

Crow's 'state of the university' talk spotlights how ASU is expanding access

President speaks on ASU goals, financial health in presentation to the Arizona Board of Regents

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
February 20, 2026

Arizona State University has now fulfilled an Arizona Board of Regents request that was presented to Michael Crow when he became president in 2002.

"One of the regents at the time took me to lunch and said, 'When are you going to build a medical school?'" Crow said.

This August, the first cohort of students will arrive at the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering — the culmination of ASU's journey toward becoming a great research university, said Crow, who delivered the "State of the ASU Enterprise and Arizona State University" presentation to ABOR on Thursday.

He told the regents that the medical school will be unlike others.

"We needed to bring the full breadth of intellectual capability that Arizona State University and our faculty and our staff have and say, 'Could we specifically focus on improving the health outcomes of the people of Arizona?'"

"That means we're going to take a different approach in everything that we do."

ASU will create health practitioners who can design technology-enabled treatments and scale them, according to Holly Lisanby, the founding dean of the medical school.

"It's really been a chance of a lifetime to design, from ground up, an educational program for the future physician who needs to be fluent in new technologies such as artificial intelligence, new medical devices and so on," she told the regents.

“Because we know that we can’t achieve the goal of elevating the health of all of Arizona by simply continuing to train physicians the way they’ve always been trained.”

In his annual presentation, Crow covered the financial health of the university as well as goals and challenges.

The new initiatives he highlighted include:

The [Endless Games and Learning Lab](#), in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, combines gaming with learning experiences as a way to empower young people who are disengaged from traditional education and employment. “We all know games are super engaging for people of all ages, so this is to engage and measure learning in ways that we haven’t been paying attention to, as well as learning how to make games drive economic development,” said Renée Cheng, dean of the Herberger Institute.

The [online JD program](#), in the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, started its first cohort of 30 students in January and is intended to address the shortage of lawyers in Arizona. “We are ranked 49th out of 50 in lawyers per capita in our state. And the problem isn’t in Phoenix or Tucson. It’s out in all the small towns across our state where there’s not enough attorneys or judges to serve the population,” said Stacy Leeds, dean of the law school.

[ASU London](#) will offer electrical engineering and computer science degrees, as well as business degrees, using the three-year model prevalent in the UK. “It’s an opportunity for us to understand how to do that in ways that will be impactful in that market. But it’s also going to teach us a lot of lessons here about pathways to engineering degree programs at all levels,” said Kyle Squires, dean of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering.

[Operation Comeback](#) is a campaign to reengage people who started their degrees at ASU but never finished, offering scholarships and past-due balance relief to qualified students. More than 700 former students have expressed interest, and 10% of them are already taking classes this semester, according to Nancy Gonzales, executive vice president and university provost. The initiative is another way ASU is helping to eliminate barriers to degree completion.

Crow also described how ASU has become accessible to more low-income students. For example, institutional gift aid, which doesn’t have to be repaid, increased from \$338 million in 2016 to \$710 million this year. In 2002, about 1,000 ASU students were from families who earned less than \$20,000 a year. This year, it’s more than 7,000. ASU enrolls more Pell Grant students than any other public university in the United States.

But even with 200,000 students, Crow said that ASU, as well as the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University, are underserving the state, which has about 7.5 million residents.

“We don’t have that many kids attending the public universities for a state that size,” he said.

Take a deeper dive

Explore the stats and facts of the [“State of the ASU Enterprise and Arizona State University” report](#).

“We have a low college-going rate. We have a low graduation rate.”

He believes that increasing the number of campus-immersion and online students can address that, though financial barriers — including sudden changes in Pell Grant and federal loan rules — might make that difficult.

Among other challenges facing ASU is a continued lack of investment from the state, which provided about \$10,500 per degree awarded this year compared with \$45,000 per degree in 2003.

Despite that and other challenges, ASU's total revenue, including donations, has increased sixfold from 2003, to an estimated \$6 billion this year.

After touting several achievements, such as ASU being designated a top producer of Fulbright Award winners and reaching \$1 billion in research expenditures, Crow said it's important for the university to let people know that it has built an accessible, world-class research institution.

“We want to drive up the brand and the value of the university, but not by exclusion,” he said.

“Relentless is a word that covers what we do. We're attempting to have this access and research excellence in the same institution.”

ASU by the numbers

200,000 total students this year, including campus-immersion and online

10% of Arizona public high school graduates (more than 8,300) enrolled in ASU in fall 2025

89.2% of Arizona resident first-year students retained past their first year

87.3% of all first-year students retained

40,000 degrees expected to be awarded in 2025–26

More than \$1 billion in research expenditures

36,000 K-12 learners in ASU Prep and other pathways

ASU goals

Ensure that more than 90% of students continue their studies beyond their first year.

Increase graduation rate to more than 85% and more than 45,000 graduates annually.

Enroll 170,000 online degree-seeking students.

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

Main image



ASU President Michael Crow gave his annual “State of the ASU Enterprise and Arizona State University” presentation to the Arizona Board of Regents at the Memorial Union on the Tempe campus on Thursday. Photo by Samantha Chow/ASU News

Text image(s)



ASU Law Dean Stacy Leeds speaks at the presentation about the new online JD program and how it is addressing the urgent shortage of lawyers in Arizona, particularly in the state's small towns.
Photo by Samantha Chow/ASU News