

# Multi-passionate grad exemplifies what it means to be a Dean's Medalist

By O'Hara Shipe, ASU News  
April 29, 2025

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

On April 3, Bianca Obando, an undergraduate in ASU's [School of Human Evolution and Social Change](#), attended the [Arizona Public Health Association's](#) annual conference.

It was her second major conference of the week, yet the driven undergrad was full of bubbly energy when she talked about everything she had learned.

"A topic today that was really important and one that I'm now even more interested in learning about is Indigenous health practices. It's so important to be aware of how colonization affects people and people's health outcomes," said Obando.

Obando attends multiple conferences a week, works in several research labs, serves as the president of two students clubs, completes coursework for two majors — and still has maintained a 4.13 GPA throughout her time at ASU.

"I think I'm just kind of a person that likes to be a little bit busy," said Obando with a smile. "I know how it sounds, and my schedule seems like a big task or really academically rigorous, but really, all of my friends are in the labs and clubs with me. I enjoy every part of being busy on campus."

Being multi-passionate, Obando struggled to settle on a major during her freshman year. After flitting between [School of Life Sciences](#) majors, she finally found the perfect combination of a Bachelor of Science in molecular biosciences and biotechnology, and a Bachelor of Arts in global health through the [School of Human Evolution and Social Change](#).

"I like the combination of both of the studies. I like to refer to biotechnology as vaccine development and global health as vaccine distribution. Together, I am learning about the process of medical developments and then how to implement them to improve global health," said Obando. "My two degrees just felt like the perfect complement."

While Obando is humble about her immense accomplishments as an ASU undergraduate, her professors lauded her for her work ethic and intellectual curiosity.

“I have been continually impressed by the number of opportunities that she seeks out, including her work as a [Helios Scholar](#) at the Translational Genomics Research Institute and her work as an intern, and then a lab administrator for the [Student Outbreak Response Team](#) in the [Applied Infectious Disease and Epidemiology Lab](#),” said Rhian Stotts, an associate teaching professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change.

Obando’s dedication to academic excellence garnered her the designation of Dean’s Medalist this spring. Each semester, departments and schools within [The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#) select outstanding students who have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to academic excellence during their time at ASU. These students are awarded a prestigious Dean’s Medal in honor of their scholastic achievements.

ASU News talked with Obando about her experiences as an exemplary undergraduate.

*Note: Answers may have been edited lightly for grammar, length and/or clarity.*

**Question: As someone who is always on the move, where do you call home?**

**Answer:** I’d say Peoria, Arizona. I went to Sunrise Mountain High School on 83rd and Deer Valley. But my mom is from Canada, and my dad is from St. Louis by way of Colombia. Most of my mom’s family is still in Canada, and my dad’s family immigrated to the U.S. So, I guess I have a home in a few places.

**Q: You took the opportunity to study abroad twice. What is the importance of studying abroad as a global health major?**

**A:** You can’t understand global health unless you are a global student. I think that doing a [study abroad in France](#) with the School of Human Evolution and Social Change was a really fantastic experience because we were with like-minded students, not necessarily all global health majors, but people interested in medicine, people interested in government, people interested in policy.

**Q: What was your biggest takeaway from studying abroad?**

**A:** It was an independence thing for me — flying there by myself and having to get to the accommodation by myself, it really made me a stronger individual. Of course, you can’t beat Italian and French cuisine, either.

**Q: You’ve spent quite a bit of time working in labs as an undergraduate. What are some of the research projects you worked on?**

**A:** I worked in the [Biodesign Institute](#) as a sophomore. Basically, we were working with salmonella bacteria by editing their plasmids to provide targeted therapeutic technologies to treat cancer, which was really awesome.

I also did work in the Applied Infectious Disease and Epidemiology Lab. That project let me collaborate with the [Maricopa County Department of Public Health](#) to investigate valley fever and salmonella in patients in Maricopa County.

I'm currently finishing up research in the [Stone Lab](#), which examines how humans and other primates have adapted to their environments.

**Q: What is your proudest moment as an ASU student?**

**A:** I've been working on an awareness project about Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) at the [San Carlos Apache Reservation](#). It meant disseminating RMSF disease information and applying tick collars to some of the dogs in the area. It felt like a really full-circle moment for me because four years ago, I would have never been mature enough or had the professional competencies or the cultural awareness to go to these communities and feel like I can really do this.

**Q: What is something you learned at ASU in the classroom or otherwise that surprised you or really changed your perspective?**

**A:** The biggest thing I have learned is to be empathetic. There are so many different factors that go into health care, and you have to be culturally and emotionally sensitive to understand your patients and provide the best care. The worst thing you can be in a community is disrespectful. That's not how science is spread. Science is spread through cultural competency and respect.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson at ASU and what was it?**

**A:** That one is really hard because I have had such amazing mentors. But, if I had to choose, I would say Rhian Stotts. She's so well versed and so articulate in all of these different research areas. I'm somebody with a billion interests, and I want to put my hands everywhere and I want to do everything. She showed me that it is totally possible to do all of these things and to be a part of these projects as long as you put the work in. Women have been the most influential people for me here at ASU, and I think that is really cool.

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

**A:** Well, I think if you're a global health major, you need to do the [Student Outbreak Response Team \(SORT\)](#). It is the most incredible hands-on public health experience you'll ever get. There are just so many opportunities with the program.

**Q: What's your favorite spot on campus whether we're studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?**

**A:** Late nights in [Noble Library](#). [Hayden](#) is geographically closer to where my apartment is, but Noble Library is kind of the spot. The energy in there is very much like when you watch other people study and it makes you want to study more. That's what Noble gives me.

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

**A:** A PhD program is definitely in my future.

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

**A:** I would spend the money on research that contributes to improving genetic diversity in the genomes we have and use for health research.

There is a lack in African and Hispanic genomes in databases that are used for research, and that negatively impacts their health outcomes. Including these genomes would improve public health outcomes for all groups and save lives. Additionally, I would use it to improve research in women's health areas, as there are major disparities in health research in this field.

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Text image(s)**





Bianca Obando. Courtesy photo