

ASU psychology graduate combines positive psychology, research and global perspective to inspire others

Award-winning author and speaker Avital Miller turned a longtime passion for human behavior into a mission to help others flourish

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

After originally earning an engineering degree, Avital Miller returned to school to pursue the passion that has stayed with her since she was a teenager: psychology. Now graduating from Arizona State University's [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#) with a master's degree in positive psychology, she has combined her academic work with writing, speaking, wellness programs and research centered on helping people live healthier and more meaningful lives.

Alongside her studies, Avital became an award-winning, bestselling author, developed programs focused on mindfulness, emotional intelligence and peace-building, and began research exploring how mindfulness can help reduce needle phobia. Through her work, travel and advocacy, she hopes to inspire others to move beyond self-doubt and create positive change both in their own lives and in the world around them. We asked her to share more about her ASU journey.

Question: What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: My “aha” moment happened when I was a preteen or teenager. I used to watch Oprah Winfrey with my mother, and I started learning about how much our past experiences impact our current lifestyle and psychology. I started reading psychology books way back then.

At the time, I was told I didn't write very well and that I wouldn't do well getting a psychology degree. Since I was strong in math and science, I earned an engineering degree instead. But psychology stayed on my vision boards and personal goals for years. When the opportunity came during COVID to return to school and make my psychology dream happen, I jumped at the chance.

Q: Why did you choose New College?

A: I chose New College because of ASU and because of psychology. ASU became accessible and supportive for making this journey possible. Intuitively, it just felt right. I didn't even look at other schools.

I also discovered the whole field of positive psychology, which connected my background in leadership, motivation, health, healing and spirituality. It combined everything I had been doing professionally and personally into one field of study.

Q: What's something you learned while at New College that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: One thing that surprised me was the process of diving into research. At first, it felt frustrating how long it took to get through small details, but I realized those nuances can make a huge difference in whether a study or intervention is successful.

I also started incorporating research into my speaking and writing right away. It changed how I communicate information and how I think about helping people in meaningful ways.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at New College? What about that lesson or professor makes it stand out?

A: My psychology of mindfulness professor, [Bowen Wang-Kildegaard](#), taught me one of the most important lessons. He noticed me personally, acknowledged where I excelled and encouraged me to pursue research.

He became a mentor, invited me to work on research projects and encouraged my career growth. That acknowledgement inspired me to contribute even more to my work and studies. It also showed me the real-life impact positive psychology can have on people.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd offer to someone considering applying for college?

A: If you're younger, think of college as a place to explore, learn and discover what inspires you and the kind of impact you want to make in the world.

If you're older, you may already have more life experience and clarity. In that case, fine-tune your educational path to match exactly what you want to accomplish and how you want to contribute.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I plan to continue writing and speaking. I've been nominated to speak at the World Peace Conference in Stockholm, and I want to continue creating opportunities like that.

I'm also continuing to develop programs I've been building while at ASU, including Sit and Succeed, The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace, The Alchemy of Peace and Wellbeing Map.

In addition, I'm working on research involving mindfulness and reducing needle phobia, which could help improve public health outcomes and emotional well-being.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years or more — and how do you think New College has helped prepare you to get there?

A: In 10 years, I see myself continuing to speak, write, teach and share knowledge that helps people flourish and thrive. I would also love to eventually pursue a PhD.

ASU helped prepare me by not only giving me knowledge but by helping me refine how I communicate it clearly and effectively in both academic and public settings.

Q: Part of New College's name is "new." What does the word mean to you? Describe how you feel "new."

A: "New" reflects ASU's spirit of innovation and openness. It encourages students to explore new ideas and perspectives.

I also think that spirit of newness can spread outward into the world through knowledge, innovation and global connection to help create a more peaceful and productive society.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share that is important to your story?

A: I hope my story encourages people to think differently about what they're capable of accomplishing. I've been called a "one-woman campaign against self-doubt," and I want others to realize they can achieve more than they think.

One of the things I like to say is, "Sing your sweet song." I hope my work inspires people to live authentically while also recognizing what we all have in common and how we can support one another in creating a more peaceful world.

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

Main image



Avital Miller presents during a speaking engagement. Alongside earning her degree in positive psychology from Arizona State University's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Miller has developed programs centered on mindfulness, emotional intelligence and peace-building. Courtesy photo

Gallery



Avital Miller speaks during a presentation focused on leadership, well-being and personal growth. Through her writing, research and wellness programs, Miller hopes to help others live healthier and more meaningful lives.



Avital Miller poses for a portrait while completing her studies at Arizona State University. Miller returned to school to pursue psychology after originally earning an engineering degree and has since become an award-winning author, speaker and researcher.



Avital Miller speaks during an event focused on personal development and happiness. Miller plans to continue writing, speaking and conducting research after graduating from Arizona State University.