

Graduate charts a new course through ASU Online

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

By Yoshita Yajjapurapu

Having grown up across multiple countries and cultures, Anna Apokina considers herself a global citizen. Born in Latvia, Apokina's early nomad lifestyle instilled in her a love of languages, cultures and the diversity of human experience, all of which lead her to study international relations when she first entered college.

However, Apokina soon realized the field no longer aligned with her growing interests and took a break to discover what she truly wanted. Her journey eventually took her to San Francisco, California.

As life grew busier with full time work and other commitments, Apokina realized returning to an in-person college program would be difficult, but her dream of completing a degree did not disappear.

Looking for a flexible option that would allow her to continue working full time, she discovered [ASU Online](#), and her academic journey studying [biological sciences](#) through The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences began.

At the same time, Apokina started a new job as a store manager at Starbucks, where she learned about the [Starbucks College Achievement Plan](#), a first-of-its-kind partnership with ASU that allows all eligible U.S. partners (employees) to earn their first bachelor's degree through ASU's top-ranked online degree programs.

The partnership gave her more than just tuition coverage. It made the dream of college a reality.

While at ASU, Apokina participated in an internship opportunity and an in-person biology lab at the Tempe campus, gaining hands-on experience and bridging classroom learning with real-world experience.

"It was an unforgettable experience that allowed me to gain practical laboratory skills, connect personally with the university, and meet wonderful people I still keep in touch with today," Apokina said.

Despite completing her degree online, the in-person lab course made Apokina feel even more connected to the ASU community and reinforced her passion for biology and science.

“With a degree in biology, I now see endless opportunities ahead,” she said. “Choosing this field felt like coming home to what I’ve always loved most: understanding life in all its incredible forms.”

Note: The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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

Answer: It took me quite a while and plenty of trial and error to finally find my way to biology. It was always my favorite subject in school; I loved learning about wildlife, nature and the fascinating workings of the human body. Still, I never seriously considered studying biology in university because I thought it was a path reserved mostly for those heading to medical school.

My real “aha” moment came during my first term at ASU Online. Connecting with students from around the world who were studying biology — and hearing their unique stories, goals and career aspirations — sparked something in me. Their enthusiasm reminded me of my own long-standing love for the subject and inspired me to finally follow that passion.

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

A: The best piece of advice I can give to anyone still in school is to follow your passion, not the expectations or opinions of others. Take time to truly think about what excites you, what you enjoy learning and what kind of work makes you feel fulfilled. It’s easy to be influenced by family, friends or societal pressure when choosing a field of study, but in the end, you’re the one who will walk that path every day.

I also encourage students to connect and network with others — classmates, professors and mentors. You never know whose story or guidance might inspire you or help shape your next step. Stay curious, stay open-minded and, most importantly, stay true to yourself.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: After graduation, I will be starting an internship in the environmental health department for the city and county, where I’ll gain practical, hands-on experience applying the knowledge I’ve developed during my degree. This opportunity will help me build a strong foundation in the field and prepare me for future career growth.

Looking ahead, I plan to return to school to pursue a master’s degree in biotechnology, continuing to expand my expertise and explore innovative solutions in science and environmental health. My goal is to combine professional experience with advanced studies to make a meaningful impact in both biotechnology and public health.

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

A: If I were given \$40 million to make a difference, I would use it to combat climate change and environmental degradation through biotechnology and innovation. As a biology major, I’ve learned

how powerful biological solutions can be in addressing global challenges. I would invest in projects that develop sustainable biotechnologies — such as microorganisms that capture carbon dioxide, bioengineered crops that withstand extreme weather and bioremediation efforts that restore polluted ecosystems. These innovations could help slow the effects of climate change while protecting both human and environmental health.

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

Text image(s)



Anna Apokina took advantage of the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, a first-of-its-kind partnership with ASU, to earn her degree in biological sciences through ASU Online. Courtesy photo