

Thunderbird at ASU grad finds people, purpose through global community

Caitlin 'Carina' Ribeiro will graduate this spring with a Master 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](#).

Caitlin "Carina" Ribeiro wore her name tag every single day at the [Thunderbird School of Global Management](#) at Arizona State University. It was a small gesture with a big reason behind it.

As someone who is neurodiverse, Ribeiro knows firsthand that small accommodations can make the biggest difference. Wearing her name tag was her way of making others feel seen, quietly signaling to anyone who might share her struggles that they were not alone. It is the kind of thoughtful, others-first instinct that has defined her two years at Thunderbird and the kind of leader she embodies.

It is also just the kind of person that Thunderbird alumni recognize — someone who is globally minded, values driven, and ready to make a difference.

Ribeiro's journey to Thunderbird started with a conversation. As a board member for Lura Turner Homes, a nonprofit in the Phoenix Valley, Ribeiro crossed paths with the organization's executive director, Max McQueen, a Thunderbird alum. When he heard she was considering going back to school, he did not hesitate.

"You have to check out Thunderbird," he told her. "I don't just say this to anyone, but you are a Thunderbird at heart."

The Karen Simon '83 Scholarship Fund in Support of Global Women Leaders made it possible for her to attend, and from there, Ribeiro threw herself into everything Thunderbird had to offer. She became a Campus Ambassador, a Foundations leader, president of Thunder Pride, and a familiar presence volunteering with organizations like Global Ties Arizona. Her [Global Challenge Lab](#) took

her to Jakarta, Indonesia, where she fell in love with a part of the world she had never experienced before.

But what shaped her the most was the people. At the Prospanica Conference in Orlando. In classrooms filled with students from every corner of the globe. In the hallways and evening conversations that turned peers into mentors and strangers into lifelong friends.

"Every day at Thunderbird I learn something new just because I am sitting in a classroom with students who have different life experiences and different perspectives," she said. "That's not something AI or a textbook could ever teach."

That sense of community was also something Ribeiro actively contributed to. As a [Foundations](#) leader, she made it her mission to ensure new students felt seen and supported from their very first days on campus. One of her students, Lillian Wu, later told her that a job opportunity Ribeiro shared in their group chat had changed the course of her Thunderbird experience entirely.

"I was really nervous being the only Taiwanese person in the classroom, but your warmth and the way you shared your Thunderbird stories helped me feel at ease and truly welcome," Wu told her.

For Ribeiro, moments like that mean the most. She spent over a decade working in disability services before coming to Thunderbird, and she knows firsthand how much difference the right support can make, and how long it can take to find it.

"It took almost 15 years to get where I am today," she said, "but I feel that I am truly an example of how successful individuals like myself can be when given the right resources."

"Just like a ripple in a pond, my actions are multiplied by those I inspire."

Below, Ribeiro shares more about her life experiences and advice she has for current and future T-birds.

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

Answer: When I was 21 years old, I was in a bad jet ski accident. I sustained brain and spine injuries, was temporarily paralyzed and, as a result, was diagnosed with PTSD. I know how precious life is and how difficult it can be. I am grateful for every opportunity that comes my way and for the support of my amazing network of colleagues, friends and family. Without them, I would not be the successful woman I am today.

Q: What advice would you give to a student just starting a program at Thunderbird?

A: Take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way, and use your status as a student — in my experience, almost everyone remembers what life was like to be a student, and they want to help. We are so fortunate that Thunderbird has amazing staff who continually work to cultivate connections and opportunities like the Ambassadors Ball or the International State of the State. Don't let titles or honorifics hold you back; at the end of the day, we are all just humans. Some of my favorite friends I've made over the past two years just happen to be a CEO or an honorary consul.

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

Main image



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (second from left) with fellow T-bird students and staff at the Reaching Out MBA, or ROMBA, Conference. Photo courtesy of Thunderbird School of Global Management

Text image(s)



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro

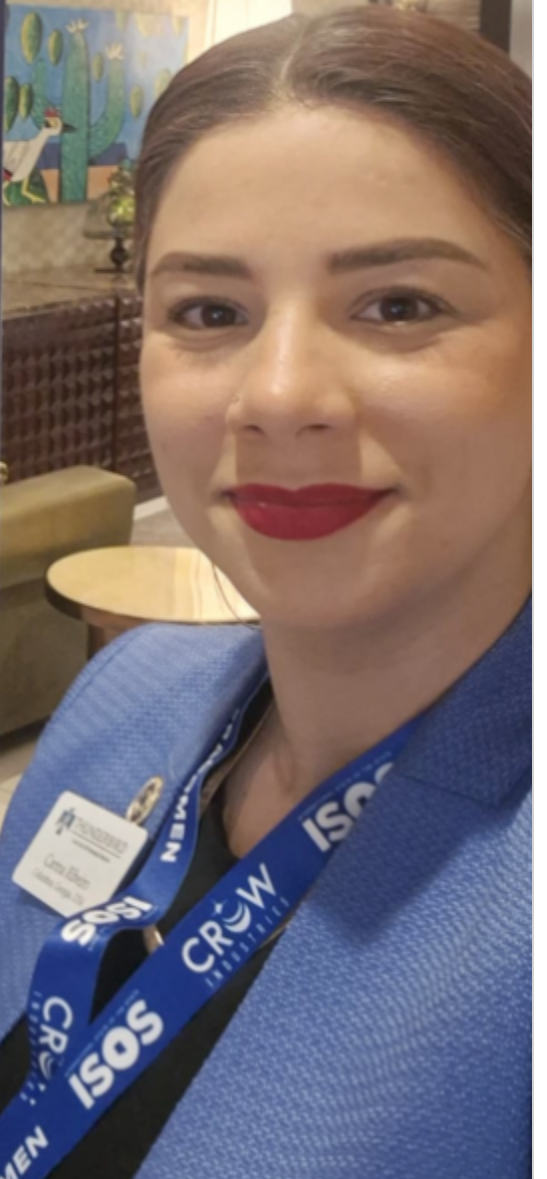
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Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro volunteering at the International State of the State. Courtesy photo

Gallery



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro hiking with the T-bird Trekkers club during the 2025 alumni reunion.



The Thunder Pride student club had the opportunity to march in the Phoenix Pride Parade with Mayor Kate Gallego.



Caitlin "Carina" Ribeiro (fourth from left) with fellow T-birds dressed up for the Ambassadors Ball.

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During her time in Jakarta, Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (left) had the opportunity to present Thunderbird alum Hilmi Panigoro with a gift, connecting multiple generations of T-birds.

**Empowering global leaders,
transforming Southeast Asia**



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (right) and teammates completed their Global Challenge Lab project with Enercon, an energy efficiency and environmental solutions company, in Jakarta, Indonesia.



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (middle) ensured that she was involved with as many Thunderbird events as she could. Here, she and fellow campus ambassadors Sam McDaniel (left) and Brian Ruiz are volunteering with the Phoenix Committee on Foreign Relations at the International State of the State.



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (left) with Foundations leaders Dayoon Kim (middle) and Ester Kabba.



Fun moments with fellow T-birds at the ROMBA Conference.



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (middle) with friends Barry Wong (left), a member of the Global Ties Arizona board of directors, and Kelly Moeur, honorary consul of Japan in Phoenix.



Caitlin “Carina” Ribeiro (left) and Director General and Dean Charla Griffy-Brown at the Ambassadors Ball.