

Welcoming the world: ASU supports international students from start to finish

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
July 31, 2025

Catalina Amurrio Zamora flew more than 4,500 miles from her home in Bolivia to attend Arizona State University, but she never felt alone.

"It feels like they accompany you throughout the whole way," said Amurrio Zamora, who's pursuing a master's degree in biological data science after earning a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences at ASU.

"I started getting emails with advice — what I needed to get done, how to get it done, when to get it done. There were a lot of Zoom sessions and hearing from other international students."

ASU embraces international students during their entire journey — from application to graduation and beyond. That includes airport greetings, specialized orientation, cultural programs, English immersion, career coaching and even a graduation celebration just for them.

Alumni can stay connected through global networks after they return home.

With nearly 18,000 international students — including those who have graduated and are taking part in career-building programs such as OPT — ASU hosts more than any other U.S. public university.

"Arizona State University is proud to be the No. 1 public university for hosting international students," ASU President

ASU's international students at a glance

Number of international students in 2023–24: 15,104 students total; 17,719 if expanded to include those who have graduated and are taking part in OPT/CPT career programs.

Percent of ASU enrollment in 2023–24: 9.6%.

Increase since 2013–14: 120%.

Top countries: India, China, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Taiwan.

Top colleges: Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, W. P. Carey School of Business.

Michael Crow said in a [statement](#). "Our international student community not only enhances the academic experience at ASU, but also supports the broader economy."

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ASU President Michael Crow tells Wall Street Journal: [International students help make America great](#)

Here are some ways that ASU supports international students on their journey.

Reaching out early

ASU's outreach begins in students' home countries. Faculty and administrators regularly visit places like India, China and Taiwan to promote ASU's high-quality programs and recruit top students.

About 60% of the international students at ASU are from India, according to Holly Singh, assistant vice president of international enrollment initiatives.

"We took leaders from Fulton Schools of Engineering with the mindset to really showcase their research, connect with students and explain that we will always be behind them," he said of the ASU team's recent visit to India.

"Inclusion is central to our charter."

Preparing to arrive

Every summer, ASU offers FAQ webinars to prepare students for life in the U.S.

"Folks from our office, the admissions team, health insurance, housing and others make sure they have all their questions answered," said Daniel Hoyle, senior director of the international student and scholar experience. "We really want them to feel comfortable on that arrival to the U.S."

This year, with visa rules constantly evolving, ASU has consistently emailed admitted and currently enrolled international students on topics including next steps, specific visa guidance, messages of support, reminders of who to contact for help, summer plans, and general health and wellness.

ASU also maintains a Discord server to engage directly with admitted international students.

Offering options

The university has told students who are waiting for visa appointments that ["ASU wants you"](#) and offered enrollment options if they cannot get to ASU by the start of the semester, including study abroad, enrollment in partner institutions

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through the Cintana Network, starting online and arriving later in the semester, or starting in the spring 2026 semester.

Also, international admitted students can take dozens of Career Catalyst courses for free while they wait for their visa appointments. As of July 15, 327 students have taken these courses, which would have cost paying learners more than \$100,000.

From the airport to campus life

Some new Sun Devils travel more than 24 hours to get to Arizona, where, if they've requested it, they are greeted by [International Students and Scholars Center](#) staff at Sky Harbor Airport and taken to their living quarters.

Each of the four Valley campuses has welcome events.

"We really want to focus on connections and local community — on campus, around campus, transportation, shopping, all of that," Hoyle said.

Newcomers are introduced to student organization leaders and global peer mentors — international students who already know the ASU community and can smooth the way for them.

Students from India or China have ready-made communities at ASU, but the university encourages new arrivals to mix with everyone.

"When they're tired, when they're anxious, they can always come back to this safety net. But the goal is to every day meet domestic students and people from other backgrounds, other countries, from their college, from their major."

Building English skills and confidence

The opportunity to experience English-language immersion is a big draw for international students, who must be able to speak, read and write in an ASU degree program. Students who are not proficient get three semesters to improve their English through Global Launch, which prepares them to participate in group projects, write academic papers, communicate with their professors and give presentations.

Besides teaching English, online or in person, Global Launch also creates a supportive community and keeps students on track through tutoring and advising. Activities like trips to Sedona, a Thanksgiving celebration and karaoke nights provide fun and socialization while boosting language skills.

Navigating visas and immigration

The International Students and Scholars Center's team of advisors helps students stay on top of constantly evolving visa, travel and immigration rules. Support is provided through town halls, newsletters, virtual advising and one-on-one sessions.

Culture on campus

ASU helps international students create events that celebrate holidays including Holi, Diwali and Eid.

“We try to make them as regional as possible. For Lunar New Year, we had student groups from 15 different countries represented,” Hoyle said.

“We help them with planning, budgeting, organizing and partnering with other student clubs and offices to give them leadership experience and have them share their culture with the campus community.”

The Thunderbird School of Global Management at ASU started as an international business school in 1946 on the site of a World War II training base for pilots in the West Valley and became part of ASU in 2015.

Thunderbird’s mission is teaching students to do business with a multicultural perspective, including the tradition of “regional nights,” which feature the cuisine, culture, traditions, art and performances from around the world. Regional nights are open to the entire ASU community.

Adjusting to the American classroom

In many countries, students don’t speak up in class — that can be a shock in American universities.

“Raising a hand to speak up during class could be considered bad manners,” Singh said.

“A typical American faculty member will not get that from an international student unless that student is prepped to understand that 10% or 15% of the class credit is that interaction.”

The center has been piloting an online course about classroom culture for the Fulton Schools of Engineering and is hoping to expand it, Hoyle said.

Preparing for a career

Many individual colleges offer career advice. In the W. P. Carey School of Business, Lurissa Brown, associate director for international initiatives in the Career Services Center, prepares students for the workforce.

“We teach them about networking, which is a big deal for our international students because for some of them it's a new concept,” she said.

“In other countries, your degree gets you the job. In North America, we are more relational.”

The business school offers one-on-one appointments with career coaches who specialize in finance, accounting and other disciplines, plus workshops, newsletters and student and alumni panels. Earlier this summer, two young employees at Microsoft spoke on a panel for international

students about how to tell your story to stand out to employers.

International students can take advantage of two career-building programs: CPT, or curricular practical training, which are internships related to their field of study, and OPT, or optional practical training, a one-year period of work after graduation. Students with a STEM-designated degree get three years of OPT.

Brown helps students with documentation and even talks to employers who might be unaware that they don't have to pay to sponsor students in an OPT program.

"They've been told it's too hard or costs too much money. We can explain the whole process," she said.

A unique graduation and lifelong ties

All international students at ASU are invited to participate in a special graduation celebration for them. At Thunderbird, the graduation ceremony includes the International Parade of Flags tradition, in which students carry the flags of their home countries.

ASU has more than 81,000 international graduates representing more than 180 countries and regions. About 65% graduated after 2010 and about 44% are under age 35.

The Alumni Association engages with these graduates on region-specific platforms, such as WeChat for China and WhatsApp for India and the Middle East, plus through regional events like receptions.

"India is the largest base of our international alumni now and they have a very strong connection with ASU," said Jennifer Zhou, assistant director of global alumni engagement. "In-country events really help us reconnect with our longtime supporters."

Thunderbird has 51 alumni chapters around the world and offers digital engagement, mentoring, coaching and classes to them.

Creating a community

Amurrio Zamora had a lifelong connection to ASU. Her father spent some time at the Tempe campus during a college-student exchange program in the 1980s and loved ASU.

"He always would talk to me about how welcoming the environment was, and when it came to me applying for schools, ASU seemed like a right fit for many reasons, one of them being the amazing biology program," she said.

She definitely experienced homesickness at first.

"I was 19 years old so I was on my own for the first time in my life. I had to learn how to do groceries. I needed to learn in a completely different language. A lot of these things create this feeling of homesickness," she said.

“But then that was replaced by excitement once I started getting more involved with everything that ASU and the ISSC (International Students and Scholars Center) had to offer.”

She became a global peer mentor with the ISSC and helps other international students.

“Everyone has different concerns, but I think the most common one is, ‘How do you not miss the food?’ And that’s something the ISSC does wonderfully. They take international students food shopping. And it goes from Walmart, which is the average food store, to more specific shops, like the Asian district.”

Amurrio Zamora said that getting involved at ASU helped her to create a community, which is also something Aditya Shinde did soon after arriving on campus from India. The senior construction management major is about to begin his second term as president of the Coalition of International Students, which is open to all students.

“My community is not just people from my country but people from all over the world. It was good because we all share one single goal, which is academics, but at the same time, whatever problems we faced we had in common.”

Besides being an advocate and voice for students, the coalition collaborates with other organizations on events throughout the year, including a welcome carnival, International Night, which draws thousands of students during the fall semester, and Pan-Asian Lunar New Year.

“And when there’s pressure from exams, we have wellness events and bring some pets in,” Shinde said.

Another common question that Amurrio Zamora hears is: How do you get used to it?

“And my answer is always, ‘You never really get used to it.’ It’s always this weird feeling that it’s not home, but it’s also home because you’ve met so many wonderful people.

“Every little thing still has the same wonder that it did when I got here.”

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

Main image



The Coalition of International Students at ASU, open to everyone, holds events throughout the year, including International Night during the fall semester, which draws thousands of Sun Devils. Photo courtesy of the Coalition of International Students

Text image(s)



International students receive a warm welcome from ASU assistants when they land at Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU News



**Life Science
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Catalina Amurrio Zamora is from Bolivia and is now earning a master's degree at ASU after earning a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences. She's a global peer mentor with the International Students and Scholars Center and helps other international students navigate their time at ASU. Photo courtesy of Catalina Amurrio Zamora

Gallery



From left: Yenna Wang, a third-year marketing and fashion design student from China; Rhyan Arunasalam, a graduate counseling student from Malaysia; and Xiaolin Xu, a graduate student in AI from China, put on their backpacks before entering the experiential studio at the Dreamscape Learn lab in the Creative Commons on the Tempe campus as part of a summer social gathering held by the International Students and Scholars Center at ASU.



A general meeting of the Coalition of International Students, which, in addition to collaborating with other student groups and ASU units on events throughout the year, serves as an advocate, bringing issues in the community to administrators.



Global Launch offers online and immersive English instruction for international students, in addition to creating a supportive community with activities like trips to Sedona and a Thanksgiving dinner.