

ASU biochemistry graduate sets sights on becoming a cardiothoracic surgeon

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

In high school, Brianna Morales flew from Arizona to Massachusetts for a summer program that would shape her future.

She attended a two-week seminar at Harvard for students interested in medicine.

There, she heard from different medical professionals, including a cardiothoracic surgeon, and had the opportunity to observe a procedure firsthand.

The moment stayed with her.

"It was fascinating — the complexity, the precision, how critical that part of the body is," recalled Morales, who is graduating with a degree in biochemistry from Arizona State University's [School of Molecular Sciences](#). "That experience made everything click for me. I knew I wanted to pursue medicine, and biochemistry felt like the right foundation to get there."

On her path to becoming a cardiothoracic surgeon, Morales' college experience went far beyond the lab.

A clarinetist of 14 years, she also joined ASU's marching band and became a section leader, a role she held for two years. Music at ASU and the people she met through it became just as formative for her as her academic work.

"I know I'm studying music and may not be able to do much with it (for my career) in the future. But the friends and connections that I've made through music have been life changing," Morales said. "I wish people would be able to also have the opportunity to make those connections and make those friends with like-minded people."

ASU News spoke more with Morales about her ASU experience and what is next after graduation.

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

Answer: One of the most impactful classes I took was called "Rescuing Healthcare." It focused on the challenges within our current health care system and what needs to change from a leadership perspective. The course was taught by a former CEO of the Mayo Clinic, and it really opened my eyes to how complex health care is beyond just treating patients. It made me think more deeply about access, leadership and how to create meaningful change in the system.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I chose ASU because it's close to home; I'm from Maricopa, and my sister went here as well. She had a great experience, so that definitely influenced my decision. It felt like the right place for me to stay connected to family while still getting a strong education.

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

A: My band director, James G. Hudson, had a huge impact on me. I've been part of the marching band all four years, and through that, he really helped me grow as a leader and as a person. I became an officer in our honorary band fraternity, serving as vice president of membership, and he encouraged me to step into that role. He pushed me to be more confident and to lead with purpose, which is something I'll carry with me moving forward.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to those still in school?

A: Study hard, but also make time for yourself. It's easy to get caught up in academics, but finding a balance is really important. Looking back, I wish I had given myself more time to relax and enjoy the experience. College goes by quickly, so take advantage of it.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: I love the courtyard in the Farmer Education Building. It's a little removed from my usual classes, so it feels like a quiet escape. Being around nature helps me focus, and it's close to the School of Music, so sometimes you can hear people playing in the background. It's the perfect balance of peaceful and inspiring.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I plan to take a year to study for the MCAT and then apply to medical school. My goal is to eventually become a cardiothoracic surgeon.

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

A: I would focus on improving access to health care. There are so many communities, especially in rural areas, where people have limited access to medical care and have to travel long distances just to be seen. I want to help make health care more accessible and equitable for everyone.

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

Main image



Brianna Morales is graduating with a degree in biochemistry from ASU's School of Molecular Sciences. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



A clarinetist of 14 years, Brianna Morales joined ASU's marching band and became a section leader, a role she held for two years during her time at the university. Courtesy photo