

International student earns Dean's Medal in mathematics

From Cairo to Tempe: Mohamed Mostafa plans to complete his accelerated master's program then pursue a PhD in pure mathematics

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

As a child growing up in Cairo, Egypt, Mohamed Mostafa describes himself as "being as quiet as you can imagine; the stereotypical math person."

Mostafa will graduate from Arizona State University this month with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and as the [School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences'](#) fall 2025 Dean's Medalist.

Mostafa's many accomplishments include making the Dean's List every semester, earning the Ioana Elise Hociota!!! Memorial Mathematics Scholarship, and participating in the Jonathan D. and Helen Wexler Mathematical Sciences Dinner for outstanding juniors.

"The awards committee was impressed with Mohamed's exceptional academic achievements, particularly in light of the level of difficulty of the courses he has taken," said [Nancy Childress](#), associate director for undergraduate programs and associate professor.

During high school, he had notable successes at several math competitions, including a silver medal at the World International Mathematical Olympiad. He began to grasp real analysis and group theory concepts and found abstract algebra fascinating, leading him to want to attend a university where he could fully develop himself.

"I found ASU to be the best university that I could attend — and I'm thankful for this choice," Mostafa said.

"It is one of the best universities when it comes to teaching math, and I liked ASU for being No. 1 in innovation for many years. However, more importantly than these, ASU is a university that highlights community and inclusion. I felt like I was part of ASU, and it was the right environment for me to develop myself academically, professionally and mentally."

As he settled into college life, he became more excited to share math with people, and even though he was savvy at math since high school, he became a better proof writer when he took MAT 410: General Topology with President's Professor [Matthias Kawski](#).

"Professor Kawski was the one to guide me the best, as he encouraged me to open up more and learn how to write proofs even better," Mostafa said.

During that class, Mostafa was pleased to find people who share his interests. Many of his classmates turned into friends, sharing not only their love of mathematics but also attending parties and hanging out together.

"My favorite memories are working with my classmates on discussing graph theory theorems and problems. Often, the problems were exciting, and discussions were always productive and amusing," he said.

After graduation, Mostafa will complete his accelerated master's program and then plans to pursue a PhD in pure mathematics.

We asked Mostafa to share more about his experiences as a Sun Devil.

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

Answer: Back in school, I realized that math was my favorite subject, that I was good at it and that it's often useful. More than anything, however, it was the subject that I could endure its bad moments, more so than any other STEM subject.

I originally wanted to minor or even major in physics as well, but I thought what my high school physics professor advised me once. He told me that when choosing the best things to study, that I do not choose the things I enjoy the most necessarily, but rather, I should choose the things that I also hate the least. While this advice sounded limiting, it applied to me, and that meant that rather than studying other endeavors that I might enjoy way less than math, I could instead focus on math and then study it on its own or apply it to other endeavors.

While studying math, I still learn a bit of everything else, such as from computer science, physics, chemistry and biology. But right now, I am dedicated to learning math more than anything. I want to continue learning as much as I can in math, and hopefully be able to add something of my own to this vast subject and go beyond.

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

A: Much of the things I learned during ASB 101 (anthropology) gave me a lot of insights about why humans act in a certain way (such as explaining altruism, eating patterns and cooperative nature of humanity).

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: For studying, meeting friends and in general, Wexler Hall followed Hayden Library. For thinking about life, I like to walk around the campus.

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

A: Be involved with productive things as much as you can and never give up.

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

Main image



Mohamed Mostafa is Dean's Medalist for the School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences. Courtesy photo