

Animal behavior graduate forged her own approach to studying children's connection to honeybees

By Risa Aria Schnebly, ASU News
May 6, 2026

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Halfway into Amalie Strange's dissertation defense, she stopped her presentation and left the room, inviting her audience to follow.

Subverting the expectations of a traditional scientific defense, Strange, a graduate of the animal behavior PhD program, presented her dissertation results with a gallery exhibition she had set up in the Biodesign Institute — complete with drawings from students that she used as research data, videos she edited and an observation hive full of buzzing honeybees.

Attendees even left with goodie bags that included homemade charcuterie boxes and cake pops, postcard-sized replicas of some of the gallery art and tiny jars of honey with "Thank You" notes attached.

The unconventional defense reflected Strange's unconventional research approach: Rather than doing experiments on honeybee physiology like many of her lab mates, Strange's data collection largely entailed hopping on Zoom calls with elementary schoolers to teach them about bees by giving them tours of real beehives with her phone camera.

"What I was trying to do with this project was look at what digital education can do for facilitating relationships between students and honeybees," Strange says.

While a lot of environmental education research emphasizes the importance of teaching students about nature by getting them outside, Strange wanted to study whether technology could inspire similar care for nature in students who might not have that opportunity.

“And I’m not just focused on cognitive learning, like looking at whether students can recite facts or improve a test score. It was more about this less tangible, more affective register of these relations.”

After giving her virtual hive tours to students, she’d study the way they understood and connected with the bees through methods like getting students to draw maps of where they saw bees in their daily lives and asking them to take videos of nature in their school’s back field.

The results of that process were intentionally open-ended; instead of generating numerical reports, Strange’s data consisted of paintings and video clips she edited together to put the perspectives of children and honeybees in conversation with one another.

“I think through the video that I was able to put together through the speculative mappings that we did, (I showed that) students were still able to connect with these through this sort of education at a distance, this education separated by a screen,” Strange says.

The nature of her data also called for an untraditional defense, she notes: “Because of the affective and sensation-based ways this data was created, the only appropriate way to see the data was in person, to have some sort of sensation of the data.”

As for how the defense itself went, Strange says: “It was really awesome to see all these faculty and graduate students and other people important to my life, all mixing and mingling and experiencing the data that these students made with me. It was a really cool experience.”

While Strange’s research looks drastically different than that of her peers in the animal behavior program, she argues that her approach fits the discipline. Her research was grounded in the framework of posthumanism, a philosophy that challenges the centrality and superiority of humans over other species.

“Animal behavior is all about close attention to the ways that animals are going about their lives, and that already hits the central core of what posthumanism is,” Strange says. “It’s about going beyond human modes of perception, and trying to think of how we can live with animals in non-extractive and non-exploitative ways.”

In fact, Strange was pulled to posthumanism after starting her PhD. She originally planned to study honeybee brain biology, but her mentor, [Gro Amdam](#), noted that Strange always lit up when discussing education and the social dimensions of science.

“She’s such a good mentor, because she’s able to really recognize what other people are passionate about,” Strange says.

With that encouragement, Strange started diving into the literature of environmental education and the social studies of science, collaborating with a second mentor in the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation, [Mirka Koro](#), and began engaging with elementary schoolers at lower income schools.

At the same time, she also kept busy serving the ASU community, working as an instructional design intern at the Teaching and Learning Center as well as serving as the president of the School of Life Science’s e-board, or graduate student government.

In her last year, she won a Goodman Fund Grant from the Royal Entomological Society to fund her gallery exhibition, making for an unprecedented dissertation defense in the School of Life Sciences.

At the end of the defense, Strange was “doctored” on the spot, passing her dissertation with no revisions — a rare accomplishment for graduating students.

Looking back on her journey, Strange says: “I think the biggest takeaway for myself is to just do the weird thing and sort of push the limits of what I’m methodologically comfortable with and seeing what comes of that. That’s the exciting part of research for me.”

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

Main image



Amalie Strange studied what relationships elementary school students formed with honeybees after giving them virtual beehive tours for her dissertation.

Text image(s)



Amalie Strange. Courtesy photo



Student drawings on display at Strange's defense, which she treated as data in her dissertation. Courtesy photo



Jars of honey and thank-you notes decorated with students drawings at Strange's defense, which she offered to guests as gifts. Courtesy photo