

# From a translator app to 2 degrees: Grad overcomes language barrier, aims to prevent drug abuse

**School of Criminology and Criminal Justice Outstanding Grad now works with Phoenix Police Department, aims for DEA position**

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

By [Marielle Rua](#)

When Angel Monroy, a first-generation student from San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, moved to the U.S. in 2022, he spoke little English.

During his first class at Arizona State University, Monroy says he relied heavily on a translator app on his phone to communicate. He was afraid to speak in Spanish because he didn't want to be seen as different, and his fears were multiplied tenfold with speaking in English.

Monroy was determined to overcome this challenge. He knew he needed to graduate college to eventually work with the Drug Enforcement Administration, a goal he set in high school.

"I remember one morning in high school during math class, one of my classmates suddenly fell off his chair and started convulsing," Monroy said. "That guy was about to die from drug abuse. After this instance, I started seeing this a lot more in school, and it ignited this passion for wanting to help prevent that from happening again."

Monroy is the Fall 2025 Outstanding Graduate from the [School of Criminology and Criminal Justice](#), part of the [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#). He is graduating with two

undergraduate degrees, one in criminology and criminal justice and the other in forensic psychology, and a certificate in homeland security.

Using his goal as motivation, every lesson became easier as he noticed himself relying less on translations. Two weeks after arriving at ASU, Monroy was working at the Verde Dining Pavilion at the West Valley campus.

His next challenge was participating in a career fair. He was interested in an internship with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service but thought they wouldn't take him seriously if he couldn't communicate clearly.

Monroy set his fears aside and used the translator app to practice questions he planned to ask during the interview. His hard work paid off — he was one of 25 interns selected.

"I can say I am really proud of myself, not only because I got the internship but because I overcame the fear to talk, even with my hard accent," Monroy said. "I didn't speak perfectly, but I tried my best."

Now, Monroy is on the other side of many other work experiences, including interning with Life Lab Studios and the Somerton (Arizona) Police Department, and serving as an ambassador for the Multicultural Communities of Excellence at the West Valley campus. He has started his career with the Phoenix Police Department and hopes to pursue a criminal investigator role with the DEA.

His message to other ASU students who may be struggling with the language barrier? "Don't give up."

Read on to learn more about Monroy's ASU journey.

*Note: Answers may have been edited for length and clarity.*

**Question: What's something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

**Answer:** Being around so many different backgrounds at West Valley campus and working with the Multicultural Communities of Excellence has changed how I approach others, lead with curiosity and no judgment. That mindset shift made me more patient and more empathetic.

**Q: Why did you choose ASU?**

**A:** I received a full-ride scholarship from ASU, through the President Barack Obama Scholars program. And because I know the criminology and criminal justice program they have is one of the best programs here in the nation.

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

**A:** I remember [Krystleynn Caraballo](#), an assistant professor, and her class called Crimmigration: Enforcement, Punishment and Detention. She pushed us to see the human impact behind policies and to back our claims with evidence while never losing sight of dignity. That class taught me to ask not only is this legal, but also is this effective and humane? It's a lens I would carry into every decision I made.

**Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?**

**A:** The Multicultural Communities of Excellence space is designed for every student to feel comfortable there. You have a lot of different students from different parts of the world. I really love to do my homework or study there because it makes me feel comfortable.

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

**A:** I'd go all in on reducing drug use among juveniles. I can fund school-based prevention that's actually engaging, expand access to counseling and family support and build after school programs that offer real alternatives for students. I want to invest in community treatment over punishment, peer mental networks and partnerships between schools, and health providers.

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

**Text image(s)**



Angel Monroy, Fall 2025 Outstanding Graduate in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, stands in front of the U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.