

From ASU to the open road: Alumna Gabriella Shead builds a career behind the scenes of Broadway tours

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
December 22, 2025

For ASU alumna Gabriella Shead, a career in the theater isn't about taking center stage — it's about making sure everything behind the curtain runs seamlessly.

Now serving as assistant company manager on a national tour of "The Book of Mormon," Shead is living a professional life she once never imagined, shaped by mentorship, hands-on experience and the foundational skills she developed at Arizona State University.

A native of Denver, Shead's journey in the performing arts began at Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, where she studied, performed and stage-managed numerous productions. That early exposure to both the artistic and operational sides of performance planted the seeds for a future in arts leadership.

She later chose to attend ASU, following in the footsteps of her parents and uncle — also alumni — seeking both independence and a strong support system.

As a Sun Devil, Shead pursued a degree in arts administration, where she was mentored by Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU vice president for cultural affairs and executive director of ASU Gammage.

While theater was not her formal emphasis, Shead credits the interdisciplinary nature of her education for preparing her for the realities of the industry.

"ASU taught me how to communicate effectively and handle competing priorities," Shead said. "I was able to take classes across all art disciplines, which gave me a much broader understanding of how organizations function."

Her involvement extended well beyond the classroom. Through clubs, campus organizations and the Residence Hall Association, Shead developed leadership skills that continue to serve her on tour today.

“Being involved helped me grow as a leader and gave me memories and connections that will last a lifetime,” she said.

Following graduation in 2024, Shead quickly immersed herself in the touring world, working as a production assistant on "A Beautiful Noise," "Life of Pi" and "The Wiz." Those roles became her introduction to company management and offered invaluable exposure to different team dynamics and operational styles.

Today, as assistant company manager, she oversees behind-the-scenes logistics including travel and housing, essential elements that keep a touring production running smoothly.

“Life on the road has been so much fun,” Shead said. “It’s a completely new experience that I never imagined myself in, and I’m grateful for every step that led me here.”

A pivotal influence throughout her journey has been mentorship, particularly from women who showed up, opened doors and encouraged her to ask questions without fear. Shead first met Jennings-Roggensack during her freshman year after being encouraged by a family friend to connect with her. What followed were regular breakfasts and lunches, candid conversations about goals and life, and invitations to performances and events that expanded Shead’s professional network.

“The best advice I received from Colleen is to always ask the question and not fear the answer,” Shead said.

Jennings-Roggensack, who has followed Shead’s trajectory from student to professional, says she is proud of the path her former mentee has forged.

“The ASU Gammage team and I are so proud of Gabriella for making her dreams come true in the theater industry,” Jennings-Roggensack said. “As a mentor and friend, it is an honor to be a part of her trajectory in this business. She will continue to shine for many years to come.”

Shead also credits Cleo Parker Robinson, her longtime mentor in Colorado, for modeling the power of lifting others up. Especially women supporting women and women of color creating pathways for the next generation.

“They both showed up in ways I didn’t expect,” Shead said of Robinson and Jennings-Roggensack. “They supported me in all the different paths I took. I am where I am because of the women in my life who believed in me.”

While touring was not originally part of her career plan, Shead now hopes to continue on the road for as long as the opportunity excites her. Eventually, her dream is to work at a performing arts facility where she can engage with theater, dance, music and perhaps one day return to a venue like ASU Gammage.

“ASU is an amazing school with so many opportunities,” Shead said. “I’m excited to come back to campus and see how much it’s grown. It will always be a place that shaped who I am.”

"The Book of Mormon" is coming to ASU Gammage Jan. 6-11. Tickets are available at asugammage.com.

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

Text image(s)



ASU alumna Gabriella Shead, courtesy photo