

Dean's Medalist's transfer story leads to Italian summer experience

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

After leaving her previous university, Casa Grande, Arizona, native Judith Guerrero wasn't sure when she'd return to the classroom. That changed when she realized her passion while scrolling through a Wikipedia page about languages.

"I didn't have any real plans to go back to school, but one day I was deep in Wikipedia, reading about the Georgian language and its origins, and I was like, 'linguistics — that's what you want to do.' I looked up Arizona State University linguistics, and there was a program for it as well as Italian."

Guerrero always had a love for the roots of different languages and learning the history behind them. She grew up speaking both Spanish and English and wanted to challenge herself in a new area, such as Italian.

"Before I even started at my previous school, I just knew I wanted to take a foreign language and I fell in love with Italian — that's really the only thing that I was sure of," Guerrero said. "I was constantly switching my major over there (at the previous university), but I was consistent with my Italian minor. When I transferred to ASU and realized Italian was a major here, I knew this was meant to be."

Now she'll graduate this December with degrees in Italian and English linguistics with a certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and as the [School of International Letters and Cultures'](#) fall 2025 Dean's Medalist.

This past semester, she worked as a teaching assistant at Estrella Mountain Community College, supporting an English as a Second Language (ESL) class that provided group instruction in language and content comprehension. She also interned at McKemy Academy of International Studies, where she developed and delivered lesson plans to foster a cultural understanding of Italian traditions and heritage.

Next summer, Guerrero will participate in an internship created at the [Biblioteca Classense](#), housed inside a Camaldolese monastery built in 1512 in Ravenna, Italy, to assist in projects ranging from social media to digitizing the library's photo collection. She then hopes to pursue graduate school.

Learn more about Guerrero and her time at ASU.

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

Answer: As far as linguistics goes, I've always been into the etymology of words, and I think I owe that to my mom. If I heard a new word, I would look up the origin, so it was always just very fascinating to me to see what language different words come from. When I was really little, I would speak Spanish at home and then I was learning English at school, and I thought that was really cool. So in my tiny little brain, I was like, “I'm gonna learn every language in the world.”

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

A: I think more than anything, being a student at ASU really reinforced my belief that education should be a right. I also feel like I tried to conduct myself with empathy first and foremost, because I really love ASU's charter, which is measured not by who we exclude, but who we include and how they succeed. I think that's very beautiful.

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

A: I would say it was [Jennifer Adams](#). She's so wonderful, kind, supportive and what she taught me is that your career path, and life in general, doesn't need to be so linear. We face so much pressure to know exactly what we want our future to look like once we start college, but plans and dreams are subject to change and that's OK.

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

A: Just keep going, even if you need to take a step back for a while. I think education is so rewarding, but it can be very challenging. I think it makes perfect sense if you need to take time off, like I did. Also, don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

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

A: Something that has been at the forefront of my brain lately, because of the [Pen Project](#), has been prison reform. I really do believe that education should be a right, not a privilege. It has been proven that educational programs within the prison system do reduce recidivism.

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

Main image



Judith Guerrero, the School of International Letters and Cultures' fall 2025 Dean's Medalist, is taking what she learned in her double majors of Italian and English linguistics into a summer internship at the Biblioteca Classense, housed inside a Camaldolese monastery built in 1512 in Ravenna, Italy. Photo courtesy of Meghan Finnerty/ASU

Text image(s)



Judith Guerrero is graduating as a first-generation student.