

8 winners of prestigious Flinn Scholarship choose ASU

Top Arizona high school graduates to join Barrett, The Honors College

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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After growing up seeing two family members struggle with cancer, Michelle Luna knew she wanted to pursue a college major that could help people.

She found it after attending a “day in the life of a biomedical engineer” experience at Arizona State University during high school.

“I saw all the different opportunities to research chronic illnesses or create prosthetics or medical devices, and I thought it was really something I wanted to do as a career,” she said.

This fall, she will be attending ASU as a Flinn Scholar — the state’s most prestigious scholarship.

The Flinn Scholarship, supported by the Phoenix-based Flinn Foundation and Arizona’s three state universities, covers the cost of tuition, fees, housing, meals and at least two study-abroad experiences. The merit-based award for undergraduates is valued at more than \$135,000.

Eight of this year’s 20 Flinn Scholars have chosen to attend ASU, and will be based in Barrett, The Honors College at their respective campuses — six on the Tempe campus, one at the Polytechnic campus and one at the Downtown Phoenix campus.

Luna is the first student from Maryvale High School to become a Flinn Scholar in the 40-year history of the award. She attended the Maryvale Gifted and Talented Academy within the Phoenix high school and will major in biomedical engineering at ASU.

“When I was a kid, I would create different potions using soap, or anything I could find, and I would pretend it was medicine,” Luna said. “My mom signed me up for camps at the Arizona Science Center and other places, so I really thank my mom for pushing me to keep learning and exploring my interest in STEM.”

“Flinn Scholars represent the very best of Arizona and the future of our state,” ASU Provost Nancy Gonzales said. “We are proud that these exceptional students have chosen ASU as the place to

pursue their ambitions. They arrive with a deep commitment to academic excellence, curiosity and service, and they will find a community here that challenges and supports them in equal measure.

“Through all that ASU has to offer across our campuses, these students will be well positioned to make meaningful contributions in Arizona and far beyond.

“I also congratulate the Flinn Scholars who chose our sister institutions of North Arizona University and the University of Arizona. We wish you all a successful college career and stand ready to support your college and career journeys.”

Luna was encouraged to apply for the Flinn Scholarship by her physics teacher, who was herself a Flinn Scholar, and her counselor, and she felt extra motivation because no Maryvale student had ever received the award.

A softball player, Luna found out that she won the scholarship while she was in the dugout between innings of a game.

“I was beyond overwhelmed with happiness but at that time, we weren’t doing well in our game so it was a little awkward,” she said.

“It’s amazing that I was gifted this opportunity and I’m really thankful for my teachers and family and counselors who kept encouraging me.”

Jonas Schwenk, of Globe High School, who was also named a National Merit Scholar, will major in robotics and autonomous systems at the Polytechnic campus.

Over the past year, Schwenk has competed with his high school’s robotics club and knew he wanted to major in it.

“ASU is one of the only universities that offers a dedicated robotics and autonomous systems major,” he said.

“Other universities offer a mechanical engineering major with an emphasis on robotics, but I wouldn’t get to touch a robot until my junior or senior year. But at ASU Poly, I can get that experience in my first semester.”

He’s also pleased to be on the Polytechnic campus.

“I come from a very small town and Poly has a small-town feel to it,” he said. “I appreciate the smaller class sizes and I value the connection I can have with faculty and professors.”

Schwenk enjoyed the rigorous Flinn application process.

“It forced me to take a step back and look at my entire journey, not just high school but elementary and beyond,” he said.

“If I’m thinking of my life as a storyline, what is the theme of my story? And I had to put that down on paper and communicate it to somebody else.”

And he’s glad to be part of the group.

“There’s 20 of us and I get to collaborate and learn from 19 other people that all have the same goal of growing within their own interests and major, but also as a person trying to make an impact in their own community,” he said.

“It’s a very powerful thing.”

The other Flinn Scholars attending ASU are:

Ethan Bialis, The Gregory School, Tucson — aerospace engineering (aeronautics)

Vedang Chintalapati, Basis Scottsdale — public service and public policy

Charlotte Gould, Corona Del Sol High School, Tempe — political science

Alexandru Josanu, Casteel High School, Queen Creek — finance

Rafael Mather Alvear, Desert Vista High School, Phoenix — civil engineering (sustainable engineering)

Riya Mehta, Xavier College Preparatory School, Phoenix — biological sciences (biomedical sciences)

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Main image



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Text image(s)



Michelle Luna



Jonas Schwenk