

# From supporting the system to shaping it: An ASU Law grad's journey

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

Before stepping into law school, August Butler was already working within the justice system, advocating for abused and neglected children through a [Court-Appointed Special Advocates \(CASA\)](#) organization.

It was meaningful work, grounded in service and compassion. But over time, Butler, who uses they/them pronouns, felt a pull to do more — not just support the system, but step into it and stand alongside the attorneys who shape outcomes and speak directly on behalf of those who need it most.

That sense of purpose led them to the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at [Arizona State University](#), where they found more than a legal education. They found mentors, opportunities and a community that helped them grow as both an advocate and a connector.

Now, as they prepare to graduate this spring, Butler has been selected for the John S. Armstrong Award — recognizing exceptional academic performance and contributions to ASU Law — and will clerk for Justice Maria Elena Cruz on the Arizona Supreme Court. They carry forward the same motivation that first brought them here: to show up, to advocate, and to make a difference where it matters most.

*Note: Answers may have been lightly edited for length and/or clarity.*

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

**Answer:** I was working at a Court-Appointed Special Advocates for Children organization, helping community volunteers advocate for abused and neglected children in the courts. I loved the work but got increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the role, so I was looking for ways to expand my impact. I initially looked at legal master's programs I could do part time, and I also organized training for the attorneys we worked with to improve their representation. But I eventually realized that I wanted to be one of the attorneys, the people who actually make things happen in the courtroom.

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

**A:** The unparalleled access that ASU Law students have to judges at every level — county, state, federal, as professors, employers, mentors or guest panelists — has taught me that they are just people. They have education and experience and wield enormous influence, but they have hopes and dreams, strengths and weaknesses, and quirks and insecurities just like we all do.

**Q: Why did you choose ASU?**

**A:** My now-husband is from Arizona, and we began getting serious and thinking about the future around the same time I started thinking about law school. He encouraged me to look at both Arizona law schools, and I did, but ASU did a very good job of making me feel wanted — a feeling that has only continued throughout my legal education.

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

**A:** This is a really hard question, because I got very lucky and all of my professors were fantastic.

But one of the most important lessons I learned in law school was from Professor [Alyssa Dragnich](#), who created the [Advance Program](#) to bring together a small cohort of diverse first-generation law students and support them through the first year of law school. She often says her goal is to make 20 students happy and successful, because that will spread through the rest of the class and the school — and I think that has borne out. So the lesson is basically that a small group of people and a little bit of positivity can have a big impact.

Law-wise, Professor [Amy Langenfeld](#) taught me how to craft and deliver an oral argument, a skill I have continued to build through moot court and one I will definitely use in my legal career.

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

**A:** Remember that being in school, especially in law school, is an enormous privilege. It is challenging and sometimes tedious, but try to enjoy learning something new every day from really smart and thoughtful professors. Avoid the temptation to complain about how hard or unfair things are and just do what you need to get by. You will get out of this what you put into it, so show up — not just physically, but mentally.

**Q: Looking back, what moment or experience at ASU stands out as especially meaningful to you, and why?**

**A:** I love the moments when I have been able to connect people. A friend of mine is deeply interested in environmental law, so I put her in touch with my externship supervisor, who works on environmental law and utilities. That turned into an externship for my friend. More recently, I put a 1L in touch with a judge I know for an opportunity to attend an event supporting LGBTQ+ youth. There, that 1L met Justice Cruz, whom I will be clerking for next year, and he will now be working for her this summer. I've also benefited from this; chatting with an upper-level student about my interests led her to recommend me to her externship supervisor, who then offered me an externship.

People think of networking as a "necessary evil" to get a job, but I think my experiences show what networking can and should be: genuinely getting to know people, connecting with them over shared interests and connecting them to others.

**Q: What are your plans after graduation?**

**A:** I will spend next year clerking for Justice Maria Elena Cruz on the Supreme Court of Arizona. After that, I plan to work at the Attorney General's Office representing the Department of Child Safety for a few years, before eventually representing parents out of one of Maricopa County's public defender offices.

**Q: How has this degree helped you in your professional journey?**

**A:** It has given me the tools I need to represent clients in the courts and help them navigate a confusing and frightening system. It has also taught me about the wider impact appellate advocacy can have, and how that might be better suited to my personality and skills. Now I hope to do both — advocate for individual clients and families statewide.

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

**Main image**



ASU Law 2026 graduate August Butler has been selected for the John S. Armstrong Award.  
Courtesy photo