

# Dean's Medalist plants seeds of justice through community garden at ASU West Valley campus

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

With a passion for equity and advocacy, Lindsey Stevens found her calling in high school through leadership in clubs focused on student unity, Latino advocacy and women's empowerment.

Now she is graduating with a bachelor's degree in [social justice and human rights](#) and a minor in communication from Arizona State University's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at the West Valley campus.

At ASU, she brought that same passion to life through impactful campus initiatives. She co-founded the West Valley Gardens, the campus's first community garden, as a response to student food insecurity — a challenge she personally experienced. She also served in undergraduate student government, where she created a clothing closet to provide free professional and everyday attire for students in need.

Stevens' academic journey has been marked by curiosity, critical thinking and a commitment to justice. She credits New College with preparing her to balance life's demands and build a future rooted in community organizing, nonprofit leadership and public service.

Stevens is currently completing an accelerated master's program and aspires to drive meaningful change in her local Arizona community.

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

**Answer:** After high school, I found myself in a bit of a slump. I had been super involved — leading clubs like the Black Student Union, Latino Advocacy Club and Women’s Club — and I loved my group of friends. But I struggled with change, and thinking about my next steps felt overwhelming. I knew I wanted to stay close to my family in Arizona, but I wasn’t sure what path to take. One day, my dad came across ASU’s online social justice and human rights program and said, “Doesn’t this sound like everything you’ve been doing?” He was right. I’d been passionate about social causes throughout high school, so it felt like a natural fit. When I toured ASU’s West Valley campus, I immediately knew it was the right place for me — it felt like home. Later, I added a communication minor, realizing how powerful communication is in driving change. It helped me better understand how to connect with others and amplify the work I care deeply about.

**Q: What’s something you learned while at New College that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

**A:** One thing that really surprised me during college — especially through my major — was how much I learned about both past and current human rights abuses. I gained a much deeper understanding of justice theories and why access to human rights is still so unequal today. Another big moment was my NEW 101 class with Jackie Collins. It introduced me to the many resources and organizations at ASU, and helped me feel connected and supported from the start.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at New College and what was that lesson?**

**A:** One of the most important lessons I learned at New College came from [Professor Aaron Allen](#) in his course, Black Politics and Popular Film. We closely analyzed "Black Panther," not just for its cultural impact, but also for what it lacked — like representation of Black disabled and queer people, or any real depiction of revolution. Professor Allen constantly challenged me to think deeper. Anytime I made a statement in class, he would ask, “Why?” He pushed me to question my beliefs and to critically examine the world around me. That experience shaped how I think and engage with complex issues today. If you have the chance to take a class with Professor Allen — do it. It’s truly worth it.

**Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d offer to someone considering applying for college?**

**A:** The best piece of advice I’d offer to someone considering college is this: You might choose a major and later realize it’s not the right fit — and that’s OK. The important thing is to get your foot in the door. Start talking to people, explore your options, and if it’s financially possible, take that first step and apply. Things might not go exactly as planned, but college is a valuable opportunity to grow, meet new people, and discover new paths.

**Q: What are your favorite locations, whether for studying, meeting friends, or just thinking about life?**

**A:** My favorite place on campus is the West Valley Gardens, located north of the Faculty Administration Building. This community garden was founded here on the West Valley campus, and I had the opportunity to contribute to its creation. Another great spot is Changemaker Central — I absolutely love it there. Finally, I enjoy spending time on the large lawn, where I can relax, study or lay on a blanket. It’s a perfect place to unwind.

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

**A:** I'm currently in the accelerated master's program. By the end of spring 2026, I'll have completed my master's degree. After that, I'm interested in working within my local community, possibly through community organizing or nonprofit work. I'm very interested in government roles, particularly in school boards and local government. There are many positions that can create significant change — often more than people realize — and these positions can have a greater impact than expected. I believe there is a real need for good people who genuinely care about their communities and want to help improve things. That's the direction I'm thinking of pursuing.

**Q: Have you received any scholarships?**

**A:** During my time at ASU, I received a scholarship from the New College Student Success Emergency Fund. This scholarship was incredibly helpful throughout my college journey. I also received support through FAFSA and federal aid, which I believe is vital and important. Without these scholarships and financial aid, I don't think I would have been able to attend college. I am extremely grateful for these opportunities because I honestly don't know how I would have managed to pursue higher education otherwise.

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

**Main image**



The West Valley Gardens is one of Lindsey Stevens' go-to hangout spots on campus. Photo by Danielle Castillo/ASU

## Gallery





Lindsey Stevens and Rae Stusen, co-founders of West Valley Gardens at ASU's West Valley campus.



Stevens studies with Stusen at the Student Lounge.