

Voyager Scholar advances accessibility in travel and higher education

ASU Online student Jessica Lopez merges her passion for learning and business to improve accessibility for people with disabilities

By Molly Loonam, ASU News
December 1, 2025

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

To say that [Jessica Lopez](#) has been busy is an understatement.

Throughout the past two years, the [Barrett, The Honors College](#) student has balanced her undergraduate studies with work as an ASU research assistant, a fellow at Loyola Marymount University's law school, a digital accessibility and marketing consultant for the [Center for Disability Inclusion](#), and a member of 11 university-associated clubs and organizations.

"I'm grateful there are so many opportunities to get involved. I've done my best to maximize every opportunity over the past two years, especially as a first-generation student," says Lopez, who is earning a bachelor's degree in business administration from her hometown of San Diego, California, through [ASU Online](#).

As graduation approaches, Lopez is excited to apply the experiences and knowledge she has gained to further her mission of disability advocacy.

As a recipient of the [Obama-Chesky Voyager Scholarship for Public Service](#), Lopez received a six-week travel stipend to use anywhere in the world during the summer of 2024, which she used to travel to Chicago, Washington D.C., Las Vegas, New York City, and San Francisco and the Redwoods to study accessibility in travel across the U.S.

Drawing on her experience as a woman born without hands and feet, she also used the trip to conduct research for what became her honors thesis, "The Business Case for Accessible Travel" — the first comprehensive study to analyze both accessibility and financial performance in the

travel industry.

Inspired by a summer internship at Amazon, Lopez plans to pursue roles in value-based marketing after graduation. She is also an advocate for anti-ableism within higher education.

"I didn't have accessible education in K–12, but I did have it in higher ed — and there's a complete contrast between those experiences," Lopez says. "There are a lot of things happening that are discouraging students from going to college, and I want to show people the value of school — both in getting a job and making you a better person."

Question: What was your 'aha' moment when you realized you wanted to study business administration?

Answer: A few years before starting school, I had a reckoning with being part of a larger disabled community — that it can be a positive identity rather than something that carries a social stigma. Understanding my identity as a disabled person changed the way I see the world and how I want to approach my life. I knew I wanted to go into disability advocacy, but I wasn't sure in what capacity. Business stood out to me because I knew if I could understand how businesses operate, I could change them from the inside out — so that disabled employees and customers have better opportunities — and approach it from both a practical and profitability standpoint. I also discovered that I want to use my degree to pursue a career in marketing because it's a powerful way to shape how people understand the role of technology and to challenge the narratives that limit who it is built for.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I have a chronic illness, so accessing education hasn't been easy for me. When I started looking into college, I focused on schools that offered community for online students. ASU's offering of online clubs and honors classes was a differentiator for me. I've wanted to do research and challenge myself academically since I was 12 years old, but I didn't think I'd have the opportunity. Through online courses, I can push myself and learn things I might not have been able to otherwise. Through the Barrett College Fellow program, I also joined ASU's STEM Program Evaluation Lab as a research assistant working alongside graduate students, which allowed me to learn more about myself as a researcher and push myself to learn things I wouldn't have otherwise.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: Teaching Professor and Honors Faculty Fellow [Robert Niebuhr](#). My favorite lesson of his — and one of the greatest things I've learned — is that even as everything changes, from society to the disability rights field, we're still grappling with the same challenges throughout human history: how to be happy. That realization helped me see that the things I'm pushing for can improve society and set an example for future generations.

Q: What advice do you have for those still in school?

A: Instead of saying "I'm not good enough" or "I'm not skilled enough," flip that and ask "Why not me?" Don't count yourself out before you've even applied. A lot of students don't go for opportunities because they feel like they don't have what it takes. Don't underestimate yourself — you might surprise yourself, and society might surprise you in how people view your contributions.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem, what would you tackle?

A: I would build a national Accessibility Innovation Lab. We need large-scale research on the lived experiences of disabled people to rethink everything from accessible transportation to home-living tools. Many accessibility products are overpriced or poorly designed because they've never benefited from economies of scale. An Innovation Lab would fund ideas disabled people have imagined for years and give them the authority to design the solutions they've always needed.

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

Main image



Business administration major and first-generation graduate Jessica Lopez (on the Tempe campus on Dec. 16) studied accessibility in travel across the U.S. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

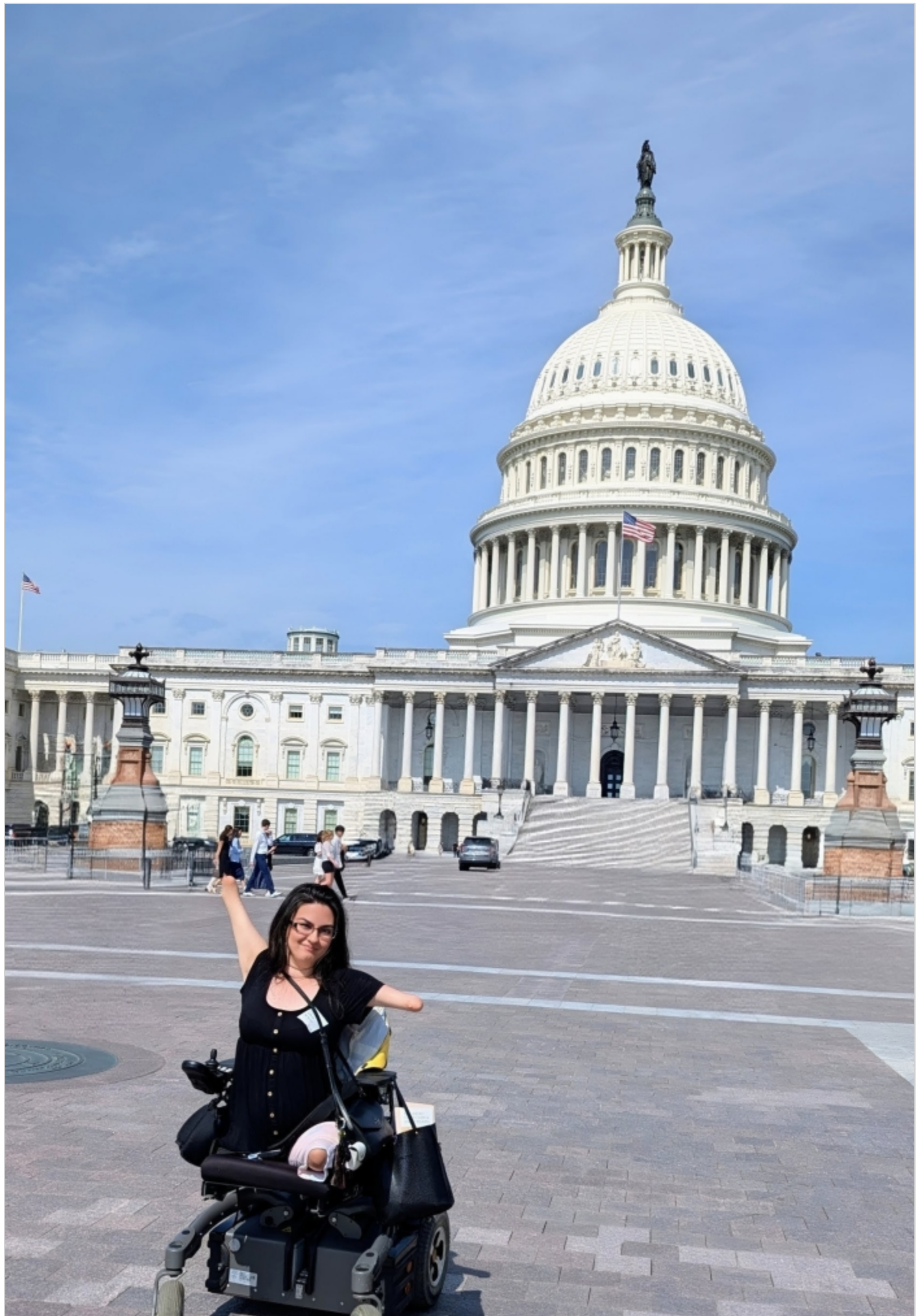
Gallery



Jessica Lopez in the Redwoods near San Francisco.



Jessica Lopez in New York City.



Jessica Lopez in Washington, D.C.