

Dean's Medalist finds path to his future through public history program

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

Like many students, Giovanni Barberio wasn't sure what career to pursue after high school graduation. He had always enjoyed history classes, and, following the advice of one of his teachers, enrolled in a [bachelor's degree in history](#) at Arizona State University.

"I came into college knowing that I didn't know what I wanted to do, and that a history degree could take me to where I wanted to go, as long as I curated my experience," Barberio said.

This spring, he is graduating as Dean's Medalist for the [School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies](#), a culmination of the opportunities he seized during his undergraduate experience.

In fall 2024, Barberio enrolled in an [Undergraduate Research Experience](#), "Local Museums: Archives and Collections," with program coordinator [Erin Craft](#), where he was introduced to [Public History at ASU](#). He worked closely with the [Tempe History Society](#), allowing him to explore a future of working in museums while earning course credit toward his degree.

Though he ultimately determined museum work was not for him, Barberio discovered a passion for public history through the experience. After completing the course, he became a student worker for the program, learning more about making history accessible in the world.

As a student worker, he aided in projects like [digitizing the Eastern Arizona Museum's holdings](#), helping expand the reach of the rich history documented within the museum. Barberio and other history students also participated in a project with the [Honorary Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Arizona](#), creating an exhibit to display pieces of the Berlin Wall. He contributed to research on the exhibit, later joining one of his classmates to present their work during the 2025 [Humanities Week](#) Public History Poster Show.

Now, during the final semester of his undergraduate degree, Barberio is participating in another URE with Associate Professor [Christopher Jones](#), compiling data to support Jones' research on economic growth and well-being outcomes. This opportunity has helped foster a mentor-like relationship, Barberio said, giving him a chance to work one on one with Jones.

"I got to see into his process a little bit," Barberio said, adding that the experience is helping him determine if he wants to pursue a PhD by showing him the level of research this degree would entail.

A student of [Barrett, The Honors College](#), Barberio's thesis, "Remembering Turin: Analyzing the Memorial Landscape of the Italian Resistance Movement during World War II," combines his work in history with his [minor in Italian](#). Along with the distinction of Dean's Medalist, he is also a recipient of awards such as the [Max Millet Family Endowed Fund](#) and [Sonia Minuskin Memorial Endowment for Jewish Studies](#).

After graduation, Barberio will return to ASU in the fall to complete the graduate portion of the [Accelerated History BA/MA](#) program, as well as a [public history certificate](#).

Though Barberio still isn't sure what his future will entail once he leaves ASU, he has gained confidence in a direction. Right now, his interests lie in historic preservation, he says, adding that public history gives him more options to move around within related careers.

We spoke to Barberio to learn more about his time as an undergraduate at ASU.

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

Answer: I had no idea public history was a field I could pursue. I was under the impression I would have to forge a way to transition from history into a different position but working with ASU Public History made me realize there was a path set out for me.

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

A: The [Design \(and the Arts\) Library](#).

Q: Which professor taught you one of the most important lessons you've learned at ASU? What was the lesson?

A: [Tim Langille](#) was one of my first professors. I asked him to do an honors contract and he was more than accepting. I went to office hours and talked with him extensively — he taught me how to talk to professors and made me realize that the people I look up to want to be talked to normally.

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

A: Say yes to everything. Hunt down any opportunity regardless of your qualification and talk to people.

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

A: Homelessness.

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

Main image



Giovanni Barberio is the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies' Dean's Medalist for Spring 2026. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



Giovanni Barberio and Kenzie Jargin present their poster, "Memorializing the Berlin Wall in Arizona," during the 2025 Humanities Week Public History Poster Show. Photo courtesy of Giovanni Barberio