

Graduate's journey from India to ASU leads to Dean's Medalist recognition

From navigating a new country to leading in research, Aliya Hashim's journey reflects determination, resilience and impact

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

Originally from Chandigarh, India, Aliya Hashim came to Arizona State as an international student and built her college experience across both the Tempe and West Valley campuses, finding a balance between the scale of a large research university and the close-knit support of a smaller academic community.

Now, Hashim is graduating this spring with bachelor's degrees in pharmacology and toxicology from the [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#), and neuroscience from [The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#), along with a minor in philosophy. She has been named the Dean's Medalist for New College.

During her time at ASU, she immersed herself in interdisciplinary research, contributing to multiple labs in neuroscience, genetics and biology education, while also pursuing an independent project exploring the effects of mushroom-derived compounds on cognition and movement using a fruit fly model.

Beyond the classroom and lab, Hashim dedicated her time to community-focused initiatives, including tutoring refugee students, supporting health education efforts and mentoring girls in Afghanistan.

Her journey has been shaped not only by academic rigor, but also by resilience, mentorship and a strong commitment to service. As she prepares to take the next step toward an MD-PhD, Hashim reflects a passion for understanding the brain, advancing medical science and giving back to the communities that supported her along the way.

Question: What inspired you to pursue your fields of study?

Answer: I started with neuroscience because I've always been interested in psychology and cognition. What fascinated me most was how much we still don't know about the brain.

As I took more classes, especially in organic chemistry, I became interested in pharmacology — particularly how drugs interact with the brain and body. Adding pharmacology felt like the perfect way to connect neuroscience with the biochemical side of things. It allowed me to explore both perspectives in a really meaningful way.

Q: Was there a moment or experience that changed your perspective?

A: When I first thought about pharmacology, I imagined it would be mostly about drugs in a general sense. But it turned out to be much more focused on metabolism, mechanisms and chemistry. I had always been intimidated by chemistry, especially organic chemistry, but studying pharmacology helped me face that fear. With the support of my professors, I realized learning doesn't have to feel overwhelming all the time. That shift changed how I approach challenges — not just in academics, but in life.

Q: Who has had the biggest impact on your journey?

A: My mentors, [Dr. Jessica Verpeut](#) on the Tempe campus and [Dr. Jennifer Hackney](#) on the [West Valley campus](#), have had a huge impact. There were times when I struggled personally during college, and they supported me not just academically but as a person. They reminded me that it's okay to take breaks and prioritize mental health. That support made a big difference in helping me stay on track and succeed.

Q: What does receiving the Dean's Medal award mean to you?

A: It means a lot. It feels like validation of everything I've gone through. As an international student from India, I came here not knowing anyone and had to build everything from scratch. This recognition showed me that I could succeed in a completely new environment. It also means a lot to my family — especially as an example for my younger siblings that it's possible to start somewhere new and still achieve your goals.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I'm on the pre-med track and currently applying to MD-PhD programs. In the meantime, I plan to continue working in research. I've been involved in multiple labs, including a neuroscience lab on the Tempe campus, a genetics lab on the West Valley campus and research through the RISE program. My current project looks at how compounds from mushrooms may affect cognition and movement using a fruit fly model.

Q: How have you been involved outside the classroom?

A: Community involvement has been very important to me. I tutor refugee students through [RISE](#), serve as an education co-lead for [REACT](#), which supports refugee communities through health education and outreach, and mentor girls in Afghanistan through the Ellicott Foundation. These experiences have been incredibly meaningful. Even while navigating my own challenges, being able to support others has given me a strong sense of purpose.

Q: What advice would you give to future Sun Devils?

A: Remember that this is your journey. At a large university like ASU, it's easy to compare yourself to others or to an "ideal" college experience. But what matters most is what you make of your time here. Stay focused on your goals and take pride in your own path.

Q: What makes someone a good fit for pharmacology?

A: You have to be genuinely interested and willing to stay committed. Pharmacology is much more complex than people expect. It's very heavy in biochemistry and organic chemistry. If you're curious about how things work at a deeper level and are willing to push through challenges, it can be incredibly rewarding.

Q: What does the word "new" mean to you as a New College student?

A: "New" represents a blank slate. Coming to ASU from another country, I had the opportunity to start fresh and shape my own path. Over the past four years, I've grown so much academically, personally and culturally. I've learned resilience, built meaningful relationships and discovered what I truly want to pursue.

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

Main image



Aliya Hashim is graduating this spring with bachelor's degrees in pharmacology and toxicology from New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences and neuroscience from The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, along with a minor in philosophy. Photo by Mariana Lozovanu/ASU.