

With resilience and mentorship, New College graduate forges her path to medical school

Dean's Medalist, future physician Denise Quizon credits New College's community and hands-on opportunities for shaping her academic journey

By Melissa Stroud, 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 first-generation college student from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Denise Quizon arrived at Arizona State University's West Valley campus sure she wanted to pursue science, but unsure of the community she would find so far from home.

What she discovered at New College exceeded all her expectations.

Through small, supportive classes, compassionate faculty mentors and opportunities to serve others both locally and abroad, she found a place where her passions for biology, communication and human connection could thrive.

During her three and a half years at ASU, Quizon became a medical assistant at a urology clinic, served as a teaching assistant in the Communication Lab, conducted NCUIRE research, volunteered in hospitals, joined a service trip to Greece and built a strong foundation for her goal of becoming a physician.

As she graduates with a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in communication, she reflects on the people and experiences that have shaped her journey and the future she's determined to build.

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

Answer: I've always been passionate about helping others, and science was something that fascinated me from a young age. As I grew up and realized I wanted to become a physician, biology became the clear path. It connects my interests in medicine, people and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Q: Why did you choose New College?

A: As an out-of-state student from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, moving to Arizona was intimidating, because I didn't know anyone here. New College stood out because of its smaller classes and the strong sense of community. I wanted to feel like I belonged somewhere, and New College gave me that from the beginning.

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

A: I learned how constantly evolving science is; things change every day. Understanding how adaptable science must be helped me realize how adaptable I need to be, especially as someone entering medicine. I aspire to always continue learning. There is always more to learn, especially in genetics, DNA and understanding diseases. That perspective shaped the way I approach both school and future patient care.

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

A: Two professors had a huge impact on me. Anna Cunningham, my very first professor at ASU, created such a welcoming, vibrant classroom that I immediately felt like I belonged. Also, Kenneth Kunkel at the Comm Lab built a community where everyone was seen and valued. They both taught me the importance of making people feel included, which is something I'll carry with me into medicine.

Q: Tell us about your NCUIRE research project.

A: Outside of academics, I stay very involved. I work as a medical assistant at a urology clinic and I serve as the treasurer for the Health Care Student Alliance. I've also grown a lot through the Comm Lab, moving from apprentice coordinator to mentor and now teaching assistant. Through the New College Undergraduate Inquiry and Research Experiences (NCUIRE) program, I completed three semesters of research with Dr. Anna Cunningham and Dr. Gregory Koop.

I volunteer locally at places like Banner Desert Medical Center and Feed My Starving Children, and I've observed physicians at Mayo Clinic. One of the most meaningful experiences I've had was traveling to Athens and Crete, Greece, with ASU students and physicians to provide primary care in refugee camps.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd offer to someone considering applying for college?

A: Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Coming here without knowing anyone was scary, but college is where you learn the most about yourself. Reach out to professors, form study groups and build a community. Know that you're not alone, and those connections will carry you through.

Q: What scholarships did you receive? And what does that mean to you and your family.?

A: As a first-generation student, I didn't have a lot of resources or guidance on how to pay for college, and neither did my parents. The process was new for all of us. Being the first in my family to go to college is a big milestone, and the scholarships I received not only helped cover the cost of attending school and some of my living expenses, they gave me the freedom to participate in college life. The support I received made it possible for me to take advantage of everything college had to offer.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years or more — and how do you think New College has helped prepare you to get there?

A: In 10 years, I hope to be working in a clinical setting, caring for patients and helping families navigate their medical journeys. New College has played such a huge role in developing my goals and has prepared me through strong academics, community support and teaching me resilience and adaptability, all skills I'll rely on throughout medical school and my career.

Q: How do you think you embody ASU's charter through your actions and experiences?

A: Inclusion is one of my core values. ASU's charter says we're measured by whom we include, not by whom we exclude, and I try to live that every day, whether in school, in research, at work or in the community. Through NCUIRE, volunteering and my communication training, I've learned how to be inclusive in science and medicine, especially when helping patients understand complex information.

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

Main image



First-generation graduate Denise Quizon is preparing for medical school with a passion for research, inclusion and serving others. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



In 10 years, Denise Quizon hopes to be working in a clinical setting, caring for patients and helping families navigate their medical journeys. Photo by Danielle Castillo/ASU