

Not your ordinary pageant: Ms. and Mr. Indigenous ASU event a celebration of culture and community

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
April 23, 2026

Everybody loves a pageant.

The anticipation, the artistry, the moment when each contestant steps forward to share who they are and what they stand for. At Arizona State University, that excitement took on a deeper meaning at the 47th annual Ms. and Mr. Indigenous ASU pageant, where culture, community and purpose come together in a powerful celebration.

This is not just about crowns or titles. It is about identity, heritage and the future.

The contestants are more than participants. They are future scholars, leaders and changemakers. This year, 10 students stepped before five judges, speaking with clarity about their cultures and their commitments to give back long after graduation.

Those who earn the titles of Ms. and Mr. Indigenous ASU become goodwill ambassadors, representing Native Americans, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians at ASU and beyond. The runners-up form the court, carrying that same dedication into cultural events across campus and throughout Indian Country.

Photos by Charlie Leight/ASU News

The five pageant judges listen to Evelyn Enos answer during the interview portion of the pageant. Enos, a 21-year-old member of the Gila River Indian Community, shared how she grew up splitting her time between her community in Arizona and away in Colorado for her mother's education. She said she found her foundation in the teachings of her grandparents, who instilled in her the importance of tradition, storytelling and connection to place. From basket dancing at a young age to learning songs tied to the land and water, she carries forward cultural knowledge that continues

to shape her identity and her path as both a scientist and a community advocate. She is pursuing a degree in biological sciences with a focus on neurobiology, physiology and behavior.

Camille Ventillie, a pageant judge and Miss Navajo Nation for 2025–26, takes notes during the interview portion for the contestants on Friday, April 17, on the Tempe campus.

Contestant Corina Collateta laughs with her sister as she puts on lip gloss before going onstage. Collateta, a member of the Hopi Nation, is a junior studying public service and public policy. The 23-year-old grew up in a multigenerational household led by her great-grandmother, grandmother and mother, where values of resilience, family and cultural responsibility were central. From seasonal dances to community gatherings that pause everyday life, her upbringing instilled a deep respect for tradition and a belief that cultural identity can remain strong even while navigating new spaces beyond the reservation.

[Pow Wow at ASU](#) participants watch the Ms. and Mr. Indigenous ASU pageant on Friday, April 17, in the arboretum park on the Tempe campus. The competition drew hundreds of family members, friends and people from around Arizona.

Candice Joe shows her professional attire onstage during the pageant. A 23-year-old Navajo graduate student pursuing a master's degree in public administration, Joe said she found her path through Native youth programs and community leadership, where she discovered the power of representation and culturally driven service. Inspired by her mother's perseverance as a single parent and educator, Joe approaches her work with a deep sense of responsibility, carrying both a leadership mindset and a commitment to uplifting Native voices in urban and tribal communities alike.

Wydell Slim introduces himself in Navajo during the pageant. Hailing from Window Rock, Arizona, Slim grew up surrounded by open land, close family ties and traditions that continue to shape his path at ASU. A second-year student studying kinesiology, Slim said he draws strength from ceremonies like peyote meetings and coming-of-age celebrations that emphasize balance, prayer and community. He carries an arrowhead as a reminder of home and often reflects on how limited access to health care on the Navajo Nation influenced his goals, turning personal experiences with injury and recovery into a commitment to pursue physical therapy as a career and improve care for his community.

Zach Ander Thomas blows a kiss to the judges and audience during the fashion portion pageant. A sculpture and education major with a minor in fashion design, Thomas said he draws on generations of artists in his Navajo family, channeling the legacy of his great-grandmother, a master weaver, into his own creative practice. His work and identity are inseparable from the land, culture and ceremonies that shaped him, grounding his perspective in kinship, responsibility and deep respect for community and tradition. Thomas centers his platform on uplifting "two-spirit and queer" joy through connection to culture, education and relationships with Mother Earth.

Evelyn Enos performs a Billie Holiday rendition of "Summertime" during the pageant. Her platform on community care and environmental stewardship focuses on empowering Native youth to lead and sustain their communities through culturally grounded solutions. She envisions initiatives such as food drives, community gardens and education on sustainable practices as ways to address unmet needs while strengthening cultural ties.

Contestant Madison Billy demonstrates salsa dancing onstage during the pageant. A third-year ASU student studying clinical exercise science, Billy carries both her Hopi and Navajo identity with pride, shaped by ceremonies like the butterfly dance and the influence of elders whose knowledge continues to guide her path. She said she sees her upbringing not as a hardship but as a foundation, one that instilled resilience, gratitude and a strong sense of responsibility to give back. That perspective now fuels her goal of returning home as a health professional, using her education to serve the very communities that raised her.

Contestant Malaysia John demonstrates her passion in highlighting the beauty of Native women. Raised going between Piñon, Arizona, and Phoenix, the 19-year-old is majoring in Native American studies with a focus on tribal governance. She carries a worldview shaped by tradition, hardship and self-reliance. Guided by her mother and grandparents in a deeply traditional household, she learned early to balance ancestral teachings with modern life, from speaking Navajo and participating in ceremonies to navigating homelessness, financial struggle and the expectations of college life. That dual perspective now defines her sense of purpose. John describes herself as rooted in faith, truth and resilience, shaped by generations before her and driven to honor them through education, law school ambitions and community leadership.

Jordyn Lomakema demonstrates making her grandmother's cookies onstage. A first-year student, she says she carries her Hopi culture as a constant presence in her daily life, shaped by ceremony, community and a deep respect for tradition. Growing up in a place where the nearest grocery store was an hour away and cultural practices guided the rhythm of each season, she learned early the importance of balance between worlds. Now studying biomedical sciences on a premed track, Lomakema credits her family, especially her parents and extended community, for instilling the discipline and purpose that drive her goal of becoming a physician and returning home to serve her people.

Myaccedes Miller performs with her violin alongside a friend playing cello. As an enrolled member of the Navajo community of LeChee, Arizona, Miller grew up surrounded by family, culture and a deep sense of community that continues to guide her path at ASU. A 22-year-old student studying organizational leadership with a concentration in project management, Miller describes her upbringing as rooted in togetherness, where relatives lived within walking distance and traditions were practiced collectively. From early memories of participating in sheep butchering alongside multiple generations to the importance of prayer and kinship, she carries forward lessons of resilience, responsibility and connection that shaped her worldview long before arriving in the Valley.

During the talent portion, Candice Joe demonstrates how to tie knots for rope-climbing. Joe spoke about how she encourages Native students to reclaim language, tradition and self-definition on their own terms.

Friends and family of Joe cheer her on during the pageant, demonstrating that the event is not just about the individual but community, culture and the people who lift them up along the journey.

Zach Ander Thomas demonstrates a wrestling move while speaking about the lessons wrestling can provide for Indigenous youth. He described art, leadership and wrestling as both "healing and protection" and said he seeks to represent strength that is physical, cultural and spiritual.

Zach Ander Thomas and Candice Joe are crowned Mr. and Ms. Indigenous ASU pageant winners for 2026 on Saturday, April 18, at Desert Financial Arena. Photo by Sherrie Logg

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

Main image



Ms. and Mr. Indigenous ASU pageant contestant Ellerie Black introduces herself in Navajo to the audience and judges on Friday, April 17, on ASU's Tempe campus. Growing up between Kayenta on the Navajo Nation and the Phoenix metro area, Black said she found both independence and identity in the space between home and away. Raised in a large family and shaped by time with her grandparents, she learned resilience, curiosity and pride in her culture, even when pieces of that knowledge had to be reclaimed through questions and persistence. Now a 21-year-old ASU student studying biomedical sciences with a minor in American Indian studies, Black sees knowledge as both academic and cultural, rooted in stories, language and lived experience. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

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