Beyond the classroom: How ASU is serving America

As the country celebrates 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we highlight examples of the spirit of service that helps define the university

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Ask most people what a university does, and they'll probably say it educates students and awards degrees.

And they're right — but that's only part of the story.

At Arizona State University, learning extends beyond the classroom.

Students, faculty and staff are working to strengthen communities, support one another and tackle challenges that affect people locally and around the world.

This July Fourth, the U.S. will celebrate 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As part of that commemoration, ASU News is highlighting just a few examples of the spirit of service that helps define the university.

Building tomorrow's public servants

ASU prepares students to lead a life of service, and one important way it does that is through the Public Service Academy and its Next Generation Service Corps.

The Public Service Academy was the only program of its kind in the country when it launched in 2015. Its goal: to educate the next generation of public servants, training future military and civilian leaders side by side.

As part of the Public Service Academy, the service corps is an undergraduate leadership development program aimed at training cross-sector leaders committed to addressing complex social issues. Students engage in practical elements of leadership and complete internships

working on real issues in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

In 2025, the service corps launched a three-year Accelerated Federal Career Track. The specialized pathway is designed for students who are ready to pursue leadership in the federal public service sector through an accelerated, immersive and academically rigorous experience.

“In the Next Generation Service Corps, we develop character-driven, adaptive leaders charged with driving positive impact both locally and globally,” said Brett Hunt, founding executive director of ASU’s Public Service Academy.

Critical languages for strong leadership

Communication is the first step to serving people effectively.

That’s the idea behind ASU’s Critical Languages Institute. Students study languages that are strategically important but less commonly taught in the U.S. (including Ukrainian, Albanian and Farsi), gaining skills that help them connect with people across cultures and borders.

The institute is housed within ASU’s Melikian Center, whose mission is to help students build the language skills and cultural understanding needed to engage with communities around the world.

Those skills carry into study abroad opportunities where students immerse themselves in other cultures. Many go on to careers in diplomacy, government and international development, where their language abilities support public service and international collaboration.

Taking service to veterans seriously

ASU has a heart for serving those who have served our country.

From helping veterans navigate GI Bill benefits — ASU is No. 2 among public institutions nationwide for students using those benefits — to creating opportunities for community, career development and academic success, the university offers a wide range of support for more than 20,000 military-connected students and their families.

Much of that work is coordinated through the Pat Tillman Veterans Center, which provides resources, guidance and a welcoming community for veterans transitioning to college life. Additionally, through the Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement, ASU also sponsors programs that help bridge the military-civilian divide, including community initiatives, academic certificates and the Verses for Vets poetry workshop.

The university is also working directly with military branches to help redesign professional military education. Announced in March, ASU will work directly with Army training centers of excellence to modernize curriculum and course design, updating lessons to reflect current technological and instructional best practices. The collaboration builds on ASU’s earlier, similar work with the U.S. Air Force.

Building America’s semiconductor workforce

Semiconductors may be small, but their impact is endless.

From smartphones and medical devices to automobiles and military defense systems, microchips help power modern life and have become essential to the nation's economy and security.

As the country works to expand domestic chip production, ASU is helping meet the challenge by educating future workers, conducting cutting-edge research and partnering with some of the biggest names in the semiconductor industry, including the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Intel and Applied Materials.

In doing so, ASU is preparing the next generation of engineers, technicians and researchers needed to support America's semiconductor industry and compete in an increasingly chip-dependent world.

Cybersecurity: Keeping the nation safe from cyberattacks

Cyberattacks come from adversaries most people never see. But their potential for disruption and destruction can be felt everywhere from hospitals and schools to financial institutions and government agencies.

Helping protect those systems is still another way ASU is serving the country.

Through its Center for Cybersecurity and Trusted Foundations — part of the Advanced Capabilities for National Security Institute — the university works with industry leaders including Google, Microsoft, IBM and PayPal, as well as federal agencies, to develop solutions to real-world cybersecurity challenges.

The center supported nearly $11 million in research activity in fiscal year 2025, helping strengthen the nation's defenses against evolving cyber threats. It also works to bolster the cybersecurity workforce pipeline, from free cybersecurity curriculum for middle school teachers to a high school research internship hosted on campus to collegiate capture-the-flag competitions.

Serving through civics education

When people understand how the government works, they're better equipped to engage in civic life. That's why civics education matters.

ASU's School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership and the Center for American Civics focus on restoring civic literacy, analyzing democratic institutions and providing workshops to train K–12 teachers in engaging civic lessons.

This year, the units launched the "Civics in a Year" podcast — 250 mini episodes leading up to the country's 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"We're doing the show because we want to make sure that civic literacy and civic education are accessible for anybody," said Liz Evans, program director for civic education and outreach at the Center for American Civics and the host of the show.

Race and democracy

Strong communities depend on people being able to talk with one another — especially when the issues are difficult.

The Center for the Study of Race and Democracy brings together scholars, community leaders and residents to examine issues of race, democracy and justice. The center combines research with public engagement, creating opportunities for informed dialogue on topics that affect communities locally and nationally.

Through public forums, community conversations, arts-based programs and initiatives focused on issues such as health equity, the center works to foster civic engagement, build understanding and help communities address complex challenges together.

Ensuring health care for future generations

Good health is essential to a good life. But maintaining it depends on having enough health care professionals. According to statewide projections, Arizona is set to face shortages of more than 4,100 physicians and nearly 4,700 registered nurses by 2032.

ASU is working to bridge that gap through ASU Health, an ambitious effort to educate the next generation of medical professionals.

The new John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering, which welcomes its first class this summer, will train a new generation of physician-engineers who blend medicine, technology and problem-solving to improve patient care and expand access to health services.

ASU is also growing the School of Technology for Public Health to better understand and improve health outcomes across Arizona.

Along with the College of Health Solutions and the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, these efforts will build the workforce, research capacity and innovation needed to keep Arizona healthier for generations to come.

Food security as national security

Most Americans don’t think about national security when they sit down for dinner.

The nation’s food supply, however, is increasingly being viewed as critical infrastructure, vulnerable to cyberattacks, supply chain disruptions, intellectual property theft and other emerging threats.

Protecting the food system, experts say, is about far more than agriculture — it's about safeguarding the country’s economy, public health and national resilience.

That’s the mission of ASU’s Center for Agriculture and National Security. The brand-new center brings together experts in agriculture, business and national security to help the government and

industry better understand and prepare for risks facing the U.S. food system.

Through research, education and policy guidance, the center is working to strengthen the resilience of America's farms, food supply chains and water resources, helping ensure that one of the nation's most essential resources remains secure.

McCain Institute: Dedication to public service

The first thing visitors see when they land on the McCain Institute's website is a simple but powerful phrase: "Service Over Self."

The institute is a nonpartisan organization inspired by the late Sen. John McCain and his family's dedication to public service.

Part of ASU and based in Washington, D.C., the institute connects the university's research and educational mission with policymakers and leaders working to address some of the nation's and the world's most pressing challenges.

The institute also prepares future public servants through leadership programs that emphasize integrity, service and ethical decision-making. By fostering collaboration across political and ideological divides, the McCain Institute carries forward McCain's belief that lasting solutions are built through character, courage and common ground.

ASU and the impact of serving

Whether it's training future physicians, preparing public servants or strengthening cybersecurity, each of these examples of ASU's strong commitment to service reflects the same idea — a university serves its country not only by educating students, but by preparing them to serve others.

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Main image



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