

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

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

For this New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences graduate Travis Harrick, the journey back to Arizona State University's West Valley campus was more than just a return — it was a step toward transformation.

Inspired by a backyard conversation with a friend, he realized the importance of communication in forging human connection, and decided to pursue a master's degree in communication studies. Building on his earlier experiences as a New College and Barrett, The Honors College alum, he found his academic home once again among familiar faculty mentors who reignited his passion for learning.

Throughout his time in the program, he discovered new ways of thinking about interpretation, ethics and connection. With a strong foundation rooted in compassion, advocacy and service, he now looks forward to a future filled with opportunities to teach and contribute to a kinder, more just world.

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

Answer: My "aha" moment happened during a conversation with my friend Gabriel, who had already graduated from the same program I'm in now. We were sitting in my backyard, talking about our goals and what we wanted to do in the world. At the time, I knew I wanted to do something that involved connecting more with people. As we talked about communication studies, I realized that communication, this thing that exists in the space between everything, is something I wanted to become well-versed in, understand more fully. Having the opportunity to become more

of an expert in the ways people communicate, I could move closer to being able to connect with anyone.

Q: Why did you choose New College?

A: I chose New College partly because I'd been here before — I earned my bachelor's degree in 2015. When I was considering grad school, my friend showed me some of the faculty, and I recognized a few of them from my time in Barrett, The Honors College. Those professors really excited me. I reached out to a couple of them, and after conversations with Dr. (Michael) Walker and Dr. (Ramsey Eric) Ramsey, I knew this was the right place for me again.

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

A: A surprise or change in perspective would certainly be something that has become a growing interest hermeneutics, which is a philosophy of interpretation. It's a way of understanding communication that teaches us how meaning is made from everything we experience, including words, moments and interactions. It helped me realize that we're constantly being reshaped by what and who we encounter. Every interaction is a chance to remake ourselves and others, which made me reflect deeply on how we show up in the world. It made me want to approach people and situations with more kindness and compassion. It is our responsibility, our obligation, to support others. That shift in thinking is leading me toward work in education and justice, and to reimagining how I interact with people moving forward.

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

A: Dr. Ramsey had a lasting impact on me. I first met him in 2013 as a transfer student in a Barrett class. At the time, I was overwhelmed — we were expected to read nine books, and I hadn't even finished one in a while. I told him I didn't think I belonged in the class or the college, and he simply said, "Why don't you try and see where it goes?" That moment stuck with me. Years later, I took his Communication and Ethics class as my first graduate course. At the end of that first class on my the first day grad school, I was reminded how that he was a mentor and huge influence in my life. His support helped me realize I was in the right place, the right campus and the right class.

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

A: The best piece of advice that I could offer somebody who's thinking about going to college is don't view college only as a path to a job. It's a space where you can introduce new words, ideas and ways of thinking into your life; to grow and change in such a way that allows you to reimagine yourself. You might not know who you'll become on the other side, but that's part of the process. Lean into the experience, be open to discovery and allow yourself to be reshaped by it. Be brave and try something new.

Q: What's your favorite spot on the West Valley campus — for studying or hanging out with friends?

A: I love spending time in the Barrett Honors College suite. It place that is close to my heart. I also enjoy the second floor of the library, especially the far west side where the children's literature

section is. It's peaceful there, and I like being surrounded by books that encourage, young people to wander and be curious. When the weather's nice, I like sitting out on the grass in front of the library to read and reflect.

Q: What are your plans after graduation? What do you plan to do for work?

A: First, I want to rest. I want to take time to reset and show up for others with clarity and care; sort of like putting on your oxygen mask before helping someone else. I keep a giant whiteboard to map out ideas and community projects I'd like to get involved in. One of my next steps will likely be civic engagement with things like city council meetings, advocating for pedestrian safety, or gathering signatures for traffic speed reduction in my neighborhood.

Q: Are you a first-gen college student? And if so, what does your degree mean to you and your family?

A: Yes, I am a first-generation student. Funny story, or really a lovely story, was when I used to work at Home Depot, I remember telling someone I wanted my kids to go to college. They said, "They will if you do." That stuck with me, and so I enrolled in college. Also, my mom, who hadn't gone to college, later enrolled too. Now she has a master's degree. So, in a way, we remade ourselves together. To my family and me, this degree means healing. It's helped me reimagine parenting, repair relationships and even embrace parts of myself I once hid. It's a transformation I couldn't have imagined a decade ago.

Q: How do you think you'll make the world a better place?

A: I want to be of service, whether that's volunteering with children, helping clean up parks or joining global efforts to reimagine education. I've learned that making the world better doesn't mean changing everything at once. It means showing up, offering what you have and being kind. Through my work with Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona, I saw how powerful art, creative expression and caring adult relationships can be for young people. Those experiences taught me about bravery, resilience and the kind of hope that comes from being seen.

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

Main image



Travis Harrick, New College's Outstanding Graduate, earned a master's degree in communications.

Gallery



Travis Harrick works at the board during a study session.



Travis Harrick stands with a group of friends and fellow ASU West Valley grads.



Graduate Travis Harrick with his proud family at ASU's West Valley campus.