

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

April Walton has law school plans, weighing careers in prosecution, criminal defense

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

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 — that prosecutorial decisions can depend on the individual being victimized — steered the spring 2025 Outstanding Graduate of the [School of Criminology and Criminal Justice](#), part of the [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#), toward exploring the cycle of victimization.

For example, someone accused of sexually assaulting an individual in a stigmatized profession, such a sex worker, might face lighter charges than if the victimized individual were perceived as more “innocent” or socially sympathetic, Walton said.

But victimized individuals aren't Walton's only focus. She said she's also interested in defendants, in part because she observed the case of her brother, who was convicted and sentenced for committing a violent crime, then was deported.

If that sounds like someone who wants to become an attorney someday, it's true. Walton is waiting to hear from law schools she applied to and hopes to begin law studies this fall.

The Calgary, Alberta, native is an international student who earned her bachelor's degree in criminology and criminal justice. She spent this semester interning with the special investigations section in the office of Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, where Walton received hands-on experience investigating crimes.

She said that if she received a \$40 million grant to help solve a problem of her choosing, she would choose reforming the justice system, especially the prisons, "so that the focus was more on rehabilitation and restorative justice rather than punitive measures that can really cause further harm or trauma to an individual who enters the prison and later re- enters society worse off."

Note: Answers may have been edited for length and clarity.

Question: What was your "aha" moment, when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: My brother was convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison. After witnessing him in the juvenile system and the adult system, I was motivated to pursue my degree in criminal justice to better understand my brother and others who became involved in the justice system.

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

A: I had the pleasure of taking a class on victims that broadened my perspective about how they are perceived and treated in the justice system. In Arizona, the state has a Victims Bill of Rights that aims to further empower and include victims in the justice process because they are often excluded or forgotten about once an investigation takes over and no longer needs their input.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: During the pandemic, I lived in Alberta, Canada. During the lockdowns, my local college kept switching between in-person and online and I wanted to commit to a consistent form of learning. So, I searched for a criminal justice program completely online with a high-quality curriculum and that is when I found ASU Online. With experiencing both the ASU Online platform for three years and the in-person environment for the past year, I can say that I had no loss of educational opportunities and learning between the two because of how seamlessly ASU provides their curriculum the exact same between both.

Q: Which professor(s) taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: [Susan Corey](#), a faculty associate in the School of Social Transformation in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, was my instructor for the justice studies class Death Penalty in the U.S. She has been an absolute inspiration of the kind of intelligent, compassionate and hardworking attorney I would like to become one day. She taught me that nobody is the worst thing that they have ever done, and that every defendant deserves the best possible defense.

She taught the class in a Socratic fashion. Her exams had a unique structure that required applying the laws surrounding the death penalty, not just memorizing them. She has opened new ways for me to study and apply my knowledge. She also took the time to incorporate fascinating guest speakers such as the county attorney, and she arranged for us to meet with real attorneys who used us as jury selection practice for their upcoming trial.

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

A: Always believe you can achieve anything you desire and beyond. If you want something bad enough, the world is yours and mine for the taking, so you must go out there and grab it. Take some time to build relationships with your peers and your professors. If something does not make sense to you, make the time to meet with your professor. They are happy to help! You can be your own best advocate. Reach out to a peer who may be struggling with a topic in which you are well versed. You will enrich your own understanding by helping another person with any given assignment.

Finally, take the time to learn not just from textbooks and articles but through others' lived experiences. It can broaden your capacity for empathy and the ability to care about something beyond yourself.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I will attend law school. I would love to practice criminal defense. But I've had the thrill of a lifetime by having an internship at Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes' office, which interested me in prosecution.

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

Main image



April Walton is the spring 2025 Outstanding Graduate of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Courtesy photo