

ASU graduates urged to cherish and strengthen their communities

Mellon Foundation President Elizabeth Alexander speaks at spring Undergraduate Commencement

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
May 12, 2025

Arizona State University has its [largest graduating class ever](#) this semester — with more than 21,000 degree-earners — as thousands celebrated their new degrees at spring 2025 commencements on Monday.

About 13,700 undergraduates and 7,300 graduate students completed their degrees this semester. Of the total, nearly 7,400 students earned their degree through ASU Online.

ASU President Michael Crow addressed the crowd during Undergraduate Commencement on Monday night at Mountain America Stadium. He said that ASU's charter was born out of the battle for democracy that started 250 years ago when American colonists took up arms against the British — before the Declaration of Independence was signed.

"That led to inalienable rights guaranteed for each of you sitting in this stadium," he said.

"The one we focus on is the right to learn — to be the person you want to be."

Crow said that ASU exists to create lifelong learners.

"We want you to be able to adapt, to be able to adjust and to recognize how to move our country forward," he said.

Elizabeth Alexander, a multiple Pulitzer Prize finalist and now the president of the Mellon Foundation, the nation's largest funder of the arts and humanities, received an honorary degree for contributions to the cultural health of American society.

She told the crowd how she knew Arizona native and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (for whom ASU's law college is named) years ago in Washington, D.C., when O'Connor ran a small exercise class for women in the neighborhood.

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“It was not just a morning exercise routine. It was the importance of community large and small, and accountability to each other and interest and care in other people as whole people,” she said.

Alexander urged the graduates to cherish and strengthen their communities.

“It is the communities we build, not our individual achievements alone, that have the greatest impact on our collective American experiment,” she said.

David Zaragoza, a student regent with the Arizona Board of Regents, graduated on Monday night with a degree in electrical engineering. He told the crowd that coming from Yuma to a large university was a challenge.

“What this journey taught me is that with determination and the support of your loved ones, you can exceed your expectations and find a purpose greater than yourself through education,” he said.

“College represents not only a time to learn but a time to broaden your worldview.”

At Monday morning’s Graduate Commencement in Desert Financial Arena in Tempe, Crow told the crowd that universities are the bearers of humanity’s knowledge.

“We take that stored information, that stored knowledge, that stored understanding, and we develop theories and assumptions,” he said.

“The whole country of the United States is based on a series of academic writings about what is a person, academic writings about what is liberty, academic theories about how a democracy might work.

“The United States itself is a model country evolving a form of government that was theorized by a group of intellectuals capable of expressing new ideas.

“This institution has been designed by our citizens to perform these functions.”

Additional [graduation celebrations](#) will be held throughout the week.

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

Main image



Mihilat Manahile, a PhD graduate in electrical engineering from Ethiopia, gets congratulations from family and friends during Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 12, at Desert Financial Arena on the Tempe campus. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Gallery



Nicholas DiGirolamo poses with his parents, Michael DiGirolamo and Laura Ryan, before Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 12, outside Desert Financial Arena on the Tempe campus. DiGirolamo earned a master's degree in communication through ASU Online while serving as a captain in the Air Force.



Associate Professor Nadia Kellam (left) takes a selfie with Ieshya Anderson during Graduate Commencement. Anderson (Tohono O'odham and Navajo nations) earned her PhD in engineering education systems and design.



Angelina Polito adjusts her cap before the start of Graduate Commencement. She earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice in psychiatric mental health.



Arizona Board of Regents Chair Cecilia Mata speaks to graduates during Graduate Commencement.



President Michael Crow addresses faculty, graduates, and their families and friends during Graduate Commencement.



Chris Goulet, a student worker in ASU's Office of Media Relations and Strategic Communications, listens to ASU President Michael Crow speak at Graduate Commencement. Goulet earned a Doctor of Musical Arts in music performance.



Newly hooded R. J. Risueno hugs his professor during Graduate Commencement. He earned a PhD in speech and hearing science.



Thunderbird School of Global Management graduates (from left) Jackleen Umland, Alexandra Johnson and Ana Walters celebrate earning a Master of Global Management during Graduate Commencement.



Samantha Bean (left) and Breanna Rosales enjoy the balloon drop at the end of Graduate Commencement. The two earned PhDs in law and psychology, respectively, at the West Valley campus.



A friend shows her pictures to friends Ravi Rajappa (middle) and Padmanabhan Muthuswamy following Graduate Commencement. Rajappa earned a master's degree in computer science, and Muthuswamy earned a master's degree in computer engineering.

Gallery



Starbucks College Achievement Plan graduates smile for a photo before Undergraduate Commencement at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on May 12.



Recreation therapy graduate Mia Bickerstaff waves to a friend before Undergraduate Commencement at Mountain America Stadium.



Kinesiology graduate and first-generation student Brandon Nguyen and supply chain management graduate and Moeur award recipient Hannah Pham pose for a photo before Undergraduate Commencement.



Veteran graduates walk in the procession during Undergraduate Commencement on Monday evening. Nearly 2,000 veteran and military-affiliated students are graduating this spring.



Golden Grads from the Class of 1975 return to ASU 50 years later to walk in the processional during Undergraduate Commencement.



Graduates stand for the national anthem Monday evening at Mountain America Stadium.



Thousands of ASU graduates take their seats at the stadium during Undergraduate Commencement.



Elizabeth Alexander, president of the Mellon Foundation, spoke during Undergraduate Commencement and was presented with an honorary degree. Alexander urged the graduates to cherish and strengthen their communities: “It is the communities we build, not our individual achievements alone, that have the greatest impact on our collective American experiment.”



First-generation college student Suzette May, who earned a degree in disability studies, is accompanied by her guide dog, Frank, during Undergraduate Commencement. Read her story.



Early childhood education and special education graduate Chloe Ephraim cheers during Undergraduate Commencement on Monday evening in Tempe.



A mortarboard of an aviation program grad is decorated to celebrate the milestone.



Film and media productions graduate Cassidy Wentland celebrates during Undergraduate Commencement on Monday. Wentland was also a student worker in ASU's Office of Media Relations and Strategic Communications (ASU News' parent unit).



Newly minted ASU graduates celebrate as confetti rains down at the end of Undergraduate Commencement.