

Student worker, ASU YouthMappers club VP advances her professional path

Geography grad Ana Feinson is mapping her future through involvement in ASU community, research

By Bianca Squicciarini, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

This commencement season, ASU's [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#) is highlighting one of its former front desk advising assistants, whose time in the department helped shape her academic and professional experience at Arizona State University.

Ana Feinson said her experience working at SGSUP was incredibly valuable. During her time in the role, she supported several events, including the annual Career Navigator event. She also assisted faculty and students across the department in a variety of capacities, including helping Arizona State Climatologist and Associate Teaching Professor [Erinanne Saffell](#) digitize climate data from the 1980s.

“My time at the front desk gave me the opportunity to connect with my professors on a more personal level and be present for mentorship opportunities I might not otherwise have had. Through this experience, I gained skills in time management, working in an office setting and supporting research initiatives as an undergraduate student,” Feinson said.

A Phoenix native, Feinson is graduating this spring with a [bachelor's degree in geography](#) and a [certificate in geographic information science](#) (GIS) from the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning within [The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#). She was supported by the New American University Provost's Scholarship, the [ASU Raise Me Scholarship](#) and the [Sustainability Undergraduate Research Experience \(SURE\) program](#) during her time at ASU.

As vice president of the [ASU YouthMappers club](#), Feinson has been involved since her junior year, participating in mapathons that use open-source mapping to support disaster response and other global efforts. She attended the [American Geographical Society's 2050 Conference](#) in New York

City, where [YouthMappers celebrated 10 years of global impact](#), with co-founder and ASU Research Professor [Patricia Solís](#), and participated in panels and networking events. During the trip, she also visited Meta's headquarters and attended lectures from current and former YouthMapper chapters, community partners and others involved in the organization's mission. Through these experiences, she developed skills in OpenStreetMap and helped organize mapping events for the club.

While Feinson continues her work as a research assistant on her SURE project under Associate Professor [Deirdre Pfeiffer](#), she is exploring opportunities to apply her geography and GIS skills in creative ways, and plans to remain involved with YouthMappers, supporting chapter management and internal projects. After graduation, Feinson intends to pursue a [master's degree in GIS](#) and spatial analysis, followed by a PhD focused on climate resilience and spatial analysis, with career aspirations of becoming a professor.

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

Answer: I had my “aha” moment when I took [Intro to Human Geography](#) in my second semester of freshman year at ASU. I remember being so excited to go to class because I felt so passionate about the topics, so invested in each module, and didn't want the class to end. That was how I knew I wanted to study geography, and specifically focus on GIS. Once I learned more about the geography degree program, I felt even more confident in my decision.

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

A: One thing I learned at ASU is how important data visualization is when trying to tell a story. This is especially true in research settings, where properly conveying data in a digestible format can elevate the research and really establish the points being made in the paper or poster. I think I learned this in classes like [Geographic Information Science II and III](#), as well as outside the classroom when I was part of the [Arizona Housing Analytics Collaborative homelessness prevention research project](#).

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: Associate Professor [Rashad Shabazz](#) taught me the importance of historical context in urban planning and how it eventually translates into GIS and spatial analysis. During his course, the [Geography of Music](#), I learned about the ways that music influences social outcomes and how institutional issues are most often processed through the use of music.

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

A: The challenges posed by extreme heat are vast, so I would take a few steps to mitigate its disastrous impacts. First, I would provide resources to people living in areas most affected by climate extremes and implement policies such as ensuring that all residents have access to proper cooling techniques. I would also ensure more green spaces are introduced in densely populated urban areas to reduce the urban heat island effect, alongside the implementation of cool pavements nationwide. I would also use this money to continue to fund cutting-edge research to mitigate extreme heat and climate change.

(Video: {<https://youtube.com/shorts/AgLKExwyFDo?si=v3FbqLN3LYh9pN5X>})

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

Main image



Spring 2026 grad Ana Feinson in front of ASU's Old Main building on the Tempe campus.
Courtesy photo

Gallery



Ana Feinson (left) conducting an on-campus survey with the ASU Walkability and Transit Alliance.



Feinson at ASU's Tempe Weather Observation Station.



Feinson at an ASU SolarSPELL Initiative event.