

# Graduate uses online biological sciences program to launch medical career

By Meenah Rincon, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2025 graduates](#).

For Danielle Kollander, the path to a college degree — and now medical school — was anything but traditional.

When her husband medically retired from the military and their family relocated to her hometown of Temecula, California, she remained focused on her goal: becoming a physician.

[ASU Online](#) provided the flexibility she needed to make that dream possible. Kollander — a Type 1 diabetic and mother of three — balanced family, health and education with unwavering determination.

“Without the ability to be remote, I would not have been able to be a military spouse or mom and be able to juggle school on top of it,” she said.

Through ASU's supportive environment and robust online offerings, Kollander not only continued her education — she thrived.

While earning her degree through The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, she participated in the [ACE Scholars Program](#), an undergraduate cancer research group and took advantage of opportunities that expanded her academic and professional horizons.

From running a PCR test on herself to exploring a genetic risk for Alzheimer's to shadowing physicians and presenting at research symposiums, Kollander gained hands-on experience that helped solidify her passion for medicine.

This spring, she will graduate with her degree in [biological sciences](#) and continue her journey of becoming a medical professional.

**Question: What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?**

**Answer:** I’ve wanted to study biology and medicine since I was about 12 years old and diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. I wanted to know *why* my body didn’t work the same way as other people’s. As I got older, it shifted to realizing that none of my providers had ever had diabetes, yet they were telling me how to micromanage my life to stay alive. I knew I had to study biology to get into medical school and bridge the gap. I want to give future patients a different experience — I will be able to guide them not just by my education but by my personal experience as someone with the same disease that they have.

**Q: What’s something you learned while at ASU Online — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

**A:** Something that surprised me about my classes at ASU Online is how much I actually liked learning about cancer. I had the opportunity to take an oncology class taught by Dr. (Carolyn) Compton and was surprised by how interested I was in that field as well. Another thing that surprised me is how fun and interesting lab days can be. I was able to do an immersion lab with Dr. (Susan) Holechek along with my summer organic chemistry labs and really did enjoy the setting.

**Q: Why did you choose ASU Online?**

**A:** I decided to apply to ASU online because it has a fully accredited biology program accepted by U.S. medical schools while allowing the flexibility I needed as a mom and military spouse. When I applied, we were waiting on orders and had no idea where we would end up. Luckily, it didn’t matter with ASU online. I ended up moving from Oceanside, California, to Dallas, Texas, while my husband was on recruiting duty. The only thing that changed was the time zone — it did not affect my ability to stay in school. I also had my third baby during my time at ASU, which would not have been possible with my diabetes and lupus if I had to show up in class — I was able to do coursework easily while on bedrest.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU Online?**

**A:** [Dr. Susan Holechek](#) taught me the most important lesson at ASU Online. I took her genetics class at the beginning of my third pregnancy and ended up getting a grade I wasn’t happy with, so I signed up for her spring break immersion program to try to have a better understanding with hands-on lab time. I showed up pregnant and tried to push off morning sickness and other pregnancy side effects to get through the week. She encouraged me to listen to my body and was so compassionate the whole week. This taught me that life and being a mom doesn’t have to get in the way of my educational and career goals. I don’t know if Dr. Holechek even realizes that she taught me this life lesson, but it has been so helpful for me as I progressed through my degree path.

**Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?**

**A:** Just keep going, and don’t compare yourself to other students. If you need to take less of a course load to keep your mental health or juggle life, do it. It took me a while to accept that everyone’s journey is different. Once you do that, it will have a huge impact on your mental health, your grades and your self-worth.

**Q: What was your favorite spot for power studying?**

**A:** I like to sit in my bed with my iPad and Macbook.

**Q: What are your plans after graduation?**

**A:** I'm taking the MCAT at the beginning of May, then applying for medical school this cycle. If I don't get accepted, I'll probably do a master's program.

**Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?**

**A:** \$40 million sounds like a lot more than it is on a global scale, but what I would focus on is the health crisis due to the food additives and eating habits of people — primarily in the United States. If people ate cleaner and less processed food, it would have a multigenerational impact on the population. Kids would learn from their parents and eventually pass those habits down to their children. I would love to see a lower obesity rate in the population, especially children because it would decrease the risk for several health issues throughout life.

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**Text image(s)**





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