

‘I will be unstoppable’: Fashion graduate says ASU FIDM gave her the tools for success

By Sarah A. McCarty, ASU News
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Editor’s note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Valentina Arroyo says she was born into fashion.

“My grandma in Argentina sewed most of our clothing, and watching her as I grew up gave me my exposure,” she said.

But when it came time to choose a focus for higher education, she decided to study medicine.

“I was born in San Juan, Argentina, a small province with limited education and a fallen economy,” Arroyo said. “My family moved us to Phoenix not only for a good life, but a good education.”

She said she always thought she needed a career or an education in something that “made the most money or had a high status,” so she began studying medicine at Estrella Mountain Community College.

But Arroyo realized she wasn’t looking forward to each new semester — a sign medicine wasn’t the right fit.

“In 2021, I got COVID before returning to school for the spring semester,” Arroyo said, “and being quarantined for seven days, feeling my absolute worst, I had a thought: ‘Why am I doing this? Who am I doing it for?’ At that moment, I turned on my laptop and started researching fashion programs.”

That decision set her on a new path: She earned her associate degree in fashion merchandising from Phoenix College and later transferred to ASU FIDM.

“My mental state of doing something my friends were doing or money-driven is what made me go into a negative spiral,” she said. “The major change has positively impacted my life in numerous ways. As college students, we often question our career choices and major paths, but doing

something you love and wholeheartedly care about is more important than settling for what society, family or friends want you to do.”

Arroyo said, for her, navigating the global fashion industry is “far more interesting” than medicine.

“Something I learned at ASU is how broad of a selection we have in the fashion industry,” she said. “I have taken classes in sustainability, trend forecasting, entrepreneurship, contemporary fashion, etc. These classes have opened my eyes and have made my mind work in ways I never thought existed. When you speak with someone that does not know much about fashion, they only think designing is the route. I will now talk for hours about how much we have in the industry.”

She also said changing her major helped her invest in herself and her future.

“In high school, I was not a good student,” Arroyo said. “My grades were always declining, and school was never a strong suit. When I started investing in myself and my education, my grades and mindset made a complete 180.”

And now, at 27 years old, she is earning her BA in fashion with a focus on fashion business management.

“Graduating with my degree seemed impossible, and ASU FIDM made it easy, fun and possible for me to be the first in my family to get a bachelor’s degree,” she said.

In the below Q&A, Arroyo shares more about her ASU experience and the lessons she’s learned.

Note: This conversation has been edited lightly for length and/or clarity.

Question: Why did you choose ASU?

Answer: Why not? ASU is awesome! Since I went to community college first, I was not looking for a typical college experience with the dorms and such. I wanted something where I could focus on my studies, challenge myself in ways I never have, and express myself through my creativity and work ethic — which is exactly what I got with ASU FIDM.

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

A: My professors have been one of a kind, all of them. Every single professor has taught me a lesson that I will leave with. I have two that have taught me lessons that will keep on teaching: First, Danielle Sponder-Testa is a professor I had for three courses, and her knowledge of the industry is inspiring. She has taught me the lessons of preparing us for the industry, how to be professional, and always gives us the feedback that will be the most helpful in the real world.

Second, Professor Jennifer Boonlorn has taught me the lesson of emotional intelligence. Something she has taught me to leave ASU with is, “You will regret more what you did not do, than what you did do and failed at.” She pushes us to try, jump at any opportunity that is handed (to us). With lessons from both of these wonderful professors, I will be unstoppable.

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

A: Try everything! Involve yourself in everything you can. Volunteer opportunities, clubs, events. Talk to people, network with instructors, and ask all the questions you can! Make an impact for

yourself and the fashion community.

Q: What was your favorite spot on the Downtown Phoenix campus?

A: Fusion on First had everything: music, food and your friends! We had study sections, an eating area, etc. I spent all my time in that building.

Q: What are your plans after graduation and your long-term career goals?

A: My plans for graduation are to jump into the working world. Every instructor has given us the tools to be ready for our careers. Resume building, interview practice questions, portfolios, websites, etc. Merchandising director for a large or luxury brand is my long-term goal.

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

A: I would take that \$40 million and split it in half. The first \$20 million I would invest in creating a solution to fix the homelessness we have on this planet: Creating homes, job programs, medical assistance for those that need it. The other \$20 million would be to fix the issue with mass-producing apparel. In my Sustainability in Fashion course, we learned that fashion is the No. 3 reason why our planet is suffering. Using the money to gather resources and solutions to becoming more sustainable could benefit all of us.

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

Main image



Valentina Arroyo graduates from ASU FIDM this spring, earning a BA in fashion with a focus on fashion business management. Photo by Sedona Vandal-Muse Collective Photography.