

From fish tanks to fieldwork: Dean's Medalist makes waves in ocean research

By Risa Aria Schnebly, ASU News
December 11, 2025

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

Viktor Meszaros has always been enchanted by the weird and wonderful creatures of the ocean. But growing up in Mesa, Arizona, he never thought he'd have the chance to study them himself.

Instead, he brought some of those creatures into his own home, carefully learning to feed hermit crabs, grow coral and even take care of an axolotl — a salamander that looks like it's always wearing a smile.

"I got my first fish tank when I was 11, and I asked my mom to get me a saltwater tank pretty soon after, where I started growing coral. So I've been doing that for over a decade now."

While Meszaros still keeps a handful of marine critters, after he transferred from Mesa Community College to ASU, he's been able to take his interest in the ocean much further than he ever expected. This December, he's graduating with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences, with a concentration in conservation biology, and has earned the Dean's Medal for the School of Life Sciences in recognition of his work in marine research.

That journey started during his first semester at ASU when he enrolled in an online Ocean Futures course with Associate Processor [Amy Maas](#), a researcher with the [Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences \(BIOS\)](#). Meszaros distinctly remembers how Mass emphasized that being in Arizona didn't have to stop students like him from pursuing marine research.

"I approached her pretty quickly and told her I wanted to get involved," Meszaros remembers.

Though Mass primarily works in Bermuda, Meszaros started volunteering to help with research from Tempe. He first started working to identify images of plankton species that researchers collected in areas across Bermuda at different depths, temperatures and times of day.

The next semester, Meszaros continued working in the lab through a [School of Life Sciences Undergraduate Research \(SOLUR\)](#) internship. With that, he started identifying images of fish species in the sample, as well as analyzing which fish occurred at different depths and according to different environmental factors. In his spare time, the accomplished undergraduate also worked as a teacher's assistant for Mass's Ocean Futures course and made time for other extracurriculars, like competing on the ASU figure skating team.

As a senior, Meszaros took on even more responsibility, helping set up a system to actually take the photos of species in the collected samples in the Tempe lab. To do that, he runs the collected samples through a machine that identifies the species based on characteristics like color and size.

"It's like putting the plankton through a scanner," he explains.

Meszaros' work helps in identifying what environmental factors those marine species like plankton and small fish depend on, which could have vital implications for all the species in the ocean food chain that eat those smaller prey.

"It's especially important to know that in the context of climate change," Meszaros continues, "since things like water temperature are going to change and we want to know how that's going to affect the whole ecosystem."

In the summer of 2024, Meszaros also got to join Mass and other researchers at BIOS through a study abroad program.

"It was really cool to be out there doing real fieldwork everyday," he remembers.

One of his favorite moments was when he got to witness the "Bermuda fireworm," a bioluminescent worm that glows bright green in shallow water at night. Along with all the microscopic critters he's encountered through his research, he says that experience reaffirmed his love of marine creatures.

"The creatures that live in the ocean are just so weird," he says while smiling. "I love them."

Though he's still deciding whether he wants to pursue graduate school or find work as a laboratory technician, either way Meszaros is dedicated to continuing to do marine research like he always dreamed.

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

Main image



Viktor Meszaros, who's graduating with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences this semester, earned the Dean's Medal for ASU's School of Life Sciences. Courtesy photo