

Trust in media pushes Cronkite grad toward authentic storytelling

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

Trust, ethics, authenticity. Those three words that are considered guiding principles and cornerstone foundations of journalism. They're also the three words that guide Karess Melanie, one of the Cronkite School's newest graduates.

"Cronkite prioritizes ethical journalism," the New York native said. "You can see it in the curriculum and environment, right down to the First Amendment Forum wall. When I toured and saw that on the wall, it clicked for me because I have always cared about doing what's right and being fair."

That inspired Melanie to choose the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication over schools closer to home.

"Cronkite prepares students for all sides of media," she said. "The industry is evolving, and Cronkite doesn't just box you into one lane. It teaches you how to move forward in journalism."

Melanie expanded her personal reach and leadership skills beyond the Downtown Phoenix campus, having served as the president of the [ASU chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists](#) and co-president of the [Black African Coalition](#), an umbrella organization that supports the more than two dozen Black, African and Caribbean student groups across all campuses.

"During my NABJ presidency, I turned my purpose into action by creating a student-run broadcast called 'The Breakdown,' creating a space where students could take the stories and stats that people often scroll past and make them make sense in a way that's meaningful," Karess said. "It's about going beyond the surface and giving audiences the full picture so they can create their own narratives and not have it created for them."

Melanie is planning to continue that authentic storytelling beyond graduation, with a deeper sense of why her path brought her to Phoenix from New York.

Question: What was your "aha" moment, when you realized you wanted to study journalism?

Answer: Growing up, I always watched various news outlets, and I started to see how the narrative could be controlled, especially around different demographics, and that impact can shape the mentality of viewers. That's why, for me, storytelling has always been a way to help people make sense of the world around them. Journalism does more than inform; it holds institutions accountable and helps people feel seen and understood.

Q: What inspires you most about the future of journalism?

A: There's a lot happening right now in journalism and tech, especially with augmented and virtual reality, and that's something I have enjoyed. At Cronkite, I was able to learn tools that have taught me new ways to reach people beyond traditional formats. But what inspires me most is trust. All the technology doesn't mean much if the stories aren't being told as an act of service and with a sense of care. For me, it always comes back to being ethical and intentional with what you put out.

Q: Why did you choose ASU over your closer-to-home options? What would you tell someone who's considering attending?

A: I toured Cronkite my senior year of high school. Cronkite felt like home from the moment I walked in, and I trusted that feeling. It was definitely a culture shock, but it ended up being one of the most important parts of my growth. Being at ASU, I was able to step into a different phase in my life through leadership positions and finding my independence. ASU is going to put you around people who think differently and come from completely different backgrounds. It's one of my favorite things about this school. Learn from it without losing yourself in it.

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

A: Everything happens for a reason — the good and the bad — and it is about how you respond to it. Don't treat the bad moments like loss; they're lessons that shouldn't stop you. I always say 'adapt and attack.' Adapt means being able to adjust, understand what's going on, and attack is when you'll handle it with confidence. A lot is going to happen inside and outside the classroom, so be open to letting yourself grow and become the best version of you.

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

A: My freshman year, I loved doing my work on the Gordon Commons patio, looking out at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. There was something about the energy of the noise and people moving that reminded me of home and what I missed about coming from a busy city.

By my sophomore and junior year, the edit bays became my second home. That's where everything happened, and it became my space to really grow in my craft.

Now, as a senior, I've found myself more connected to the Tempe campus through my leadership roles. In a way, I've come back to where I started working outside again, but this time on the Student Pavilion patio.

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

Main image



Cronkite graduate Karess Melanie (right) interviewing a fireman. Courtesy photo