

# ASU FIDM student graduates with a job in LA and an eye abroad

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](#).

As a rhythmic gymnast for most of her life, Nicole Napoli Herkenhoff always assumed her future included competing and then coaching. Then the pandemic hit.

"Competitions were canceled, the gym closed, and for the first time, I found myself with a lot of free time," Herkenhoff said. "I decided to use that as an opportunity to try something I had always been curious about but never had the chance to pursue: sewing."

The athlete, who grew up in Joinville, Brazil, and moved to Irvine, California, when she was 14 years old, bought a small sewing machine. She taught herself to sew, and started to wonder if she had a career in fashion.

"Once I made my first pair of pants, I knew I could do this, and that is when I applied to fashion school."

She earned an associate degree in fashion design at legacy FIDM, and after Arizona State University's fashion program expanded to LA as ASU FIDM, she chose to earn her BA in fashion merchandising from the school and is graduating this spring.

"Continuing with ASU felt like the natural next step," Herkenhoff said. "Wanting to expand my understanding of the industry beyond design, I decided to shift my focus to the business side of fashion and changed my major to fashion merchandising."

Herkenhoff said receiving the New American University Transfer Scholarship and the ASU FIDM Award played an important role in allowing her to continue her education, and she credits ASU FIDM for helping prepare her for success. Studying at the school's LA location allowed her to be in the heart of the Fashion District, steps from manufacturing companies and industry opportunities, and the expert faculty and rigorous education gave her a competitive edge in the industry.

"What I think I'm getting from my experience at ASU that I wouldn't necessarily find elsewhere is the combination of academic learning and direct industry exposure in a really connected way," Herkenhoff said. "Being able to study fashion from both a creative and business perspective, while also working in the industry at the same time, helped me understand how everything I was learning

in class applies in real life. It made my education feel practical and relevant, rather than just theoretical.”

She said she also valued the access to professors who have real industry experience and are “genuinely invested in helping students grow both professionally and personally.”

While maintaining her course load, Herkenoff also worked as an assistant fashion designer at two different companies.

“A lot of what I was learning in class was directly reflected in the professional environment,” she said. “It was really interesting to recognize how those ideas translated into real-world decisions, and it gave me a much deeper understanding of how the industry actually operates.”

After graduation, she will transition to a full-time position at her current company, Kimberly C, a wholesale brand that designs women’s activewear and loungewear. She works closely with the senior designer to help develop the main line, which is sold to smaller boutiques, as well as exclusive styles created for larger retailers like TJ Maxx and Altar’d State. She said she hopes to transition into an associate designer role as she continues building her career.

In the below Q&A, Herkenoff shares more about her AS experience, lessons learned and long-term goals.

**Question: What’s something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

**Answer:** One thing that really surprised me during my time at ASU was how interconnected the creative and business sides of fashion are. Coming from a design background, I initially focused mostly on the artistic process, but studying merchandising showed me how much strategy, data and consumer behavior influence every decision in the industry.

What made this even more impactful was seeing those same concepts applied in real time through my work as an assistant designer.

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

**A:** The professor who taught me one of the most important lessons at ASU was Jenny Drew Oubari from Fashion Entrepreneurship. She showed me what it really takes to run a business, but more importantly, she encouraged me to go after my goals and truly believed in my ideas.

During my final semester, I had the privilege of working alongside her as a teaching assistant, which made the experience even more meaningful. She continues to inspire me, and I couldn’t recommend her class enough. Sometimes learning how to grow and succeed as a person is far more valuable than any single academic lesson, and that’s something I’ll carry with me moving forward.

**Q: What is one of your favorite projects you worked on while at ASU?**

**A:** My capstone project, Getaway Girl, is a personal brand development concept that I first began in my Entrepreneurship class and have continued to refine. It’s a project I’m incredibly passionate about, and my goal is to eventually turn it into a real brand after graduation.

Getaway Girl is centered around redefining travel wear by blending style, functionality and versatility into one cohesive collection. The idea came from wanting to solve common travel challenges like wrinkling, overpacking and limited outfit options. The pieces are designed with lightweight, wrinkle-resistant fabrics and mix-and-match versatility, allowing for multiple outfits with fewer items.

Aesthetically, the brand leans into elegance with a subtle vintage influence, while also focusing on practical details like flattering silhouettes and functional pockets. Sustainability is also a core value, with an emphasis on U.S. manufacturing and creating high-quality, multipurpose garments that encourage a more intentional wardrobe.

Overall, Getaway Girl sits at the intersection of fashion and function, with the goal of helping women travel confidently, pack efficiently and feel polished in any setting.

**Q: What are your long-term career goals?**

**A:** I've always had an entrepreneurial mindset, so one of my biggest long-term goals is to build my own brand and hopefully turn Getaway Girl into a reality someday. I'm also very interested in gaining international experience, and I would love to live and work in Italy — ideally in a fashion capital like Milan. After participating in a summer study abroad program through ASU, I fell in love with the language, culture and the fashion industry there. Since then, I've been taking Italian classes as part of my electives, and I hope to put those skills to use in my future career abroad.

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

## **Main image**



Nicole Napoli Herkenhoff graduates this spring with a BA in fashion merchandising. Courtesy photo