

ASU's America Reads is more than a tutoring program

Initiative connects K–8 students with Sun Devils, providing mentoring, academic help and inspiration about going to college

By Lauren Greenberg, ASU News
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Reading, writing, math — these subjects are crucial throughout one's academic career. Some students breeze through these topics without any struggles, while others require a bit more assistance in order to shine.

[America Reads](#) at Arizona State University provides free tutoring to K–8 students in need at Title I schools around the Phoenix metropolitan area, ensuring that they are successful in their academics and also have a role model to look up to.

“Our goal is to make sure we are able to hire Federal Work Study eligible students to go into the community to serve children K–8 grade in reading, writing and math,” said Kaitlyn Haugen, program manager for America Reads.

“We want to make sure that the (K–8) students have a role model and someone that is always rooting for them ... telling them ‘while this might be hard now, you will eventually get it, and you can aim to be whatever you want to be (in life).’”

Haugen said that America Reads is one of the only free tutoring programs offered in metro Phoenix, and that that factor is crucial for many in the community.

Christin Harbinson, a site manager for the program, said that tutors customize their teaching strategies based on each individual student.

“Tutors go to the site for three hours a day and have two one-on-one sessions with K–8 students. Throughout the semester they test the student, figure out where they’re at and how to support them to get them to grade level if they are behind,” Harbinson said. “They build relationships (with the students), and they are a mentor, too.”

Through helping individual students, America Reads serves the entire local community.

“We get to know the parents; we get to see the students grow,” Harbinson said.

America Reads serves K–8 students, but the program also helps college students learn invaluable life skills that translate directly into the post-academic world.

"What I really like about this program is the relationships and the culture," Harbinson said. "We not only help college students with their job, but you really get to build relationships with them and care for them. Seeing students grow from being a freshman that never had a job before to being ready to graduate is really awesome and important.

"It's not just a tutoring job — if you stick with it, you learn a lot of career skills and professional development. Even if you go into (a career) completely different (than tutoring or education), you've already gained so many skills that you may not have learned otherwise in other jobs."

Several students who served as tutors eventually started working for the program professionally. One of these former students is Graciela Cazares, an America Reads site manager.

Cazares explained that working as a tutor for the program taught her skills that she ended up applying to scenarios outside the educational field. She also said she greatly enjoyed getting to know and working with her students personally, as well as meeting and befriending fellow Sun Devils.

"I was surrounded by other ASU students, which was really cool," Cazares said.

The program also encourages K–8 students to think more about their futures.

"We provide some college-going practices to some of our middle school students to make sure that they are thinking about their futures more and know some of the resources that are available to them," Haugen said.

Harbinson said, "We're more than just a homework program. (America Reads) is an educational program to help students grow and meet them where they are."

Want to get involved?

[Learn more](#) about the America Reads program.

[Apply to be an America Reads tutor](#) as a Federal Work Study eligible student.

Find out how to [partner with America Reads](#) and host the program at your site.

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Main image



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