

Thunderbird at ASU grad spends lifetime seeing world, plans to change it for the better

Crystal Tan is graduating with a Bachelor of Global Management

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

By the time Crystal Tan was 15, she had lived across Europe and Asia and visited 51 countries. The world had been her classroom long before college.

"I wanted a university experience that reflected that part of me," she said.

Ultimately, this global upbringing led her to [Thunderbird School of Global Management](#) at Arizona State University, where she pursued a [Bachelor of Global Management](#).

"I chose to enroll because I wanted an education that would help me understand how to lead and build across cultures," she said. "It felt like a place where my background would be valued."

Through student leadership, campus work and the everyday activities of Thunderbird life, Tan placed herself in situations that required her to adapt quickly and take ownership. Her goals grew more intentional as a result.

"I began to enjoy the process and started to understand what I value and what I do not in the career I want to pursue," she said.

Now, Tan is continuing into Thunderbird's [Accelerated Master of Global Management](#) to focus on marketing and strategic communications. She is drawn especially to the entertainment industry, where storytelling and audience connection drive how ideas move.

"Long term, I want to move into a leadership role where I can shape marketing strategies that resonate across different cultures and markets," she said.

"I came to Thunderbird already interested in business, but I learned to think more deeply about communication, identity and responsibility. Global management is truly about the people."

Here, she shares more about her college journey.

Question: What motivates or inspires you?

Answer: What motivates me most is knowing I have people rooting for me. My parents have always been my strongest supporters, and since coming to Thunderbird, I have gained a few more people who continue to encourage me and believe in what I am working towards. That support pushes me to keep showing up and putting in effort, even in areas I do not naturally enjoy. It has shaped how I approach my work, with a sense of responsibility not only to myself, but also to the people who have invested in me.

Q: For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

A: I feel most grateful for my parents. They chose to leave a small island and build a life that allowed us to see the world. This summer, my parents and I will add another country, Bolivia, to our list, and I am already planning to explore more of South America. My sense of curiosity and openness to the world came from my parents. When it is just you and your parents in a foreign country, you rely on each other in a different way. It is because of them that I have this continued desire to live in new countries. Wherever I go next, I am dragging them along to be part of that journey with me.

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

A: Professor [James Deyo](#) taught me one of the most important lessons during my time at Thunderbird. I did not naturally feel comfortable in accounting, and at first I approached it with hesitation.

Through his class, I realized that discomfort does not mean lack of ability or fit. It often means there is more depth to engage with. He pushed me to look past my initial reaction and focus on understanding the logic behind it. That shift changed how I approach challenges. Instead of avoiding areas where I feel less confident, I now see them as opportunities to build a stronger foundation. That mindset has carried into how I approach both my academics and my future career.

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

A: I would focus on improving access to education and health care for girls around the world. This is something I have spent time researching since my teens, and it is an issue I cannot ignore. Even in developed countries, there are barriers that affect access to basic needs like the pink tax¹, which I have personally been impacted by.

In many parts of the world, the gap is far greater. Girls are denied education, lack access to health care and are limited in their ability to build independent futures. I would invest in initiatives that expand access to both education and health care for girls. These are two areas that directly shape long-term independence and opportunity, and improving them creates a lasting impact not only for individuals but for entire communities.

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

¹ The tendency of items marketed mainly to women to be priced higher than similar products marketed to men.

Main image



Crystal Tan. Photo by Thunderbird School of Global Management

Gallery



Crystal Tan with fellow T-birds Sarah, Carola, Bryce and James, who were all part of her first executive board in the Undergraduate Thunderbird Student Club. This photo is from Bryce's graduation last year.



"I met Riko (left) and Lily (right) during our freshman year in Professor Nelson's TGM 101 class. Ever since then, we have planned our classes around each other to increase the chances of working together again. They are my closest friends that I've made here in Thunderbird," Crystal Tan said. This photo represents their lifelong friendship created throughout their studies.



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Some of the current Thunderbird Student Government team celebrates their first Regional Night and their work over the semester.



Crystal Tan (right) and friends pose on the Tempe campus in their graduation best.



During her holiday travels, Crystal Tan stopped over in Japan for a week and met up with roommate Riko Takayoshi, exemplifying the life of a Thunderbird — with a friend in every city.



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Crystal Kim
Marketing Aid

During her time at Thunderbird, Crystal Tan was able to attend an ISOS event and connect at a banquet full of diplomats.