championship in 2011. Following her success in kickboxing, she started boxing and won her weight class in the Louisiana Golden Gloves boxing tournament held in Lafayette, La., in March.

[Hand](#) says her family is supportive of her decision to pursue fighting even if they

don't quite understand the desire to fight for a living. She says she realizes she is following a path less-traveled, but knows her window of opportunity to fight professionally is small.

“An academic career is something I can always come back to if fighting doesn't work out,” says Hand, who is trying to get her honors thesis ready for publication. “But fighting is not something I can come back to once I'm out of it. This is something I really want to pursue right now.”

On top of her training, Hand is also the owner and general manager of GOW Martial Arts, a local gym, and she waits tables part-time, as well. She will cap off her amateur fighting career this summer competing in three tournaments ? two kickboxing and one boxing ? before turning professional in both sports. She has her eye on the 2016 Olympics, but has to wait and see if professionals will be allowed to compete. Either way, she says she is following her dream.

“This is what I want to do, and I'm happy to have the opportunity.”