

American Indian Studies Dean's Medalist sets sights on career in community work

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

Jack Wingo has had a busy spring, including the birth of his first child on top of finishing his undergraduate degree while balancing two jobs.

As he heads into the next chapter of his personal and professional life, he noted how special this time has been for him.

"With so many important milestones happening at once, my plans are simple but grounded: to be the best husband and father I can be, and to bring dedication and compassion with me wherever I go. I'm excited to take what I've learned and carry it forward into my career, family life and community," Wingo said.

He transferred to Arizona State University after starting his degree with an interest in cultural revitalization. It was a passion realized through a community college course he took after wanting to learn more about different cultural regions and tribal histories outside of his own.

"ASU seemed like the best option for my degree and career path. I knew that its American Indian Studies program was established and well respected, and I liked that it focused on community impact and did a lot of partnerships with local Arizona tribes," Wingo said.

Now he'll graduate this spring as the [American Indian Studies program's](#) Dean's Medalist with a degree in American Indian studies and a minor in communications.

Wingo is an intern with the town of Gilbert through its Native American Management Internship program, where he helps integrate Indigenous perspectives into local government operations. He'll soon begin a temporary position working under a town manager assistant as a junior management analyst.

“Looking ahead, my goal is to build a career centered on community work — something meaningful where I can give back and feel good about the impact I’m making,” Wingo said.

Below, learn more about Wingo’s time at ASU.

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

Answer: [Michelle Hale](#) taught me one of the most important lessons I learned at ASU: that I have the ability to make a meaningful impact within Native communities. I took two of her classes, and seeing the work she did both in and outside the classroom deeply inspired me. Her commitment to Native issues motivated me to finish my degree strong and continue pursuing my passion for serving Native communities.

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

A: Apply for internships early, especially ones connected to your field of interest. Internships are one of the most valuable ways to get your foot in the door, build a network and gain real-world experience. Classroom learning is important, but it doesn’t always show you what day-to-day work in your field actually looks like.

I’d also remind students that everyone moves at their own pace. It took me 13 years after high school to reach this point. There is no “right” timeline. Don’t compare your progress to anyone else’s; focus on what you can handle, and build a schedule and course load that supports your success. Your journey is valid, no matter how long it takes.

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

A: My favorite spot on campus was the American Indian Student Support Services (AISSS) in Discovery Hall. Between and after classes, I would make a beeline for the AISSS quiet room. It became my go-to space to sit down, focus and lock in on my assignments. I spent countless hours there staying productive and connecting with other American Indian Studies majors and Native students who shared similar interests and goals.

What made AISSS special was the sense of comfort and community. The services they offered for Native students made the space feel like a home away from home. Transferring to ASU from a tribal university with 800 students was a huge culture shock. But AISSS played a major role in making my junior and senior years here a positive experience. It was the place where I felt seen, supported and connected and was my anchor on such a large campus.

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

A: I would invest the first half in improving living conditions within the Cherokee Nation. Millions would go to improving infrastructure amongst the many small communities within the reservation. Disparities like housing shortages, unsafe roads, flooding and clean waterways would be priorities.

The other half would go toward cultural revitalization programs, especially ones that bring youth and elders together to strengthen language, cultural continuity and traditional arts. Arts and culture are great paths to community wellness. Strengthening cultural ties while creating safer, healthier

living conditions are issues I would tackle to build a healthier and stronger future for Cherokee families.

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

Main image



Jack Wingo will begin a temporary position as a junior management analyst working under a town manager assistant after graduation. Photo by Meghan Finnerty/ASU