

Remarkable academic record earns ASU grad the Charles Wexler Mathematics Prize

Majoring in both mathematics and chemistry, Freyja Eckman excelled in challenging 400-level and graduate courses

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

Freyja Eckman has been selected as this year's recipient of the Charles Wexler Mathematics Prize, the highest honor an Arizona State University undergraduate in the [School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences](#) can receive. She will graduate summa cum laude this May with dual bachelor degrees in mathematics and chemistry.

She has compiled a remarkable academic record, successfully completing a diverse array of advanced courses. Before this semester even started, Eckman completed 12 courses at the 400 level in mathematics, along with two graduate courses — earning an A+ in every one of them.

Eckman has increasingly gravitated towards theoretical mathematics, which includes many different disciplines. Curious about which of these areas she prefers the most, she simply tried them all — courses ranging from set theory, graph theory and combinatorics to group theory, linear and abstract algebra, complex analysis, real analysis, topology and differential geometry.

This year, she continued her studies in abstract algebra and topology at the graduate level and excelled at that level, as well.

"I had the privilege of teaching Freyja topology two years ago, and she was academically flawless and consistently contributed thoughtful responses, suggestions and critiques, even when other students were hesitant to speak. But what stood out most to me was her leadership and mentorship," President's Professor [Matthias Kowski](#) said.

"Freyja taught me how much she enjoyed working collaboratively, and how valuable it is, sometimes to just have a sounding board for ideas."

Eckman said, “The thing about math is that it's something that's best done with other people.”

Eckman grew up in Mesa, Arizona, and participated in the [Joaquin Bustoz Math-Science Honors Program](#) (JBMSHP) for several summers before entering Arizona State University. She later worked as academic staff with the program.

“Freyja drew from her own experience as a JBMSHP alum to create an inclusive and nurturing environment, providing consistent encouragement and mentorship,” said [Cindy Barragan Romero](#), program manager for JBMSHP. “This can be especially beneficial for students who may feel overwhelmed by the program’s academic rigor and the experience of being away from their families for the first time.”

Eckman is also an exceptional citizen of the school, working as a grader and instructional assistant and volunteering as a [SoMSS student ambassador](#).

This fall Eckman will pursue a PhD program in mathematics at the University of Oregon, likely in a field related to algebra, topology or geometry. But before heading for the Pacific Northwest, she will once again spend the summer working with the Joaquin Bustos Math-Science Honors Program.

We asked her to share more about her experience as a Sun Devil.

Question: What’s something you learned while at ASU that surprised you, that changed your perspective?

Answer: A big change of perspective I encountered was just how different mathematics was compared to what I’d seen in high school. This really clicked for me in MAT 371, advanced calculus, when I started to understand that proofs weren’t just a way for us to show something is true, but they also function to communicate *why* things are true. This made me realize that mathematics was so much more varied and beautiful than I had expected, and I really developed a passion for the subject as a result.

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

A: A big lesson I learned in Dr. Kawski’s topology class was the importance and benefits of building intuition and sketching pictures. Both help build understanding and are useful when solving difficult problems, and I’ve taken the habits I’ve built into future classes.

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

A: It’s OK to not have everything figured out from the start! There’s no shame in changing majors or doing some exploration or introspection to guide you along your path, as school is a great time to explore the possibilities for your future.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: Just north of Hayden Library, there are several tables where it seems to be a few degrees cooler than the rest of campus. It’s a nice place to be when it’s too hot to be outside anywhere else.

Q: What do you like to do in your spare time?

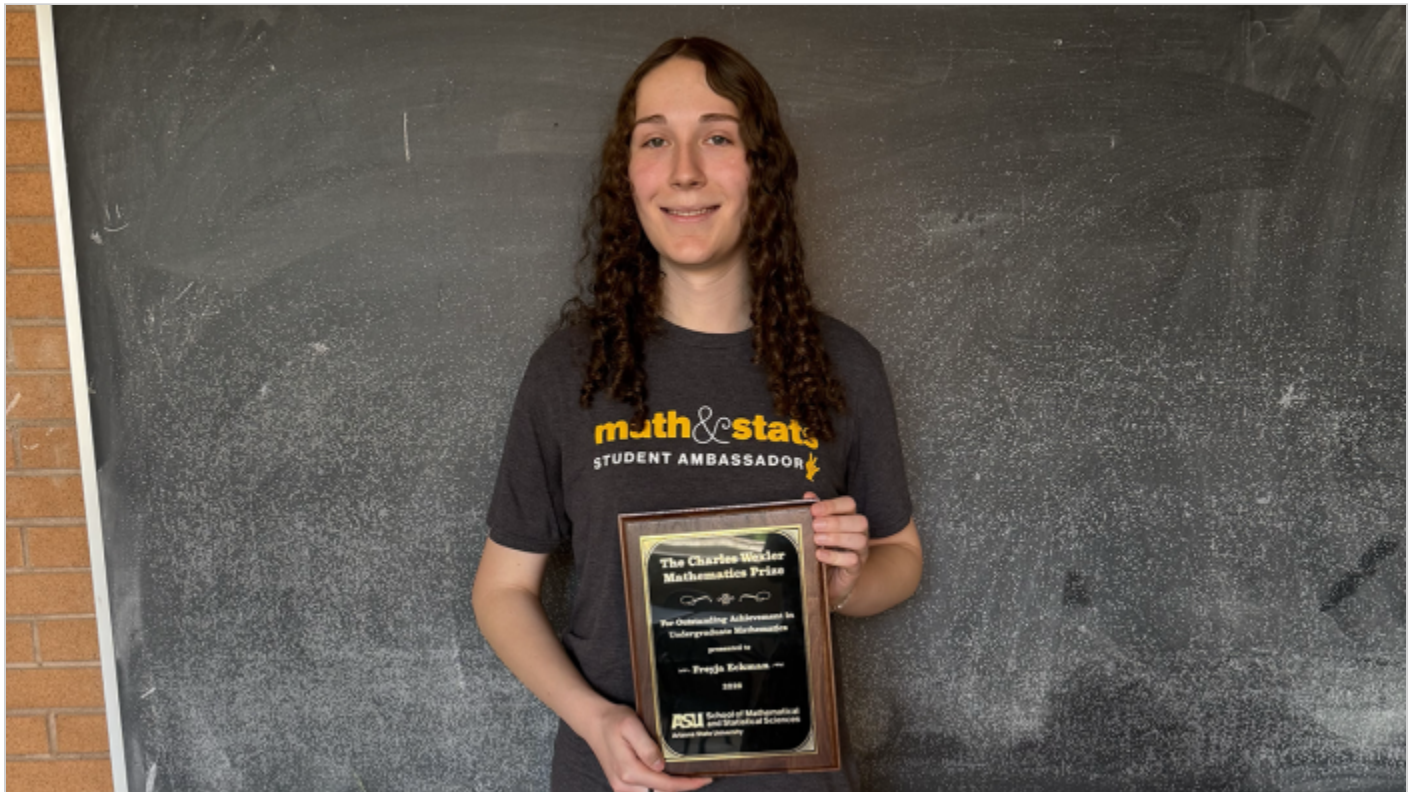
A: I love to solve Rubik's Cubes, play the guitar and flute, and do all sorts of outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking and bird watching.

Q: What are your favorite memories of your time in the School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences?

A: There have been several times, in the days leading up to a midterm or a final, where me and classmates will study as a group. Getting to meet people and work together to prepare, seeing their unique perspectives and insights, is always a great experience within this community.

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

Main image



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