ASU alum brings life-changing robotics to LA operating rooms

California native Nicholas Santos-Ramirez serves the communities he grew up in

By Renae Hintze, ASU News
June 4, 2026

Nicholas Santos-Ramirez calls in to an interview about his experience at Arizona State University around 5 p.m. It's just another step in his busy day, on his way home from one of the five hospitals he frequents in the LA area.

Earlier in his life, he might not have imagined working alongside surgeons in operating rooms. Today, he knows it's where he belongs.

The ASU alumnus partners with California health care providers on using the da Vinci 5 robot, a highly sophisticated and versatile robotic surgery system that is globally recognized for advancing minimally invasive surgery. It's a role he takes to heart.

"At the end of the day, I'm aware that someone's mom, dad, brother, sister, whoever it may be on the table, is very real," he says. "Being a true partner to your surgeon is ultimately what matters. If you're in the OR, you're bringing value. You're not supposed to be a wallflower."

For Santos-Ramirez, this work represents a full-circle moment in his life. The hospitals he serves today are the same hospitals his family members go to.

Choosing ASU

Though health innovation is Santos-Ramirez's passion, his journey to a career in med tech and surgical robotics was not a straight line. He started out pursuing his associate degree in kinesiology and sports medicine at a community college in Santa Clarita, California, and was originally on track to become an athletic trainer.

But after spending more than 200 hours in the clinic with athletes, he realized this wasn't the path for him. That's when he met with a counselor at ASU and first heard about the bachelor's degree in health entrepreneurship and innovation. The program was positioned at the intersection of health care, systems thinking and problem-solving — exactly where Santos-Ramirez wanted to be.

In his time as an undergraduate, he found himself connecting with a diverse community of peers.

“There are people from all walks of life here,” he said. “We have a mix of public health, nursing, health entrepreneurship and innovation majors. All of these fields are represented within the same programs and classes, allowing us to collaborate on projects.”

He was also paired with a mentor in the Edson College Alumni Mentorship program.

Bri DuBose, who earned bachelor’s degrees in psychology and nursing, as well as a master’s degree in healthcare innovation, from ASU, was working at a San Diego-based health care system at the time. She played a key part in influencing his decision to pursue his graduate degree.

Connecting from desert to coast

This May, Santos-Ramirez graduated with a master’s degree in healthcare innovation. Now a proud Double Devil, he is also helping define what it means to be one of more than 75,000 Golden State Sun Devils — embracing his connections between Arizona State University and his home.

“As someone who lives in California, it feels incredibly fulfilling to have a network of others who share my experiences, attended the same university and can relate to me," he said. "Perhaps we even have the same professors or have been through similar academic journeys. This network can be a valuable resource for future California Sun Devils, providing them with opportunities for professional development and growth.”

He is living proof of that support, currently volunteering as a mentor to Edson College students in the same program that helped him and serving on the Edson College Alumni Board. He also stays connected to his alma mater online, keeping up with the university’s latest endeavors in what he calls his “daily dose” of ASU.

“It kind of seems like the direction ASU is taking is to change the narrative of the institution … adding a med school, promoting ASU Health, the umbrella that Edson College will now fall under. All these things inspire me, and it makes me really happy with my decision in choosing to go to Arizona State to begin with.”

Looking forward

When Santos-Ramirez looks to the future of health care in California and beyond, he sees potential to advance health equity by embracing emerging technologies in medicine.

He also has a message of encouragement for future students, current students and his fellow alumni.

“My advice is to stay connected within the university and the communities you serve. Whether you're an Arizona resident, a California resident, Wisconsin resident — it doesn't matter. Join anything you feel will be impactful. Volunteering, community events, whatever it is, you'll feel an extra sense of accomplishment and community in your life. That’s important.”

This story originally appeared on ASU News.

Main image

Nicholas Santos-Ramirez (left), an ASU Double Devil alum, poses next to the da Vinci 5 robot with Dr. Nojan Toomari, a master robotic general surgeon. Santos-Ramirez trains health care providers on this robotic system in five hospitals across Los Angeles. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)

Nicholas Santos-Ramirez earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in health innovation from ASU. Courtesy photo