

From second chance to graduation: 220-plus students build momentum through ASU's Earned Admission

For working adults and returning learners, pathway provides a flexible way to start, keep moving forward toward a degree

By Carrie Peterson, ASU News
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As Arizona State University prepares to celebrate its spring graduates, many students graduating this May didn't follow a traditional path to get there, returning to college while balancing work, family or other responsibilities.

They began by taking college courses first, demonstrating their readiness through performance rather than relying on past academic records.

Through ASU's [Earned Admission](#) pathway, learners can enroll in university courses, demonstrate their academic ability and earn their admission into ASU. For students balancing work, returning to school or navigating nontraditional routes, the pathway offers a way to move forward on their own terms without the barriers of traditional admissions.

This May, more than 220 graduates started through Earned Admission, contributing to a growing total of more than 1,300 ASU graduates who have come through the pathway. More than 10,000 students have been admitted to ASU through Earned Admission, underscoring the scale of its impact.

“For these students, graduation represents more than completing a degree — it reflects the work they put in to get here and the opportunity to prove what they’re capable of,” said [Scott Weatherford](#), associate vice president of Universal Pathways at [ASU Learning Enterprise](#). “We’re honored to be part of their educational journey. Earned Admission creates that starting point, and what we’re seeing is students carry that momentum all the way through to graduation.”

From early start to global opportunity

For Sayalee Chivate, the journey to ASU began with a clear goal, and a willingness to take an unconventional route to reach it.

Growing up in India, she knew she wanted to pursue a career in math and programming. But starting college in the United States required a different kind of transition. Earned Admission provided that.

“It made it way easier to transition from a different education system to the U.S. education system,” Chivate said.

Chivate started taking courses at 16, completing a full course load before officially enrolling. She began as an online student before moving to the U.S. to continue her studies in person.

Through that process, she gained more than academic momentum, she gained confidence in her ability to navigate a new environment independently.

“I was way more capable than I thought I was,” she said.

Now graduating with a Bachelor of Science in data science from The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Chivate plans to pursue a master’s degree at Northeastern University.

Finding direction and momentum through a second start

Naomi Wright’s journey to ASU began while working at Starbucks, where she discovered a pathway that made returning to college possible. The [Starbucks College Achievement Plan](#) Pathway to Admission (the Earned Admission pathway for Starbucks partners) became her entry point into higher education.

“I decided to enroll back in school and just see where it goes,” Wright said.

That decision helped her rediscover direction.

While working and taking classes, Wright gained hands-on experience as an EMT and in an emergency room, experiences that shaped her interest in medicine and led her to pursue a Bachelor of Science in biochemistry from The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

ASU, she said, helped bring focus to her goals.

“It allowed me to home in and focus on a direction.”

Now preparing to graduate, Wright is planning for her next step: applying to medical school while working in a cardiology clinic during her gap year.

Looking back, she sees Earned Admission as the moment that changed her trajectory.

“I’m glad to have been given this opportunity,” she said. “Otherwise, I likely wouldn’t have gone back to college.”

Returning to school to build a career in counseling

For Jeremy Niederman, the opportunity to start again made all the difference.

After not being admitted through traditional methods, he found another option through Pathway to Admission while working at Starbucks.

“I was glad to have an opportunity to take the courses to gain my admission to ASU,” Niederman said. “Without Earned Admission, I would not be graduating.”

His interest in counseling traces back to high school. But it took time, and life experience, to fully pursue that path. After working as a professional life coach, he returned to school to build toward a career as a therapist.

At ASU, he found both the academic program and the perspective he was looking for, particularly through coursework focused on cultural understanding.

Now graduating with a degree in counseling and applied psychological sciences through the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, Niederman plans to begin graduate school this fall as he works toward becoming a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Redefining where a college journey can begin

At ASU, the impact of the Earned Admission pathway is part of a broader effort to expand access to education.

“We are committed to expanding access to high-quality education, and Earned Admission is a powerful example of that mission in action. It creates opportunity for talented individuals whose capabilities are undeniable,” said [Dan Cox](#), dean of natural sciences at The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. “These students developed the skills and mindset needed to succeed in demanding, high-impact fields such as health care and technology. Their success reinforces the idea that talent is everywhere, and with the right tools, it can thrive.”

For these graduates, while their stories differ, their paths to becoming college graduates share a common starting point, the opportunity to begin, regardless of past academic performance.

Earned Admission is designed to expand access by allowing students to demonstrate readiness through performance, not just past academic records. For many, that model creates an entry point that might not have otherwise existed.

For Chivate, Wright and Niederman, it became the starting point for everything that followed.

Together, their journeys highlight what's possible when students are given the chance to start and the support to carry that progress through to graduation.

"Don't overthink it," Chivate said. "If you put in the work, you'll be able to do it."

Wright encourages others to focus less on having a perfect plan and more on making steady progress. "You don't necessarily have to know exactly what you want to do," she said. "Just move in a general direction every day."

For Niederman, success came down to staying committed, even when it was difficult.

"Pushing past the uncomfortable and refusing to let anything stand in your way is vital," he said.

As they graduate, these students are stepping into futures shaped not only by their degrees but by the paths they took to earn them, and the momentum they built along the way.

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Main image



Photo by Sabira Madady/ASU

Text image(s)



Sayalee Chivate



Naomi Wright



Jeremy Niederman