

ASU Online grads honored at campus celebration

By Meenah Rincon, ASU News
May 15, 2025

Rodney Perkins dreamed of becoming a doctor since high school, but after earning his undergraduate degree, he felt his college experience hadn't fully prepared him for the next steps.

This week, the New Orleans native traveled to Arizona, ready to receive his master's degree in [biomedical diagnostics](#), a program he says prepared him to take on the next challenge.

This spring, approximately 13,700 undergraduate and 7,300 graduate students [earned their degrees from Arizona State University](#). Of those totals, 7,400 students earned their degree through ASU Online.

Although graduation celebrations are a long-standing tradition, for these online students, it offered a special chance to take part in a ceremony created just for them at ASU's Tempe campus, giving many their first opportunity to visit the state and ASU in person.

Maroon and gold balloons and photo booths dotted the Student Pavilion on Wednesday, filled with hundreds of friends and family members of online student graduates, as [Phil Reiger](#), university dean for educational initiatives and CEO of EdPlus, addressed the crowd.

"When we started intensely working on ASU Online 15 years ago, we could not have filled this room," Reiger said.

Online education has come a long way since then. ASU Online now offers more than 350 online degree programs, has enrolled more than 280,000 students and last year [surpassed 100,000 graduates](#) — remaining steadfast to its commitment to provide accessible education to more learners everywhere.

[Nancy Gonzales](#), ASU executive vice president and university provost, also addressed the room and expressed that it's also a poignant time in life for many.

"As a first-generation college graduate myself, I understand the significance of this moment," she said. "When I accepted my bachelor's degree — also from ASU — I carried with me the dreams and hopes of those in my family and my community who didn't have the same opportunities that I had before me. So, and for those of you with children today, you are offering a powerful example

and opening a door that they will not have to push open themselves in ways that I know many of you have done to be here today.”

Perkins, a first-generation college graduate, is one of those students.

“You know, it’s something that many people from where I’m from don’t really take very seriously,” he said. “When they see me, they’re all smiles. They say, ‘We’re so proud of you.’ Having a younger sister, I think, it’s going to inspire her to want to do better.”

But Perkins didn’t do it alone. In the crowd of people, Perkins spotted [Danielle Kish](#) and immediately made his way to her.

This was the first time Perkins was meeting Kish — his success coach — in person.

Kish is one of many coaches who support ASU Online students in reaching degree completion and who offer personalized support and guidance that often becomes a defining factor in a student’s academic journey.

“Meeting students at graduation is the best moment because you know that all their hard work paid off,” Kish said. “I always tell my students on their very first call, even though you’re online, you are never alone.”

Perkins wasn’t alone in recognizing the value of ASU’s specialized support services and the accessible degree programs the university provides. Student keynote speaker Nada Obaid studied and earned her degree from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

“Studying online abroad has its own kind of challenge,” she said. “The screens create a distance, and the workload is overwhelming at times, especially while balancing life. I found friends and the persistence I didn’t know I had, and people who helped carry me through it.”

Obaid is an [Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education \(AGFE\) Scholar](#) and received her graduate degree in [computer science \(cybersecurity\)](#).

It was university teams, success coaches, advisors, faculty, classmates, friends and family who she thanked for helping her achieve this milestone, and [Kenia Marquez](#) was sitting front row alongside Obaid’s family.

Marquez was Obaid’s success coach and part of a dedicated team that helps AGFE scholars through their scholarship requirements by meeting regularly and getting to know students’ academic journeys.

??The program aims to expand the investment in individual students into a long-term investment in the region’s future. Emirati businessman and philanthropist Abdulla Al Ghurair, founder of the AGFE, headquartered in Dubai, has committed one-third of his wealth to the foundation. His mission: to prepare 50,000 Emirati learners for higher education and the workforce, and to empower 150,000 Arab youth with access to high-quality educational opportunities that lead to sustainable, elevated livelihoods by 2025.

“My favorite thing about coaching students is being able to understand what they’ve gone through, also having been an online student myself through the graduate program,” Marquez said. “It’s

about showing them that they're not alone through this process. Through the good times, through the bad times and being able to help them push through those hard times. Being a success coach is helping them find a path to move forward.”

What the graduates accomplished is no small feat.

“We may not have shared classrooms or campuses, but we shared something deeper — the resilience to finish what we started,” Obaid said. “And as we leave this chapter behind, we carry with us the strength to face whatever comes next.”

As for what’s next for Perkins? Medical school — and he has his eyes set on ASU.

Related: [ASU announces future medical school to be located in downtown Phoenix](#)

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

Main image



ASU Online graduate student speaker Nada Obaid thanks family, friends and ASU for helping her achieve the dream of a college degree. Photo by Grace Olson Corder/EdPlus

Gallery



ASU Online biomedical diagnostics student Rodney Perkins celebrated earning his master's degree alongside other online students May 14 at the Student Pavilion on the Tempe campus.



Phil Reiger, university dean for educational initiatives and CEO of EdPlus, congratulated graduates at the ASU Online celebration, where hundreds of friends and family members filled the Student Pavilion. “When we started intensely working on ASU Online 15 years ago, we could not have filled this room,” Reiger said.



Nancy Gonzales, ASU executive vice president and university provost, addressed graduates at the ASU Online celebration, sharing how as a first-generation college graduate herself, she understands the significance of this moment.



ASU Online celebrated graduates from across the U.S. and the world. This May, 7,400 undergraduate and graduate students earned their degree through ASU Online.