

From small town to tinsel town, future filmmaker sets sights on ASU film school

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
August 15, 2025

This month, Joseph Lopez Tavares leaves his small hometown of Johnston, Rhode Island, and heads to Los Angeles — the second-largest city in the U.S. — to attend film school.

That's the perfect plan for Tavares, who graduated high school in a class of just 130 students and is eager to experience everything LA has to offer.

"I live in one of the smallest towns, in the smallest states in the country," said Tavares, who will be attending [The Sidney Poitier New American Film School](#) at the [ASU California Center Broadway](#).

The future filmmaker compares Johnston to the small town in the movie series "Scream."

"Basically everybody knows everybody," he said.

ASU wasn't originally on Tavares' radar — until he discovered the film school in LA. The sought-after high school videographer had already set his sights on majoring in film. Over time, the other schools dropped off his list and ASU remained. Flying out for an "[ASU in LA Day](#)" tour sealed the deal.

"Once I went out there and visited, I realized pretty quickly that it was where I wanted to be," said Tavares, who is planning to get a [BFA in film and media production](#).

For Tavares, it is all about location, location, location.

LA is the film industry capital of the country, offering strong prospects for internships and invaluable opportunities to build connections — a crucial advantage in an industry where who you know often opens up doors.

At ASU California Center Broadway, coursework embedded with LA-based partners allows students to work alongside professionals in their fields while earning their degree.

The school's faculty includes feature film screenwriters, studio executives, Emmy-winning television veterans, acclaimed documentarians and highly respected craftspeople.

"I always wanted to go to Los Angeles," said the incoming student. "I have never been, but I always wanted to. And now I have the opportunity to live there for four years or maybe more."

Tavares will be taking classes in the former Herald Examiner Building in downtown LA that has been renovated and transformed into a modern, mixed-use academic facility.

For Tavares, the setting is both historic and practical as he has a medical condition that makes navigating large campuses challenging.

"I have a heart defect," he said. "So walking around a huge campus and going from class to class would be difficult for me. So the convenience of the campus is really, really helpful to me."

Tavares is looking forward to meeting a lot of new people in an entirely new environment.

"I'm someone who is open to making lots of new friends," he said. "That's why I'm going so far. In my town, pretty much everybody goes to the local schools. It wouldn't feel like I was in college if I did that. I'd feel like I'm just going to another grade in high school. And there wouldn't be too many new experiences."

Still, Tavares says that being away from home is going to be challenging. He is close to his family and has an established medical support team.

"As much as I'm super excited to do it, it's also literally on the other side of the country," he said. "I'm going to be pretty much on the other side of the world at that point, with how big the United States is."

Staying in his small town would be safe, but that is not what he wants.

"I want to be someone who goes far, both physically and also with my career. That's a big goal of mine," he said.

Tavares is sure that he will be uncomfortable at times, but he knows that comes with new experiences.

"I will be thrown into situations that will probably make me super uncomfortable, because that's what college is about," he said. "Finding these new experiences and being uncomfortable. That's how you learn and grow."

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

Main image



Joseph Lopez Tavares is leaving his small hometown of Johnston, Rhode Island, to head to Los Angeles — the second-largest city in the U.S. — where he will attend The Sidney Poitier New American Film School at the ASU California Center Broadway. Courtesy photo