

8 Flinn Scholars set to begin college careers at ASU this fall

By Megan Neely, ASU News
May 28, 2025

Eight of this year's 20 Flinn Scholars have chosen to attend Arizona State University this fall.

Valued at over \$135,000 per student, the Arizona-based [Flinn Foundation](#) scholarship supports Arizona high school students in their college endeavors. With the choice of one of Arizona's three public institutions, [Flinn Scholarship](#) recipients receive tuition coverage, free meals and housing, and funding for study abroad opportunities.

All eight of the incoming Sun Devils will be a part of [Barrett, The Honors College](#). Seven will be located on ASU's [Tempe campus](#) and one on the [Downtown Phoenix campus](#).

Johanna Villanueva, who is graduating this spring from Marcos de Niza High School, is from Tempe and chose ASU not only for its proximity to home but also for the inclusive education the university is known for. She'll be studying journalism and mass communication through the [Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication](#).

Villanueva chose her major because of her desire to become a storyteller.

"The Cronkite School completely allured me with its innovative approaches to journalism, as well as with their investigative journalism branch," Villanueva said.

She has her sights set on becoming an investigative journalist in Arizona or working as a historian focused on Southwestern or Arizona history. Her aspirations also include becoming a children's choir director and being a musical playwright or singer.

She was drawn to apply to the Flinn Scholarship because of the foundation's mission to benefit Arizona for future generations.

"As a Tempe city volunteer, employee and former [Mayor's Youth Advisory Commissioner](#), I love this city and the state. My senior year was dedicated to writing a musical about the hidden figures of Tempe's Old West history, all as a benefit for the Tempe History Museum," Villanueva said.

"Even before I applied to Flinn, I knew I wanted to benefit Arizona by uncovering lost stories, lost perspectives, lost truths and shed light on them as a journalist and artist. I'm absolutely glad that the Flinn Foundation offers a scholarship for students who love their state and use their talents to

enrich it.”

Searching for his next home after high school, Rati Tabatadze saw what ASU could provide him.

“ASU’s model of the [New American University](#) aligns perfectly with my own approach to education, as well as life,” Tabatadze said. “I love being on the forefront of genuine change.”

He was interested in the Flinn Scholarship from the early years of attending his high school, the Gilbert Classical Academy. It was the focus on Arizona, personal support shown by members of the foundation and the community shown by past scholars that made it clear this experience would be life-changing.

Tabatadze will study data science in [The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#) and electrical engineering in the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#). He has been fascinated by how physical systems and intelligent algorithms come together to solve real-world problems. Tabatadze built [Tempe at a Glance](#), a platform that analyzes and visualizes data on a public dashboard.

“The project helped me see the value of data in understanding urban systems, but it also made me think about the infrastructure behind the data. I wanted to learn how to build those systems myself,” Tabatadze said.

He also worked on a project that used predictive modeling and machine learning through the InspiritAI program to analyze and forecast the spread of COVID-19 strains.

Originally from the country of Georgia, Tabatadze came to Arizona seven years ago. Wanting to give back to his Georgian community, he worked on his personal project “Geologymaps,” an interactive mapping system for geological risks in Georgia. He hopes to continue the project to give back to his heritage while simultaneously contributing to his home in Arizona.

Tabatadze wants to become a software engineer.

ASU impressed Cindy Huang because of the potential experiences that were available. Set to study political science at The College in the fall, Huang knew she wanted to capitalize on the opportunity of staying in state for college. The choice between the three schools wasn’t a difficult one, she said.

“ASU stood out because of all the opportunities available to me within the political science program. Going on the Flinn visits, it was apparent that ASU was a great choice in terms of proximity to legislative internships, as well as awesome opportunities like becoming a [Capital Scholar](#),” Huang said. “Additionally, meeting with professors from the [School of Politics and Global Studies](#), like [Gina Woodall](#) and [Tara Lennon](#), showed me the high quality of research going on at ASU.”

A BASIS Flagstaff graduate, she conducted her senior project in conjunction with Advanced Placement research. Huang studied partisan differences in the moderation of misinformation on social media.

“Especially as it has become so prevalent in our society, I’ve developed a passion for understanding why the divide has become so prominent, as I believe understanding the why is the gateway to finding solutions,” Huang said.

When speaking with her college counselor, Huang was captivated by all the Flinn Scholarship had to offer. The ability to study abroad, internships and a supportive alumni network were all factors when she decided to apply.

Huang hopes to participate in research based on her previous projects and is considering a career in law.

“With law school, a JD can open lots of career paths, and I'm excited to understand more about that process and whether I want to pursue it,” Huang said. “My passion is understanding political polarization, and in college, I definitely want to explore that in research. I also want to do some internships within the broader political field, too.”

The other Flinn Scholars attending ASU are:

Eliut Gonzalez, Glenview College Preparatory High School, aerospace engineering (astronautics).

Alejandro Zayas Abril, Heritage Academy Mesa, biomedical engineering.

Jacob Batty, Kingman Academy of Learning, biological sciences (biomedical sciences).

Maya Bustos, Sandra Day O'Connor High School, business (global politics).

Iulia Musat, Chaparral High School, biochemistry (medicinal chemistry).

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

Text image(s)



Johanna Villanueva. Courtesy photo



Rati Tabatadze. Courtesy photo



Cindy Huang. Courtesy photo