

# Celebrating spectacular spring 2025 grads

## A look at some of ASU's graduating students who have already made an impact

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News  
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A record 21,000-plus students will be turning their tassels in May as they embark on the next chapter of their lives following Arizona State University's commencement.

These grads have a bright future ahead considering that ASU is a top public university for employable graduates, and many have already made their mark on the world while studying at ASU.

From pursuing multiple majors to conducting impactful research, here's a look at some of the remarkable soon-to-be alumni graduating this spring.

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### Read more

[ASU graduates overjoyed — and employed](#)

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### [Grad plans to bring American studies degree to nursing career](#)

From Albuquerque to Antarctica, School of Social Transformation student Sofia Atencio took every opportunity she came across to become a more well-rounded person.

### [Graduating student tells peers to live in the moment](#)

Zoelyn Mulloy started her academic career during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. After many unexpected challenges and turns, she found herself thriving at ASU and is now graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in gender, women and sexuality studies and a minor in art history.

### [Flinn Scholar, nursing graduate ready to serve Arizona families](#)

Netia Unger, a first-generation student, has always found a way forward, and now that same determination is taking her into a nursing career rooted in purpose and care.

### [Dean's Medalist attributes success to pursuing every opportunity that comes her way](#)

Mia Bazbaz has accomplished her dreams at ASU by taking this particular piece of advice to heart: Try everything. The justice studies major has amassed a staggering list of achievements, such as internships, clubs, community service, scholarships and a study abroad in Germany.

### [PhD grad focused on Indigenous people's experiences in academia](#)

Joseph Gazing Wolf has lived many lives — including being an Indigenous rights activist across the world — and now, he graduates with a Doctor of Philosophy in environmental life sciences.

### **ASU grad tackles women's health disparities through honors research**

“Initially, I wanted to become a doctor so I could help people in this direct way. But trying to find ways to lessen the health disparities that women face has become more of a priority,” said Megha Pillai, who is graduating with a bachelor's degree in biology with a concentration in biomedical sciences.

### **Dean's Medalist excels in academics, leadership at ASU**

When he started at ASU, Grant Skala originally pursued only political science. But his curiosity and passion for learning led him to expand his academic path to add a communication degree as well as a minor in history and a certificate in philosophy, ethics and law.

### **Graduate uses online biological sciences program to launch medical career**

ASU Online provided the flexibility that Danielle Kollander — a Type 1 diabetic and mother of three — needed to get one step closer to her goal of becoming a physician.

### **Graduate student completes six-year ASU journey without pause**

From the moment she began her undergraduate studies, Olivia Reyes was determined to immerse herself in the intersection of art and technology. In just six years she completed just that at the School of Arts, Media and Engineering.

### **Dean's Medalist uses writing, literature to understand the human experience**

Dahlia Horani made practical use of ASU's career preparation resources while delving into her passions: reading, language and understanding the human condition.

### **ASU Online graduate finds new purpose in public health**

One of the most meaningful courses Samantha Karkar took at the College of Health Solutions explored the many social, economic and systemic factors that contribute to health inequities in the U.S. and around the world.

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**From community  
college to  
commencement**

[Meet ASU's spring 2025  
transfer graduates](#)

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### **Dean's Medalist epitomizes a compassionate natural leader**

Vaikhari Nalole has distinguished herself through her outstanding academic achievements, unwavering commitment to research, peer mentoring and community engagement.

### **Young ASU grad continues to inspire while chasing his dreams**

A high school diploma, two degrees down, and two to go. Dallas Salas is quickly accomplishing his dreams of becoming a five-time Sun Devil. Now that he has completed his Master of Healthcare Innovation program, he's reflecting on the experience and sharing what's next.

### **English grad perseveres in ‘unrelenting pursuit of story’**

Mary Ryan Kirsch shares her love of Southern culture — especially Southern food — as an editorial assistant at a lifestyle magazine. Kirsch is also a former chef, a wife and a devoted dog mom. All those descriptors are part of her unconventional student success story.

### **Sports law and business graduate balances ambition on her path to the top**

During her senior year at another university, Julia Jacome didn't have a clear idea of what career path she wanted to pursue. So when a friend told her about the Master of Sports Law and Business program at ASU, she knew it was the next step.

### **Launchpad for a new life**

Kiera Charley's educational path began with a ceremonial blessing held at her home on the Navajo reservation. Four years later, it will culminate in a graduation ceremony at a 53,000-seat stadium in Tempe when she earns a degree in astrobiology.

### **ASU Law student advances HR career with master's in employment law**

As a department human resources specialist in the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Itzel Torres Alvarez wanted to deepen her understanding of U.S. labor laws and their application in the private sector, so she enrolled in ASU Law's human resources and employment law online master's program.

### **Dean's Medalist continues to explore the universe's unknown**

Olivia Calcerano had more questions than people had answers to about the universe, so she sought to solve them herself. Now she is set to graduate with a degree in physics and a minor in mathematics — and getting closer to deciphering those questions.

### **ASU grad hopes to change the face of health care**

Surabhi Sajith's unique perspective led her to pursue a bachelor's degree in global health from ASU's School of Human Evolution and Social Change alongside a bachelor's degree in microbiology from the School of Life Sciences.

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

During her time at ASU, Bianca Obando attended multiple conferences a week, worked in several research labs, served as the president of two students clubs, completed coursework for two majors — and still maintained a 4.13 GPA.

### **A race against time: Grad innovates research on aging**

Her mission to find a school that aligned with her needs landed Brianah McCoy at The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Eight years later, she's graduating as a three-time Sun Devil with her PhD in molecular and cellular biology.

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## **From second chances to Sun Devil success**

**Earned Admission grads**  
**redefine the college journey**

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## **Global health grad is ready to take on the world**

Undoubtedly powered by his usual drink of choice, a blonde Americano, Samuel Rosales has cruised through his time at ASU with a 4.0 GPA while working as a full-time shift supervisor at Starbucks.

## **How this ASU political science grad turned adversity into advocacy**

Nicole Spencer-Walters' instinct to analyze, combined with a deep-rooted passion for advocacy, shaped her vision for the future: a career in law.

## **School of Social Transformation celebrates first grads from online gender studies master's program**

"ASU Online has helped me so much; my whole ASU student experience has been online, allowing me to continue my education while working full time," said upcoming graduate Brian Castillo-Murillo.

## **ASU Online grad with dual degree sets sights on wildlife conservation**

Growing up on the move, Cori Sharp says finding stability and pursuing long-term goals was always top of mind. After graduating from high school, she started working at Starbucks — and, in doing so, discovered the company's partnership with ASU.

## **Music theater graduate reflects on ASU journey**

Performance major Grace Rogers has always loved to sing. Now a graduating senior, she is celebrating a childhood passion that has blossomed into a career. In March, she made her New York City debut and after graduation she will be featured in a professional production of "Into the Woods."

## **From Brazil to a PhD track: How one Dean's Medalist found her way at ASU**

After moving from Brazil to pursue college in the U.S., Helena Silva Goldbaum found her calling in developmental psychology. Now she's graduating with two degrees and a spotless GPA, and she plans to earn her PhD.

## **Sun Devil athlete and biochemistry grad does it all**

From the gym floor to the lab, ASU biochemistry, math and honors scholar Alex Theodorou balances elite gymnastics and academic excellence.

## **How one barista found her passion in community advocacy**

Pamela Garcia returned to school after a decade away, earning a sociology degree through ASU Online and the Starbucks College Achievement Plan. Now she plans to use her experience to advocate for immigrant communities.

## **Graduate brings empathy and innovation to experience design**

Marisa Costagliola has blended her background in health care with immersive technology and human-centered design to create meaningful, community-focused work.

### **First-gen student transforms into a campus servant leader**

Saad Abuhamdieh found his voice — and his passion for leadership — at the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. Through mentorship, campus involvement and authentic connection, he transformed into a campus leader and Dean's Medalist, inspiring others to embrace new opportunities and lead with heart.

### **International student discovers transformational power of language**

Growing up in the Arabian Desert, Abdalla Alateyah could not have imagined he'd one day graduate from college in the Sonoran Desert. He chose to study at ASU on the strength of its international reputation as a leader in linguistics training.

### **Dean's Medalist explores connections between late-stage imperial decline and political apathy**

Benjamin Ash has always been passionate about history, politics and activism, making it no surprise he chose to study how these intersect.

### **Lifelong passion for urban design turned into urban planning degree**

First-generation college student Nathaniel Bush was named a Dean's Medalist in the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning — a recognition that celebrates his exceptional academic achievements, including a 4.22 GPA, and his contributions to the field of urban planning.

### **ASU grad heads to Harvard after exploring connection between allergies and the brain**

Childhood experiences inspired Leslie Bustamante Hernandez to unravel how allergies affect physiology and behavior.

### **Dual-degree graduate sets off for Italian internship experience**

When she began college, Andrea Chacon wanted a way to combine all of her passions. Now, she will graduate this spring with dual degrees in anthropology and Italian and a minor in economics.

### **A graduate's journey from cancer research to business leadership**

At ASU, Kelly Conard centered herself at the intersection of science, health care and technology. Her work aims to translate scientific discoveries into practical health solutions, with a focus on studying vaccines for influenza and COVID-19.

### **Thunderbird at ASU graduate champions health care innovation across borders**

Daniel Chaves has always been steadfast in his belief that health care can — and should — drive equity and build bridges across cultures.

### **Taking health care leadership to the next level**

For nearly 20 years, Dr. Anikar Chhabra built a career rooted in precision, care and clinical excellence in orthopedic surgery and sports medicine. But it wasn't until he found himself sitting in high-level administrative meetings that he realized something was missing — he needed an MBA.

### **Meet the 14-year-old trailblazer earning a degree from ASU**

She learned to read before 2, took college algebra at 8, finished high school at 11 — now Abigail Zagala has earned her undergraduate degree from ASU at age 14 and aims to change lives through law and advocacy.

### **Grad aims to use law degree to stand up for others**

For McKenna Hunter, the draw to law began early: "I loved to learn and solve puzzles, and law was the only profession where there is an intersection of almost every other subject matter."

### **Grad driven to practice law by personal experiences and injustices faced in Iran**

Growing up in Iran, Negar Nahid made herself a promise that one day she would be someone who not only valued the rule of law but also stood firmly for equality and justice. That commitment became her guiding mantra.

### **Gaps in care set ASU grad on a new career trajectory**

After spending more than 60 weeks in hospitals over five years, Kristen Bish knows where health care falls short — and she's using her experience and education to change that.

### **Raised in Kenya, South Africa and the UAE, this grad is taking on global policy**

Through research, diplomacy and a double major in sociology and political science, Julia Döll is using her global background to explore how systems work — and how they could work better.

### **Graduate leads with heart in pediatric nursing**

Throughout her time at the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, Ava Randecker has leaned into the human connection of health care, especially during her numerous clinical rotations at Phoenix Children's Hospital.

### **Mentorship helped graduate find passion for immunology**

Fathima Nawaz moved across the globe to discover how our bodies defend themselves from environmental toxins in an increasingly polluted world.

### **Graduating ASU linguist works to combat online conflict**

Daeun Shin, who is graduating with a PhD in linguistics and applied linguistics, hopes to soon put her new credentials to good use reducing conflict on the internet.

### **Graduate finds academic passion through longtime hobby**

Emilia Pierce has been compiling a family tree since she was 10 years old. One day, a thought occurred to her — why not turn this hobby into a career? Now she's graduating with bachelor's

degrees in history and anthropology from ASU Online.

### **Triple major finds purpose in tech, teamwork and community impact**

For Rashi Duttgupta, finding the right path did not happen overnight. But everything changed when she enrolled in a CIS 236 class, where she discovered her passion for teamwork and problem-solving in the information systems space.

### **Business law grad wants to give back to Indigenous communities**

For Ethan Tacheene, pursuing a business law degree wasn't just a personal goal — it was a mission rooted in serving his community.

### **Global curiosity fuels Thunderbird at ASU grad's education**

Bryce Young transferred to the Thunderbird School of Global Management searching for a change. Now graduating this spring with a Bachelor of Science in international trade, Young reflects on an experience defined by a community she now calls family.

### **Honors grad uses space to solve challenges on Earth**

When Christopher Langenderfer came to ASU, he was interested in space. By the time he graduated, he was using satellite data to address real-world environmental problems on Earth. Now, he is set to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in technological leadership.

### **Thunderbird at ASU grad uses global roots to thrive in business**

The first of his family to grow up in the United States, Diego Lara credits his globally minded upbringing for shaping his early aspirations and his eventual journey at the Thunderbird School of Global Management at ASU.

### **International student prepares for launch into space industry**

When Ana Girish moved from Kerala, India, to Arizona State University, she brought with her a dream that had first taken shape at age 12: to one day work in the space industry. This spring, that dream becomes a reality.

### **Sustainability grad brings a systems mindset to space**

Kennedy Gourdine arrived at ASU with a clear sense of purpose. She knew she wanted to study sustainability, and she knew she wanted to make a difference. What she didn't expect was how her passion for the planet would lead her to the future of space.

### **Thunderbird grad finds her voice in global space leadership**

Aisha Ndahi came to ASU from Nigeria with a background in space science and a goal: to develop the leadership and management skills she needed to make a broader impact.

### **ASU grad champions animal welfare through psychology research**

From an early age, Holly Molinaro was captivated by the animal world — glued to episodes of “Animal Planet” and “The Crocodile Hunter.” That childhood fascination grew into a lifelong passion for understanding animal behavior and ultimately led her to ASU.

### **With facilities job and tuition discount, art history grad takes the plunge — and the plunger**

How many ASU graduates does it take to change a light bulb? Just one, and he’s graduating with a PhD in art history this May. From unclogging toilets and fixing door hinges to teaching classes and homeschooling his child, Paul Iannone's journey has been intense.

### **Vietnam veteran graduates with master's in international affairs and leadership**

Wayne Johnson, a 77-year-old aspiring college instructor, is graduating with a Master of Arts in international affairs and leadership this May.

### **History grad discovers career trajectory with public research opportunity**

Lily Crigler’s work included curating items and transcribing oral histories for A Journal of The Plague Year, a digital repository created by the Public History program to document the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Grad motivated to create change among tribal communities**

Sadie Red Eagle came to the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University for one sole purpose: to help tribal communities and families just like hers.

### **Grad takes next step to practice law, make an impact**

Amrita Vyas is graduating from the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University with a Master of Laws, bringing her one step closer to resuming her legal career.

### **Amid school, parenting and work, family and human development grad lands dream job**

As a single mom of four, Hilary Katzenmeier used ASU Online and the Starbucks College Achievement Plan to pursue a degree in family and human development and a future in the classroom.

### **Department of Psychology Dean’s Medalist heads to Mayo Clinic with a full-ride**

Vincent Truong is graduating with dual degrees in psychology and biochemistry, a minor in disability studies and a drive to return to underserved communities as a physician.

### **Meteorology grad aims to improve weather resilience across the Southwest**

For Amanda Gibbons, her passion for weather began with her childhood fascination with monsoon storms. At ASU, she discovered the full scope of being a meteorologist: not just forecasting weather but improving how communities respond to it.

### **ASU Law graduate champions health care reform**

Chanel Okosun will receive her Master of Legal Studies with an emphasis in health care law and administration from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. She has long been interested in understanding the intersection of law, policy and real-world outcomes in the health care field.

### **From sea turtles to science policy: How this ASU grad found his path to a PhD**

For Johann Valera-Vega, a biological sciences major on the neurobiology track at Arizona State University, a study abroad trip to Mexico turned out to be more than just an adventure — it was the turning point in his journey toward science and research.

### **First-generation grad wants to give back to the community, one smile at a time**

"I made the decision to go back to school a little later than most," Kylee Fleckenstein says — but she has more than made up for lost time. She'll graduate this summer with a Master of Geographic Information Systems.

### **Applied mathematics grad wants to 'make math more human'**

For Isiaha Rodriguez, numbers aren't just symbols — they're a language of creativity, connection and change. With a perspective like that, this first-gen graduate found his calling in applied mathematics at ASU's New College.

### **ASU geology grad aims to inspire students with 'stories from the land'**

From his role as a student worker in the Labriola National American Indian Data Center to representing ASU at many tribal community events as Mr. Indigenous 2024–25, Elishua Shepherd's time at ASU reflects a strong commitment to Indigenous excellence and community.

### **Liberal studies grad pursues legal career to champion representation, social change**

Driven by advocacy and equity, liberal studies graduate Jack Tess plans to pursue law school next with the hope of one day challenging systemic barriers and encouraging representation through education and public policy.

### **ASU Law student pursues sports law dreams with LLM degree**

Jasmin Alisha Dunston's journey to earning a Master of Laws at ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law is an extension of her deep-rooted experience in Major League Baseball.

### **Dietetics graduate builds confidence by 'chasing growth'**

Jasmyn DeGraff initially struggled to choose a major, feeling constricted by the rigidity of academic disciplines. During her first year, her perspective changed, as she started to view disciplines less restrictively and realized them to be sandboxes with boundless opportunities.

### **ASU chemistry grad turns persistence into purpose**

Samir Saifi doesn't give up easily. When the path he thought he wanted — a career in medicine — no longer felt right, he had the courage to pivot. And when chemistry, a subject he once hated, began to make sense in college, he leaned in.

### **ASU graduate earns dual degrees, eyes public service career**

Melissa Leal-Esquivel, a 2025 Outstanding Graduate of ASU's College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, earned bachelor's degrees in political science and anthropology, and is preparing for a career in local government leadership.

### **Dual-degree grad advances child development research with military families**

Sarah Nesbit's academic path was shaped by her unique upbringing as the daughter of two U.S. Army service members. These early experiences sparked her interest in how children grow and thrive, particularly in families impacted by military service.

### **Veteran earns ASU degree from Prague while working as IBM project manager**

Balancing life across continents, U.S. Army veteran Jitka Michal earned her degree via ASU Online from Prague while managing projects for IBM — and now plans to transform workplace culture through leadership grounded in empathy and inclusion.

### **Outstanding undergraduate turns numbers into solutions**

When Lilly Tretheway first arrived at ASU, she knew she wanted math in her life — but not in the traditional way. This drive led her to pursue a double major in applied mathematics for the life and social sciences, and data science, where she found a curriculum rich in complexity and possibility.

### **Dean's Medalist finds passion in public service, international relations**

Liam Nelson knew no limits when finding his niche at ASU. His collegiate career was marked by his engagement in his surrounding community and passion for public service. Now, he's set to graduate with three degrees: Asian languages (Japanese), international relations and history.

### **Grad explores the intersection of ideas, leadership and impact**

Recognized as a Dean's Medalist, Hannah Falvey reflects on how combining philosophy, economics and civic thought shaped her education — and her vision for the future.

### **Former basketball player finds purpose in sports medicine**

When a high school basketball teammate was injured during a game, it gave Anaya Lopez the spark for her future career. "Watching the athletic trainer come out and assess her fascinated me," Lopez said. She is graduating with a bachelor's degree in sports science and performance programming.

### **Tech meets tradition: One PhD's mission to preserve Indigenous memory**

In a digital world where stories are easily shared but not always protected, Alycia de Mesa asked: How can Indigenous traditional knowledge be preserved without losing community control?

### **MFA graduate changes the landscape of ASU ceramics program**

One of Nicole Ponsart's most impactful contributions to the ASU community is the clay recycling program she initiated.

### **Family, mentors fueled ASU grad's creative writing**

Mia Milinovich is a writer, a creative and a storyteller, whose relationship with the literary arts began long before the confines of the classroom.

### **Speech and hearing science doctoral student secures assistant professorship upon graduation**

Over the course of his study, R.J. Risueño acquired several accreditations and accolades, including his professional license to practice as a speech-language pathologist and a certificate from the Arizona Department of Education to serve in this role for K–12 students.

### **First-generation graduate seeks to understand 'why and how' of health conditions**

After spending much of her career immersed in the health care industry, Tierra Muse now holds a bachelor's degree in international public health — a degree she completed online while fulfilling her many other responsibilities.

### **Outstanding Undergraduate Student embodies the spirit of service**

Dietetics graduate Chloe Bernier excelled academically, served as president of the Student Nutrition Council, was a delegate in the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and still found time to work three jobs to support herself through college.

### **Doctoral conducting student ready to make his mark in California**

Grant Stephen Knox is a conductor, music educator and musicologist. He will graduate in May with a Doctor of Musical Arts in wind band conducting and a graduate certificate in music entrepreneurship, and he has already landed a job in California.

### **Cardiology medical assistant establishes club to empower aspiring health professionals**

Medical studies graduate Mia Tarditi aims to support others across a variety of contexts, from the club she established as a student, Pre-Health on Poly, to her time as a teaching assistant and into her professional life as a medical assistant at a cardiology office.

### **Accomplished 'double devil' completes doctorate early with novel gut-brain axis research**

College of Health Solutions Outstanding Graduate Student Emily Dow has grown into a highly accomplished doctoral student, completing her degree in exercise and nutritional sciences in just three years.

### **Psychology grad takes on certificates and research as an undergraduate student**

Emlyn Pratt's undergraduate journey at Arizona State University included a psychology degree, research, the completion of two certificates and various extracurricular activities — and they are just getting started.

### **From microscope to medal: ASU Online grad's love for science earns dean's honor**

Chantel Woodard, a first-generation graduate from ASU's New College, is turning her childhood love of science into a meaningful career in forensic science. Her goal? To bring justice and closure to families — one DNA analysis at a time.

### **ASU Online graduate uses education to uplift communities**

First-generation college student Luis Fernando Yanez Martinez is passionate about creating change in the communities he cares about most. So when he decided to pursue a degree, the innovation in society degree at ASU turned out to be the choice he had been looking for.

### **ASU double major sets sights on improving health care access**

Mia McLaughlin is graduating with dual degrees in political science and global studies, and aims to work on improving health care access and coverage for underserved communities across Arizona.

### **ASU grad finds purpose in advocating for LGBTQ+ community**

Rory Martin's undergraduate experience in counseling and applied psychological science brimmed with research, community efforts and student organization participation — all of which prioritized the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

### **Graduating MFA student bridges art, memory and political discourse**

Mehrdad Mirzaie, a photographer whose work often reflects on his native Iran, is graduating from the School of Art's MFA program this spring.

### **Multidisciplinary artist finds collaboration, new ways of thinking in ASU dance program**

During her time at ASU pursuing an MFA in dance from the School of Music, Dance and Theatre, Valkyrie Yao has been broadly recognized for her unique artistic vision.

### **ASU Online grad prepares to inspire young learners**

For JJ Mende Ceja, who was able to earn a college degree through the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, the achievement represents more than academic success — it's a symbol of family, perseverance and breaking barriers.

### **Playwright leaves finance industry to pursue a life with 'art at the center'**

Claire Dettloff is graduating from the School of Music, Dance and Theatre with an MFA in theatre with a focus on dramatic writing. She said this degree has helped her return to her passion for the arts.

### **Scholarships made college, the arts possible for theatre major**

Aglae Mendez is graduating from the School of Music, Dance and Theatre with a bachelor's degree in theatre. A recipient of the President's Award, an Obama Scholar and a College Assistance Migrant Program Scholar, Mendez credits the scholarships she received during her time at ASU for making college possible.

### **Thunderbird at ASU grad pursues peace through law**

Kylie Heaton came to ASU with the goal of becoming an international business attorney. This spring she is graduating with a bachelor's degree in global management and after graduation, Heaton will pursue her juris doctorate at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law.

### **Re-entry student honored with Dean's Medal for community impact**

Cassandra Roush, who is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy, religion, and society, has turned compassion into action — mentoring fellow students, supporting Native communities and helping shape inclusive campus events.

### **Graduate builds community for women in biochemistry**

Isabella (Izzy) Montini, who is graduating this spring with honors with a bachelor's of science degree in biochemistry and a minor in gender, women, and sexuality studies, says their growth in college came not just in the lab or lecture hall, but in learning who they are outside of the classroom.

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

Lindsey Stevens turned her personal experience with food insecurity into action by co-founding ASU West Valley's first community garden — planting seeds of justice, equity and lasting change.

### **Student who experienced homelessness found his passion for helping others through grocery job**

Daniel Maldonado was a quiet teenager who made few friends in high school. When you're experiencing life in the foster care system, you seldom stay at one school long enough to create such relationships. But that all changed when the spring 2025 Outstanding Graduate entered college.

### **Thunderbird at ASU grad charts purpose-driven path**

Yuuki Sasao-Ruef's connection to the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University started long before she began pursuing her degree, when she worked for a company that was founded by an Thunderbird alum.

### **Returning student discovers effective social work can be practiced anywhere**

Lindsey Joy Smith enrolled at ASU to earn a Master of Social Work at ASU's Tucson location, 23 years after receiving her bachelor's. But it didn't take her long to find that her passion for social work had led her to where she readily admits was an unusual place: the restroom.

### **First-gen grad overcomes barriers to pursue dreams**

Courage, tenacity, perseverance, passion and love — that's how Alicia Fritz overcame the barriers that stood in her way to pursue her passions for supporting communities, environmental justice and solving complex problems.

### **Disaster preparedness trainer says her degree helps her maintain 'public health as public safety'**

Deena Khoury lived emergency management long before earning an Arizona State University degree in it. Khoury was a part-time reservist with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in its the Uniformed Services, governed by the Civilian Reservist Emergency Workforce Act.

### **Film student's passion for live production takes her from Jordan to Hollywood**

After participating in the Semester in LA program through The Sidney Poitier New American Film School, Haneen Mutaz Mousa Saqer has got her sights set on moving to LA to pursue a career in live production.

### **California fashion student thrives in LA Fashion District**

Grace Skukan graduates this May with a Bachelor of Arts in fashion — and with industry experience and connections after living and studying in the LA Fashion District.

### **Academic excellence, leadership skills earn grad a Dean's Medal**

Emily Speckman's love for earth and environmental science was inspired by her eighth grade teacher's own love for earth science, and her passion for the subject thrived under the guidance of ASU's award-winning faculty.

### **Grad's experience observing brother's conviction influenced her decision to study criminal justice**

April Walton's interest in criminal justice started with a question: Why do prosecutors press weightier charges against some defendants and not others, even if their actions were similar? The answer steered the Outstanding Graduate toward exploring the cycle of victimization.

### **ASU FIDM opens doors for fashion design graduate**

Fashion design student Eryn Enright said she never expected the opportunities that would be presented to her as an ASU FIDM student.

### **Cinematography student finds work and career inspiration in LA**

Gavin Godinez got valuable industry experience during his semester in Los Angeles with The Sidney Poitier New American Film School, landing an internship and working as a production assistant on a music video.

### **Grad charts path to space and science communication**

Triple major Hailey Nelson — astrophysics, chemistry and French — has her sights set on a career in space. She got a head start during her time at ASU as part of the Psyche Student Collaborations program.

### **How art and technology attracted this Minnesota artist to ASU**

Leah Donnelly said she explored various creative paths — advertising, fine art and design — but nothing quite captured the full scope of her interests until she discovered ASU's School of Arts, Media and Engineering.

### **Fashion graduate creating LA-based menswear brand**

ASU FIDM student Jax Margo graduates this May with a Bachelor of Arts in fashion and big plans for his future in the industry.

### **PhD graduate is hopeful for the future of journalism**

Kristina Vera-Phillips explores fairness in newsrooms and authentic storytelling that gives all perspectives and voices an opportunity to be heard.

### **Police officer and Dean's Medalist balances duty, dreams**

Whether investigating domestic violence and sex crimes or mentoring fellow graduate students, Jonathan Cole applies his education in real time to support victims, strengthen investigations and build community.

### **Graduate accelerates toward future in sports journalism**

After attending camp at Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Ari Wohl knew he wanted to join the Cronkite Nation. Now he's graduating with two degrees and heading to Israel for the trip of a lifetime covering the Maccabiah Games.

### **Grad's message for future students: Don't be afraid to start over**

Manisha Rajnish thought she wanted to study business but pivoted to journalism when she transferred to ASU. She brought her entrepreneurial mindset with her though, building a virtual reality tool to help journalists manage high-stress situations.

### **Grad embraces environmental leadership role to cultivate change**

At New College, Rae Stusen found more than a major — they found a mission to strengthen communities and protect the planet.

### **Grad changes course and finds inspiration, deeper purpose**

Taylor Jojola's journey through New College was shaped by friendships, mentorship and a passion for student success.

### **Doctoral student poised to make a global impact on water insecurity**

In 2023, Jobayer Hossain enrolled in the environmental social science doctoral program in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change with dreams of changing the face of water security in Bangladesh.

### **Informatics grad is an engineering leader, community-builder**

Chukwunonso Okonkwo has won many awards during her time at ASU — but her real legacy could be her dedication to fostering a sense of community for fellow students.

### **Engineering grad turns sacrifice into success**

When Angie Valencia arrived at the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, she chose her major as a way of following in the footsteps of her brother and sister — both electrical engineers — and pursued her degree as a tribute to her parents' courage and unwavering commitment.

### **ASU grad one step closer to geological sciences dream job**

School of Earth and Space Exploration geological sciences graduate Samantha Beauchaine took part in a number of internships and outside-the-classroom experiences, including working as a NASA Space Grant intern on the ASU-led Psyche mission.

### **Dance education grad finds connection, community at ASU**

A transfer student from community college, Abby Mustard chose to attend the School of Music, Dance and Theatre after performing in an ASU dance concert. She pursued dance education so she could combine her love of dance with job skills and a teaching certification.

### **ASU Online graduate finds love for learning at ASU, now heads to Harvard**

Growing up, Ryan Pogemiller said he never liked school — so much that at times he questioned if he would complete high school. But once he enrolled at ASU, he noticed a shift. His courses, he said, were the perfect intersection of digestible and rigorous to be enjoyable.

### **Popular music student builds community through music**

Breanna Stephens' work builds bridges across disciplines and communities and highlights the dynamic environment of music production, digital collaboration and creative entrepreneurship.

### **Dean's Medalist shares love of math and music performance**

Katarina Fenner graduates summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in mathematics and a minor in clarinet performance. She has been a member of the Sun Devil Marching Band/Sun Devil Pep Band every semester, as well as a member of either the Maroon and Gold Concert Band or ASU Wind Symphony.

### **From service to support: Veteran empowers ASU Online engineering peers**

Cecil Deveau chose to attend the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering via ASU Online after retiring from the U.S. Navy. As a nuclear electrician's mate, he had gained a wealth of experience working on a wide variety of electro-mechanical equipment. Earning his degree was the logical next step.

### **Accomplished engineering double major celebrated for excellence and impact**

As an electrical engineering and computer systems engineering double major, Jayashree Adivarahan pursued every opportunity in her path — including multiple leadership and service roles.

### **Grad finds her focus in graphic information technology**

Going to ASU felt like the perfect fit for Jadyn Ocken. She found a program she was interested in — located close to home on the Polytechnic campus — in graphic information technology. "It's a blend of design and technology that gives both creative and analytical minds a place to grow."

### **Outstanding graduate loved being part of first-place concrete solutions team**

Mackenzie Schmader says she's fascinated by how things are built and the technology that drives the construction industry.

### **Outstanding Graduate drawn to ASU for learning experiences beyond the classroom**

Kartik Aggarwal's journey from Dehradun, India, a small city in the foothills of the Himalayas, continues onward to the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering graduate convocation stage as he celebrates achieving dual master's degrees in computer science and management of technology.

### **From student to changemaker, grad seeks to serve, teach and build bridges through communication**

For Travis Harrick, earning a degree from ASU's New College wasn't about chasing a career; it was about becoming someone who uplifts and empowers others.

### **ASU grad takes interdisciplinary water research to Princeton, then NYU**

With a curious mind, Adam Wiechman reached beyond the boundaries of traditionally siloed academic principles. This spring he graduates with a PhD in sustainability, with a focus on complex adaptive systems science and is being recognized as an Outstanding Graduate Student.

### **ASU Outstanding Graduate's path from Peace Corps to global development**

When Ryan Watling served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, a nonfunctioning solar water pump became the moment that reshaped his understanding of global development, eventually leading him to pursue a master's degree at ASU.

### **Outstanding sustainability grad will bring startup experience into new career**

Grace Reiter didn't waste a moment of her time at ASU. Among other things, the honors student served on undergraduate student government, held an internship with the WE Empower program, was ASU's 2023 Homecoming Queen, conducted research on a variety of sustainability and technology initiatives, and co-founded a startup focused on addressing food insecurity.

### **Thunderbird grad driven to give back to home country**

Jose Rachelle Revaly has always been inspired by the strength and resilience of her homeland, Haiti. Coming to Thunderbird School of Global Management, she sought to sharpen her financial and strategic leadership skills to further Haiti's future development. Now, she graduates with a Master of Global Management with the dream of doing just that.

### **Grad completes research on predicting Parkinson's disease**

Biomedical informatics and data science graduate Suraj Puvvadi has always looked at the intersections between disciplines, seeing how skills in one area can serve another. For him, that means looking at how health and medicine intersect with technology and math.

### **Graduate earns PhD after accomplishing lifelong goal of doing cancer research**

Instead of dreaming of being a firefighter or a movie star, when Austin Blackmon was a kid, he dreamed of finding a cure for cancer. Now, graduating with a PhD in molecular and cellular biology from the School of Life Sciences after years of doing cancer research, Blackmon can say he has followed through.

### **Grad's passion for health education and sexual violence prevention makes an impact**

Alyssea Immonen, graduating with a bachelor's degree in social and cultural analysis, incorporated their passion for sexual violence prevention into nearly every facet of their college career.

### **PhD grad uses applied mathematics for impactful research**

When Samantha Brozak started her undergraduate journey at Arizona State University, she wasn't planning on eventually getting a PhD. But she missed doing mathematics research so much after she graduated, she decided to go back to grad school.

### **One grad's research, resolve and dog named Fred**

At 56, Suzette May has graduated from Barrett, The Honors College with a degree in disability studies from the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences — all while going through progressive vision loss.

### **Dean's Medalist lands prestigious role in US Army**

Andrew Napier joined ASU's Army Reserve Officers Training Corps in 2023. Since then, his exceptional leadership skills and commitment to service have been demonstrated through his role as the cadet battalion commander of the program this past academic year.

### **Outstanding grad combines love of math, physics**

From a young age, Joshua Grumski-Flores showed promise. He was in a gifted program in elementary school; took high school classes in junior high and college classes in high school. Now he's graduating with degrees in mathematics and physics.

### **Dean's Medalist champions Indigenous voice through art and academia**

When Miranda "Randii" Lantz Castaneda walks across the commencement stage this spring, she'll do so carrying not just multiple degrees, awards and leadership titles, but the legacy and hopes of a community often left on the margins of academia.

### **Access ASU's TRIO helped grad find her community and succeed**

Divina Ranger, a graduating senior who studied transborder Chicana/o and Latina/o studies and is the Dean's Medalist for the School of Transborder Studies, reflects on her transformative experience with Access ASU's TRIO programming.

### **Fueled by questions, grad prepares for research role at NIH**

During his time as a student in the School of Life Sciences, Dean's Medalist Alexander Sastokas majored in biological sciences with a concentration in biomedical sciences — and followed his curiosity wherever it led, even when it completely rerouted his plans for the future.

## Cronkite grad finds purpose through story

Dylan Wickman wasn't sure what he wanted to do when he headed to college, but four years later, he has confidently grown into his role as a storyteller — including stints at The Arizona Republic, Cronkite News, Blaze Radio, ASU Student Life and even across the pond in Ireland.

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

## Main image



Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

## Text image(s)



Sofia Atencio



Mia Bazbaz



Grant Skala



Dahlia Horani



Dallas Salas



Kiera Charley



Surabhi Sajith



Samuel Rosales



Cori Sharp



Alex Theodorou



Saad Abuhamdieh



Nathaniel Bush



Kelly Conard



Abigail Zagala



Kristen Bish



Fathima Nawaz



Rashi Duttagupta



Christopher Langenderfer



Kennedy Gourdine



Paul Iannone



Sadie Red Eagle



Vincent Truong



Johann Valera-Vega



Elishua Shepherd



Jasmyn DeGraff



Sarah Nesbit



Liam Nelson



Alycia de Mesa



R.J. Risueño



Grant Stephen Knox

Emlyn Pratt, ASU graduate, decked out in regalia and holding a pitchfork

Emlyn Pratt



Mia McLaughlin



Valkyrie Yao



Aglae Mendez



Isabella (Izzy) Montini



Daniel Maldonado



Alicia Fritz



Grace Skukan



Eryn Enright



Leah Donnelly



Jonathan Cole



Rae Stusen



Chukwunonso Okonkwo



Abby Mustard



Katarina Fenner



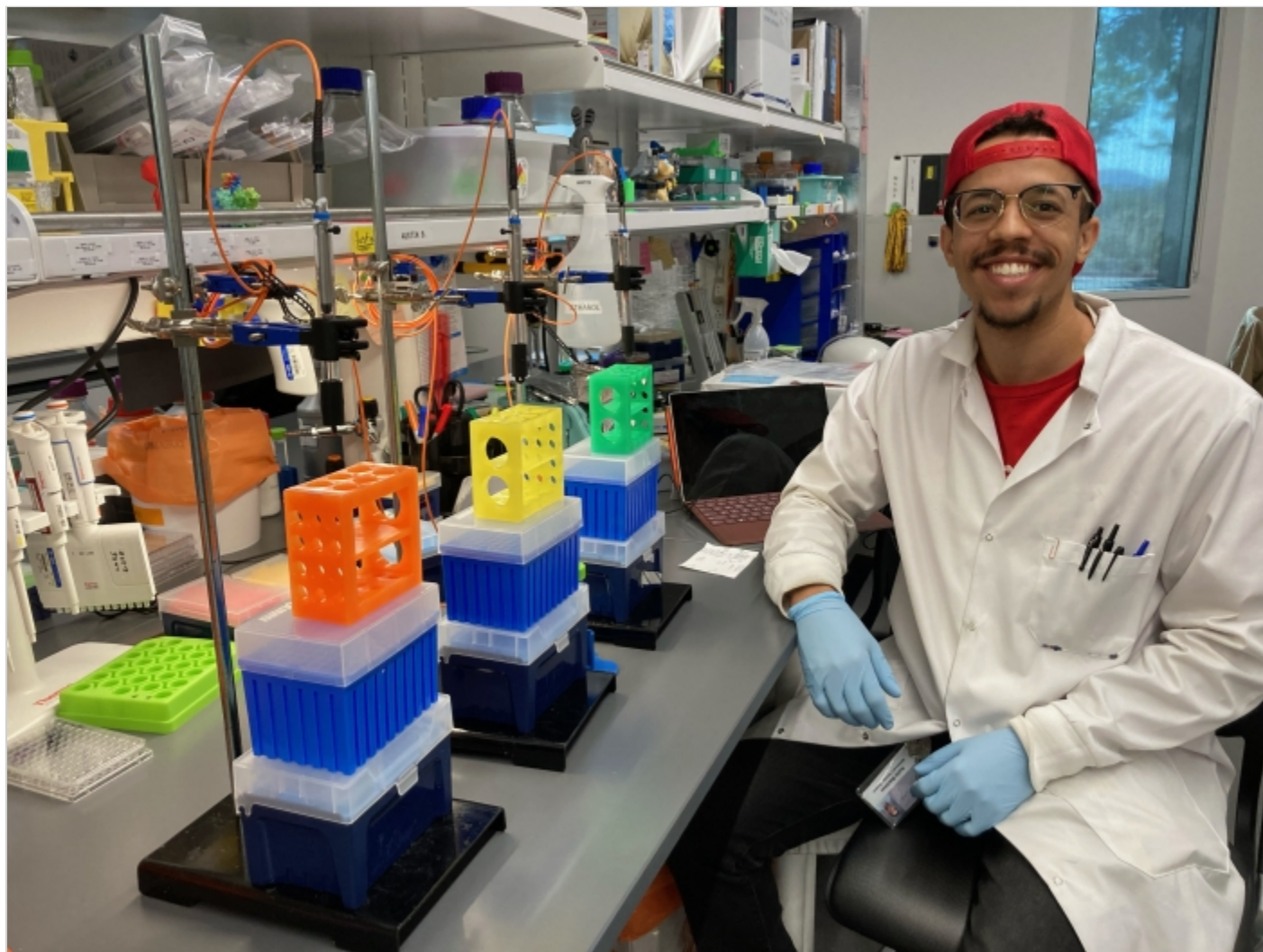
Jadyn Ocken



Travis Harrick



Grace Reiter



Austin Blackmon



Suzette May



Miranda "Randi" Lantz Castaneda



Dylan Wickman