

Dean's Medalist builds community and connection through student involvement at ASU West Valley

Double major Emma Huang transformed her academic experience through leadership, mentorship and a passion for building student community

By Melissa Stroud, ASU News
May 12, 2026

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

From leading campus organizations and mentoring first-year students to giving tours and pursuing two degrees at once, Emma Huang has immersed herself in nearly every aspect of student life at Arizona State University's West Valley campus. The Dean's Medalist, who is double-majoring in forensic psychology and communication while also earning her master's degree through the 4+1 communication studies program, has turned her passion for community and connection into a mission to help other students feel supported and involved at the [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#).

Below, Huang shares more about her time at ASU West Valley and her plans for the future.

Question: What was your college journey like in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at ASU West Valley?

Answer: My journey at ASU West Valley has really been centered around student involvement and building community on campus. I'm currently the president of the Programming and Activities Board, and I helped co-found a club called HOTDOG, which stands for "Hanging Out Together Devouring Our Grub." I also work for Student Connection and Community, serve as a peer academic leader for New College, give campus tours through ASU Admission Services, TA for public speaking and have been a mentor for two semesters.

Q: What inspired you to pursue your field of study?

A: I attended one of ASU's summer camps after my freshman year of high school. I participated in a forensics camp at the West Valley campus, lived in the dorms for a week and got to experience what college life was like. I absolutely loved it.

From that point on, I knew I wanted to come to ASU West Valley and pursue forensics. I originally started in forensic science, but eventually realized forensic psychology was a better fit for me.

At the same time, I took a public speaking course for a literacy requirement and completely fell in love with communication. I became a mentor for the course, added communication as a minor, and eventually turned it into a second major. I realized I was very passionate about interpersonal communication and human connection overall, which ultimately led me to pursue my master's degree in communication studies.

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

A: There are two major influences. Growing up, my mom was always in school pursuing higher education. She's currently working on her PhD, so academics have always been a part of my life. I used to go with her to classes and spend time on campus with her, so I always knew college was something I wanted to pursue.

Once I got to ASU, (Instructor) [Kenneth Kunkel](#) had a huge impact on me. He taught the public speaking course that really changed everything for me academically. I later became a mentor for his class and now a TA for him, so it's been a full-circle experience.

Every time I talk to him, I feel like I learn something new, whether it's about communication, teaching or just life in general. He's been an important mentor throughout my college journey.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I really want to continue working in higher education. Through all of my student involvement experiences, I found a passion for student affairs and the university environment.

After finishing my master's degree, I'm interested in pursuing the EdD Leadership and Innovation program through the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation. I want to continue working in higher education and focusing on student involvement, community and belonging, because those are topics I'm really passionate about.

Almost every research project or academic interest I have somehow comes back to student engagement and creating meaningful communities for students.

Q: What does being named a Dean's Medalist mean to you?

A: Being named a Dean's Medalist means so much to me because New College has been such an important part of my life. I'm "New College through and through" at this point, with three degrees connected to New College and multiple jobs working with students here.

The recruiters and staff at New College helped me feel supported from the very beginning and showed me all the resources available to students. They really made me feel like New College was a family and that everyone genuinely wanted students to succeed.

That's part of why I became a peer academic leader. I wanted to help first-year students connect with those same resources and feel supported right away. Receiving this recognition feels full circle because it comes from a community that has meant so much to me throughout my college experience.

Q: What advice would you give to future students starting their journey?

A: My biggest piece of advice is always to get involved. So many opportunities come from saying yes, stepping out of your comfort zone and connecting with the campus community.

I wasn't involved at all in high school, so coming to ASU and getting involved was a complete 180 for me. But it completely changed my college experience for the better.

I've seen firsthand how much of a difference it makes, not just for myself, but for other students too. Even attending one event or joining one club can help students feel more connected and supported. Getting involved really can transform your college experience.

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

Main image



Emma Huang poses for a graduation photo at Arizona State University. Huang is graduating from New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences with double majors in forensic psychology and communication, while also pursuing her master's degree through the 4+1 communication studies

program. Courtesy photo

Gallery



Emma Huang walks with a fellow student across ASU's West Valley campus. She hopes to continue working in higher education and helping students build connections and a sense of belonging on campus.



Dean's Medalist Emma Huang spends time with fellow students on ASU's West Valley campus. Student involvement and the creation of a sense of community became among the most meaningful parts of her college experience.



Emma Huang stands at the Paley Gates on ASU's West Valley campus.