

A leap of faith led this Outstanding Graduate to health care innovation

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

Improving food access and preventing the chronic diseases that had negatively affected her family for generations inspired Natasha Burrell to become a registered dietitian.

It was her dream job — but it also opened her eyes to new challenges.

“I realized how the system wasn’t serving anyone particularly well. The health care professionals and providers I worked with were skipping lunches, working exhausting hours and navigating endless regulatory hurdles to take care of their patients. And patients were facing long wait times, high costs and confusing, fragmented care,” she said.

Some of these things Burrell had heard about in school, but seeing them up close every day lit a fire in her.

“Patients and health professionals deserve better. So I wanted to help change the system.”

She found the program that would help her accomplish that within the [Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation](#). This December, she will graduate with a [Master of Healthcare Innovation](#) and as the college’s Outstanding Graduate.

A first-generation student, Burrell is used to breaking barriers even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient. She wants others to know that she was scared to pivot in her career and to pursue a master’s degree after years away from school, but she chose to do it anyway.

“It was a six-year gap between my undergrad and starting this program, but taking that leap of faith and investing in and believing in yourself even when it's hard, it pays off. It really does,” she said.

Currently, Burrell works at ASU's Learning Enterprise, using her extensive experience to manage a health literacy program. Below, she discusses the MHI program and offers advice.

Question: Why did you choose ASU?

Answer: I chose ASU because I needed to grow and push myself. I wanted to build confidence, develop an entrepreneurial mindset, and learn how to understand and tackle complex systems. Health care needs new and bold solutions that challenge the status quo, and I wanted to be in a place that encouraged and nurtured that kind of thinking. I knew ASU would help me develop the mindset to not only spot problems, but also create solutions and build the momentum to put them into action.

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

A: In my undergraduate classes, I took heavy science courses, so I was expecting a lot of exams and long study sessions again as I started this program. But what I really loved about this program is that everything I learned was valuable to me.

Every module I went through taught me something that I could immediately start practicing or applying in my personal or professional life. They don't just teach you concepts and frameworks — they teach you how to become a leader as well through introspection. I felt like I grew so much because of it. It wasn't busy work; it was all meaningful. Many of my other classmates worked full-time too and were busy, so I appreciated the thoughtfulness of the curriculum.

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

A: As an elective, I took User Experience with Dr. [Lynne Cooke](#), and it completely changed the way I think about health care. I was very new to user experience, but the class helped me see how design shapes nearly every interaction. When I go to websites, use apps, visit health clinics, or even just drive my car or use a coffee machine, I think about the user experience now. Dr. Cooke gave me such thoughtful and comprehensive feedback on my assignments that I could actually see myself improving in a short amount of time. She was also funny, and that made the class even more enjoyable!

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

A: Be curious about subjects, about people and their experiences and about the different paths your life could take. Curiosity helps you meet new people, challenge your assumptions, and notice when your old ways of thinking no longer fit who you're becoming. You'll learn a lot from your professors, but staying curious about your classmates and the people you meet can teach you just as much. If you stay curious and open-minded, you can walk away with so much knowledge you'll feel like you have a secret extra degree.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: The great thing about this degree is that there are so many different opportunities it prepares you for. As I am most passionate about systemic change and health equity, I hope to eventually move into health policy innovation. I also hope to open my own business centered on Black women's health and well-being, especially because we've been historically underrepresented in research and continue to face major health disparities.

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Main image



Driven to make a difference, Natasha Burrell wants to improve how health care works.