

Veteran, spring grad follows in his mother's footsteps

After 5 years in the US Navy, Michael Zubia is pursuing a career in social work

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

By Noah Flug

Michael Zubia is many things — a twin, a Navy veteran and the son of a single mother among them.

This spring, he adds another identifier: the Spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate for the [School of Social Work](#) within ASU's [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#).

Zubia's path to receiving the recognition has been anything but straightforward. After graduating from high school, he initially pursued a general studies degree at Estrella Mountain Community College, but he dropped out after a year.

"I had no direction, no nothing," Zubia said. "I didn't really know where my life was going."

He spent the next several years working at Starbucks before enlisting in the Navy alongside his twin brother. There, as an aviation boatswain's mate, he directed aircraft as they took off and landed on the carrier where he was stationed.

After five years in the Navy, Zubia returned home to Phoenix and gave college another shot, finishing his associate degree and transferring to Arizona State University. He enrolled in the School of Social Work, following in the footsteps of his mother, a social worker who graduated from the same program.

"It was always my dream to go to ASU," Zubia said. "I watched my mom graduate, so it was something I saw and I thought, 'That's what I want.'"

At ASU, Zubia formed close connections with professors like [Evette Mei](#). Through Mei's courses, he learned how to engage with clients and discovered his favorite social work theory: the

humanistic approach, which emphasizes respecting the dignity of clients while helping them navigate challenges.

Those experiences exposed Zubia to new perspectives on social work, and although the coursework was challenging, it only strengthened his commitment to the field.

“That was my ‘aha’ moment, when I realized this is what I’m meant for,” Zubia said.

Zubia went on to earn his bachelor’s degree and is now graduating with his master’s degree in social work. During his time at ASU, he gained hands-on experience through an internship with U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly’s office, where he helps connect constituents with resources and services. He hopes to pursue a career doing similar work, helping people get the support they need.

“I just really enjoyed it,” Zubia said. “Something about it — I was doing it and I thought, ‘This just feels right.’”

Through all the ups and downs, Zubia said his biggest motivation to keep going was the support his family gave him.

“My family means a lot to me,” he said. “It’s a strong moment for me.”

Now, as an outstanding graduate, he is eager to start his career and return the favor.

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

Text image(s)



Michael Zubia, courtesy photo