

Dean's Medalist finds purpose in constitutional law and civic education

Spring grad Sophia Thomason reflects on 'intellectual buffet' provided by ASU

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

For Sophia Thomason, the study of civic and economic thought has always been about more than choosing a career path. It is about pursuing truth, understanding human nature and engaging deeply with the ideas that shape political life.

Thomason is graduating this spring with a Bachelor of Arts in civic and economic thought and leadership, along with a minor in art history and a certificate in philosophy, politics and economics. At ASU's [School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership](#), she found a place where those interests could intersect, allowing her to explore enduring questions about law, politics and the human experience.

Read on to learn more about the school's spring 2026 Dean's Medalist and her experience as a Sun Devil.

Note: Answers have been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Question: What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: What drew me to my major at the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership is that it does not force me to choose between my interests in philosophy and governance. SCETL's mission is to provide a comprehensive civic education by bringing disciplines such as philosophy, politics, law, economics and international relations into conversation with one another.

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

A: I enjoy exploring theories of constitutional interpretation, and my time at ASU has revealed the complexity of applying the U.S. Constitution. My professor, Dr. Alan Gibson, introduced me to the Constitutional Convention's rule of secrecy, which prohibited delegates from discussing the proceedings with non-delegates and barred public attendance. As a result, the ratifying public had a very limited understanding of how the final document came together. In many ways, we share that limitation today. For instance, when the convention notes were later released, they proved to be incomplete and, at times, potentially unreliable. For these and other reasons, questions about the original meaning and intent of certain provisions can be difficult to resolve with complete certainty. Interpreting the Constitution thus carries the immense responsibility of exercising careful judgment in the face of ambiguity — holding history, principle and practicality in tension. That challenge is precisely what draws me to the field of constitutional law. No matter how many years I spend studying it, there will always be more to learn; some new question, nuance or perspective to consider.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: Because it offers such a range of courses and clubs, I knew ASU would provide a well-rounded education — one that would enable me to explore not only my primary interests, but also discover new ones. I believe an education is most meaningful when we remain open to “aha” moments that extend beyond identifying a career path. Just as important are the moments when we realize that activities like Japanese watercolor painting brings peace to the daily grind, or when we begin to understand the kind of person we want to become, not just the profession we intend to pursue. At ASU, I was able to research constitutional law, develop an appreciation for Shakespeare and read my favorite philosophers in their native French. That is the kind of intellectual buffet I was seeking in a university.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: After graduation, I will study French political thought in Paris through the Academia Tocqueville program this summer. In the fall, I will return to ASU to complete my accelerated master's in classical Liberal education and civic leadership, with the long-term goal of pursuing a joint JD/PhD to become a professor of constitutional law and American history. During both high school and college, I had the opportunity to teach K–12 students at the Arizona Capitol on topics such as constitutional law, civic virtue and the unique history of the Arizona Constitution. That experience gave me a profound sense of purpose. By engaging students who had previously been apathetic about these subjects, I came to see teaching as a form of public service. Since then, I have been drawn to the vocation of teaching at the university level, where conversations are deeper, questions more searching and the pursuit of truth sustained over time.

Q: How has pursuing multiple degrees complemented your academic experience and opportunities during your time at ASU?

A: My art history minor has complemented my SCETL major in several ways. Art often reflects the socioeconomic context in which it was created, such as the mercantilist themes embedded in Dutch Golden Age still lifes. Through art, the political ideas and historical events I study are made visual and tangible; they come alive in a way that is both moving and deeply meaningful. In fact,

some of my SCETL professors have incorporated artwork into their classes to illustrate political and economic concepts. Those were always among my favorite days in the classroom. The philosophical dimension of my major has been enriched by the questions that arise in art history. What constitutes beauty, for instance, or whether museums have an obligation to return artifacts to their countries of origin. Engaging these questions has deepened my understanding of both disciplines and improved my ability to think across them. It has also shaped the way I engage with others, sparking unexpected conversations and connections. At networking events, for example, I can present myself as someone whose interests extend beyond a single field. This has made me a more interesting candidate to potential employers, such as those who work in politics but also engage in art curation on the side.

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Main image



Sophia Thomason is the Dean's Medalist from the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership. Photo by Meghan Finnerty/ASU