

ASU history programs inspire graduate to 'think bigger'

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

In 2022, while recovering from liver surgery, Cass Walrath decided to return to school, hoping it would help her heal and move forward. She enrolled in [ASU Online](#), where she took a history course with Instructor [Karin Enloe](#).

“Almost immediately,” Walrath said, she knew she wanted to pursue a degree in history, hoping to become a historian of women’s experiences.

She took courses from her home in Los Angeles for a year before spending a week on ASU’s Tempe campus with the [Online Undergraduate Research Scholars](#) program. Here she worked on [A Journal of the Plague Year](#) with Associate Clinical Professor [Katy Kole de Peralta](#) and Senior Project Coordinator [Erin Craft](#), which sparked her love for public history and the power of connecting academic research with broader audiences.

It was then that Walrath realized her practical decision to complete her bachelor’s degree was growing into a passion for research, storytelling and community engagement.

“I stayed because I found a true academic home and community,” Walrath said. “ASU encouraged me to think bigger.”

And think bigger she did, continuing her education in history with the [accelerated history BA/MA program](#) and a [public history graduate certificate](#).

During her graduate studies, Walrath participated in both the 2024 and 2025 [Scotland Archive Experiences](#), where she conducted archival research to further understand how women’s letters reveal agency and power in 18th-century life. She presented her research at the Public History Poster Show during [Humanities Week](#) two years in a row, and she consulted on her classmates’ posters and presentations as well.

Walrath received many awards while at ASU, including the [History Research Endowment Fund](#), [Emma Goldman History Travel Grant](#) and [Noel J. Stowe Public History Fellowship Endowment](#), among others.

After graduating, Walrath plans to continue her research on public history and women's agency while pursuing presentation opportunities at history conferences. She hopes to combine her education and experience in business to support institutions that want to tell inclusive, evidence-based stories.

"I want to keep growing as a historian and communicator: someone who can bridge academic research and public engagement," she said.

We spoke with Walrath to learn more about her time at ASU.

Note: Responses have been lightly edited for length and/or clarity.

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

Answer: At ASU, I learned that research is as much about interpretation as it is about evidence. Courses in sensory and archival history challenged me to think critically about how memory, gender and power are constructed through sources themselves. I began to see archives not as neutral repositories but as curated spaces that reflect the biases and silences of their creators. That shift changed how I approach both primary research and public history projects.

Q: Which professor taught you one of the most important lessons you've learned at ASU? What was the lesson?

A: Each of my professors has shaped my path in meaningful ways. Kole de Pealta and [James Dupey](#) taught me how to think like a researcher, how to ask better questions, trust the process and engage deeply with primary sources. I also learned a great deal from watching [Hannah Barker](#) present her work with clarity and confidence, which inspired me to approach my own research with that same sense of purpose. [Stephen Lazer](#) probably challenged me the most, pushing me to refine my writing and think critically about narrative and argument. And in public history, Craft showed me the importance of community and collaboration, how sharing history with others can be as impactful as writing it.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to other students?

A: Find whatever brings you balance. For some, that might be exercise or creative work; for others, it might be quiet reflection, time outdoors or simply slowing down. Academic life can easily consume every hour if you let it, but balance keeps your curiosity alive and your perspective grounded. Give yourself permission to recharge, because when you take care of your well-being, your ideas have space to grow. Personally, I actually retained more information when I allowed myself breaks to process.

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

A: I would address the housing crisis for LGBTQ+ youth in Los Angeles, especially those aging out of the foster care system. As a former foster parent, I've seen firsthand how limited resources and unstable housing can derail young people's potential. I would create transitional housing programs that combine affordable living with mentorship, education and job training. Every young person deserves safety, dignity and a fair chance to build a stable life, and housing is the foundation that

makes that a stronger possibility.

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

Main image



Cass Walrath is graduating from the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies this fall with a master's degree in history and a public history graduate certificate.