

Outstanding Graduate finds purpose in research and clinical care

Psychology student to pursue a PhD that integrates clinical practice with scientific discovery

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

Graduate student Lucia Xueqing Yuan Zhang, recently nominated for Outstanding Graduate of the [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#), came to Arizona State University with years of experience as a psychological counselor and a deep curiosity about how emotion regulation influences memory, decision-making and recovery after trauma. Her master's degree became a personal milestone, a process that strengthened her skills, clarity and confidence as she learned to ask stronger research questions, navigate complex challenges and deepen both her research and clinical abilities.

At New College on ASU's [West Valley campus](#), she found everything she was looking for: advanced psychological training, meaningful research opportunities and a place where she could translate research into real practice. Working in the [DREAMS Lab](#) and serving as a teaching assistant further expanded her expertise and sense of belonging. Now graduating, Zhang plans to pursue a PhD that blends research and clinical practice to improve mental health outcomes in diverse communities.

Question: What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to study psychology?

Answer: I didn't have one single moment. Before coming to ASU, I worked as a psychological counselor for many years, supporting people experiencing emotional challenges such as stress, trauma, family conflict and major life transitions. I saw how differently people respond to hardship and how some rebuild their lives slowly and successfully after difficult experiences. I also went through my own long recovery after a serious accident. That experience shaped how I think about resilience and well-being. Rebuilding my life step by step deepened my understanding of healing,

physically and emotionally, and strengthened my desire to learn more about how people recover. That combination of personal and professional experience inspired me to come to ASU and study psychology more deeply.

Q: Why did you choose New College?

A: New College offered exactly what I was looking for: a flexible, research-focused program with supportive faculty. I wanted to understand more than just counseling techniques — I wanted to learn what's behind them.

Q: What is something you learned at New College that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: My course on emotion was very impressive because it didn't focus only on theory or research history. We also learned about the mechanisms behind clinical skills: how emotional processes shape counseling techniques. (Associate) Professor [Nicole Roberts](#) encouraged open discussion about how emotion regulation and research can support psychological counseling. This matched my background perfectly because it combined clinical work with scientific understanding.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson, and what was that lesson?

A: The most important lessons I learned came from my research experience in the DREAMS Lab with professors [Mengya Xia](#) and [Abigail Gewirtz](#), and from serving as a teaching assistant for (Assistant Teaching) Professor [Bowen Wang](#). In the lab, I gained a full understanding of the research process and discovered the value of collaboration and mentorship. As a TA, Professor Wang's patience and encouragement helped me overcome insecurities and grow into a more confident educator. Together, these experiences taught me how meaningful research is done and how impactful supportive mentorship can be.

Q: What advice would you give to someone considering attending college?

A: As a nontraditional student balancing school, work and major life changes, I often felt overwhelmed, but the supportive ASU community made all the difference. Mentors across campuses helped me see strengths I hadn't recognized and encouraged me through moments of doubt. Because of them, I became more confident, learned to ask for help, adapt quickly and stay grounded through challenges.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I plan to apply to PhD programs, possibly at ASU or at other universities. I'm interested in counseling psychology, clinical psychology or human development and family science. I want a career that combines research with clinical work.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years, and how has New College helped prepare you?

A: In 10 years, I hope to be working at the intersection of clinical psychology and psychology research, building a bridge between the two. New College gave me a supportive environment where I could grow as a researcher and apply emotion science to clinical practice.

Q: Part of New College's name is "new." What does the word mean to you? Describe how you feel "new."

A: "New" represents innovation and inclusion. In my program, we have students from different backgrounds, cultures and ages. It's very inclusive. We learn not only from books but also from discussions, new perspectives and innovative approaches to understanding psychology. Our instructors encourage us to think creatively and explore new ways to apply what we learn.

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

A: I would use the money to expand educational opportunities for young women. Education is powerful; it shapes families, communities and future generations. As a counselor, I saw how lack of education created challenges for some mothers trying to support their children and navigate difficulties. Helping young women access strong educational opportunities can improve well-being not only for them but for entire communities.

Q: What does earning this degree mean to you and your family?

A: This degree is a confirmation to myself. The process of earning it was even more important than the degree itself. Through this journey, I gained skills, clarity and confidence. I learned to ask stronger research questions, handle complex challenges and approach my work with more focus. It strengthened both my research abilities and my clinical skills, preparing me for the future.

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

Main image



Outstanding graduate Lucia Xueqing Yuan Zhang will graduate this fall with a master's degree in psychology from ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. Courtesy photo

Gallery



From left: Lucia Xueqing Yuan Zhang with her classmate Jixin "Anna" Zhou and her father Jinppen Yuan Zhang at the ASU Tempe campus.



Zhang with her classmate on the ASU Tempe campus.



Zhang at ASU's West Valley campus, a place where community felt like home.