

ASU film and media studies grad looks forward to shaping own story

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

When Simon Gill first arrived in the U.S. in 2016, he wasn't thinking about making art.

At the time, the then-26-year-old was focused on survival. He came alone, the only one of his four siblings eligible for a visa.

Gill had dreams for sure; he had begun film school in his native Pakistan but put that on hold to emigrate. The reason? Gill's mother had come to the U.S. as a refugee and was financially supporting the family back home.

"Joining her here felt like the most important step for our family's stability and so she didn't have to carry everything on her own," he said.

His filmmaking career would have to wait.

At first, Gill worked whatever jobs he could to support himself and his family. One of those jobs was at a movie theater in Manhattan, which serendipitously led to a small film editing internship.

"It only covered my subway fare," he said, "but it kept me connected to the field. I slowly built my editing career from there. Years later, once I found some stability, I realized I still wanted to return to the degree I never got to finish."

Gill did indeed return to that degree. He is graduating from Arizona State University this fall with a [Bachelor of Arts in film \(film and media studies\)](#) via ASU Online.

Now a resident of Jersey City, New Jersey, Gill completed several ASU internships with a media company in New York City. He said that through those experiences he's begun to imagine himself as someone who might someday mentor others.

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

Answer: I grew up in Lahore, Pakistan, where most people are encouraged to go into very traditional careers like medicine, law, engineering or business. I tried to follow that path and enrolled in a business program, but I struggled with the routine, the expectations and the financial pressure, so I eventually had to drop out. During a summer break, I came across a film and animation course at the only arts school in my city. I signed up out of curiosity, and something clicked. I loved learning what happens behind the camera and how stories are shaped. I bought my first [DSLR](#) and started making small videos with friends and learning how to edit them. It was the first time I felt genuinely excited to learn something.

Q: What’s something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you, that changed your perspective?

A: As I took classes about identity, culture and how people think and behave, it really opened up a new path for me. It changed how I approach both film and life, and it helped me understand myself more. I realized that storytelling isn’t just cool visuals. It’s about understanding people, characters and why they do what they do.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I tried applying to film programs in New York twice, but the process of transferring and evaluating Pakistani transcripts was confusing and discouraging and I got rejected twice. I gave up for a while. A few years later, a Pakistani friend who graduated from ASU told me about the school. It worked perfectly for my situation because I was living in New York, working full-time, and needed flexibility with class schedules and how many credits I could take. The admissions process at ASU was straightforward, and I actually felt supported by the admissions department. They guided me toward the resources I needed to evaluate my Pakistani diplomas, and the process went smoothly.

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

A: In “Introduction to Storytelling,” [Lance Gharavi](#) (School of Music, Dance and Theatre professor) said, “The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves create a sense of who we are.” That really stayed with me. When I came to the U.S., I struggled to find my place. I worked small jobs and often felt like my fears and failures were defining me. For a long time, I believed that was just who I was now. But like any good story, there is a character arc. And now I feel like I’m in the middle of mine. I came to the U.S., rebuilt my life step-by-step, and eventually returned to finish my degree years later. That quote made me realize that I get to shape my own story. I am not just living it, I’m writing it.

I also want to say a special thank you to [Ruby Mackoud](#) (instructional professional in English). Her support and willingness to help me complete my internship made it possible to earn the credits I needed. I’ve been working full time and now preparing to be a father, and it was overwhelming to balance everything. There were times where I seriously considered pausing my education again.

And I also want to thank my academic advisor, [Kara Von Holten](#), for pointing me to the right resources and connecting me with Ruby in the first place. I’m genuinely grateful to both of them.

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

A: As (philosopher) Søren Kierkegaard said, “Life must be lived forward, but can only be understood backward.” Every decision, every opportunity means something, even if you do not see it right away. Take the chances that come your way, even the small ones. Keep going.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I plan to continue growing my own freelance video production work, which I started building this year. This degree also gives me the confidence to apply to bigger companies and take on larger creative roles. Finishing this degree is also a personal achievement. As a 35-year-old and soon-to-be dad, I want to be able to tell my son that it is never too late to return to your education.

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

A: I would invest in more financial support for international and transfer students, especially those from immigrant backgrounds who are working while trying to finish their education. For many of us, we’re not only studying, we’re also helping support our families at the same time.

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

Main image



Graduating ASU film student Simon Gill has faced many obstacles in his quest for a degree. He's learned not to define himself by his failures. "Like any good story, there is a character arc," he said. "And now I feel like I'm in the middle of mine. I get to shape my own story." Courtesy image.