

Finding strength in stillness

School of Social Work Outstanding Graduate Evangelina Lopez discovered that true advocacy starts with staying in the moment

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News
December 1, 2025

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

By [Noah Flug](#)

When Evangelina Lopez picked up the phone earlier this year at her internship, she wasn't expecting the call that would stay with her forever.

On the other end was a new father whose partner had died during childbirth. The grief in his voice was raw.

Lopez, uncertain how to respond, drew on advice from one of her professors at Arizona State University: Focus on being in the moment.

She calmly reassured the father and listened to him express his grief. At the end of the call, he thanked her for creating a space where he felt safe to be vulnerable.

"That moment really stayed with me," said Lopez, the fall 2025 Outstanding Graduate in the [School of Social Work](#), part of the [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#).

For Lopez, who is graduating with a bachelor's degree this semester, such moments have defined her college journey. They remind her that advocacy isn't always loud or public. Sometimes, it's simply being there for a stranger.

While studying at ASU, Lopez interned at a community health center in Phoenix. She partnered with a local nursery that helps infants detox after being exposed to substances and assists parents as they transition home.

"Hearing the parents say how much they loved the program and how much it helped them, that's when I really see the impact of what we do," Lopez said.

Born and raised in Phoenix, Lopez says her classes at ASU made her more aware of the larger systems that shape people's lives.

"We don't always realize how our biases shape those systems, and that can create barriers," Lopez said. "I want to be part of improving them so they work better for everyone."

Lopez admits that being named an Outstanding Graduate feels surreal and credits her professors at ASU.

“I’m so thankful for my professors; they’re the reason I stayed in social work. Their advice helped me believe in myself.”

As she looks ahead, Lopez hopes to combine both of her passions: pursuing policy work while continuing to help families.

“Five or 10 years from now, I hope people can say I helped make connections,” she said. “That I helped strengthen the ties that make people feel supported.”

After graduating, Lopez plans to enroll in ASU’s Advanced Standing Program to earn her master’s degree in social work.

Read on to learn more about Lopez’s ASU journey:

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

Question: What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study your major?

Answer: As a child, I loved reading so much that books were sometimes taken away as punishment. One book that stuck with me was “My Sister’s Keeper,” which explored complex family dynamics and difficult circumstances. A character in the book, a guardian ad litem, inspired me. She navigated painful family moments with compassion, advocating for those who couldn’t speak for themselves. I looked into becoming a guardian ad litem and discovered social work. I fell in love working with families, individuals and communities across different systems. Social work allows us not only to advocate but to empower others to find their own voices and strengths, helping them navigate complicated and stressful systems.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: In high school, I talked with my history teacher about college and my interest in social work. I was nervous about leaving the state, especially with financial concerns and COVID still recent. She told me her wife studied social work at ASU and shared their experiences with me. After researching the program and hearing about the opportunities ASU offered, I knew it was the right fit. I’m so grateful I chose ASU. It gave me community, meaningful relationships and incredible learning experiences through both peers and faculty.

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

A: It’s hard to choose just one, but [Cristina Galto’s](#) lesson stands out: She emphasized genuine curiosity and being present with clients rather than searching for the “perfect” response. As someone who tends to overthink, her advice helped me focus on being in the moment and trusting my skills. It’s something I carry into my classes, internship and daily interactions.

Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?

A: Remember you’re human and show yourself kindness. Balancing different roles as a student, worker, family member or parent can be stressful. With so many responsibilities and deadlines, it’s

easy to forget to care for yourself. Give yourself permission to rest, practice self-care and enjoy time with loved ones. Even doing nothing is OK.

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

Text image(s)



Fall 2025 Outstanding Graduate from the School of Social Work Evangelina Lopez.