

AZ Opportunity: Advancing Arizona's Future

2025 Annual Report

Contents

- 3 About this report
- 4 Message from leadership
- 6 Recognizing service
- 7 Measuring impact
- 8 Impacting the future
- 20 Top five stories:
University of Arizona
- 22 Growing the attainment pipeline
- 32 Top five stories:
Northern Arizona University
- 34 Financial support and oversight
- 36 Top five stories:
Arizona State University
- 38 Athletics
- 42 Stewardship
- 50 Rankings

About this report

The Arizona Board of Regents’ Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report highlights the innovation and progress at Arizona’s public universities — Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona — and the board’s role in advancing education, research and economic prosperity. Filed in accordance with A.R.S. §15-1629, the report outlines key initiatives such as the AZ Opportunity program, along with milestones in enrollment, research funding and workforce development. It also celebrates the universities’ contributions to addressing Arizona’s critical needs, including health care and economic growth.

The board’s promise to Arizona

To increase postsecondary access and attainment for Arizona students, seek solutions to societal challenges, and do both while improving quality, affordability and efficiency. The Arizona Board of Regents is committed to promoting the discovery, application and dissemination of new knowledge, extending the benefits of university activities to Arizona’s citizens outside the university, and maximizing the benefits derived from the state’s investment in education.

Regents

- Cecilia Mata, Chair
- Doug Goodyear, Chair Elect
- Gregg Brewster, Secretary
- Fred DuVal, Treasurer
- Jessica Pacheco
- Larry Edward Penley
- Lee Stein
- Jadyn Fisher, Student Regent
- David Zaragoza, Student Regent
- Gov. Katie Hobbs, Ex-Officio
- Superintendent Tom Horne, Ex-Officio

Executive Director

Chad Sampson



AZ Opportunity: Investing in Arizona’s future through higher education

The Arizona Board of Regents is putting Arizona’s future first with AZ Opportunity — a commitment to make public higher education the foundation of statewide progress. Building on the principle that investing in students and universities remains the best way to strengthen our state, Arizona’ public universities are creating greater opportunities for students to succeed, researchers to drive discovery, and our state to grow and prosper.

By expanding access to education and training the next generation of professionals, ABOR is laying a solid foundation for a stronger Arizona that benefits every citizen, from rural outposts to urban centers. AZ Opportunity is a bold plan to invest in the people and programs that will lead our state into the future.

The five pillars of AZ Opportunity are designed to tackle Arizona’s most pressing needs:

Education for All: Expanding access to education in rural and urban areas for all students. The board is broadening access through the Arizona Promise Program, AZTransfer, increasing Free Application for Federal Student Aid completion rates and enhanced support for Latino and Hispanic students. These targeted programs and partnerships help remove barriers to college for underrepresented communities, resulting in increased enrollment and graduation rates.

Health Care Excellence: Training future medical professionals to address health-care shortages. AZ Healthy Tomorrow is the board’s answer to Arizona’s health-care workforce shortage. With nearly 3 million Arizonans facing limited access to primary care, the initiative is critical to building a stronger health-care system and meeting the long-term needs of both rural and urban communities. Early successes include Arizona State University’s planned medical school in Phoenix, Northern Arizona University Health’s largest graduating nursing class and

the University of Arizona’s implementation of accelerated medical degree pathways.

Innovation and Growth: Enhancing workforce training and research in technology, health care and renewable energy. Arizona’s evolving workforce demands a versatile skill set that blends traditional knowledge with technology, data analysis, sustainability and more. To meet these needs, our universities and partners are training career-ready graduates equipped for high-demand fields such as computer science, cybersecurity, engineering and health care. By aligning on this common cause, we can shape a future where Arizona sets the global standard.

Funding Restoration: Restoring previous budget cuts invests in university programs and research infrastructure, which spur economic activity. Strategic reinvestment is revitalizing critical programs and research, generating immediate jobs and long-term economic growth.

Future-Ready Campuses: Building new medical education research and capacity — as well as ongoing investments in the state’s research and industry strengths — requires access to capital funding for future-ready campuses. Capital investments are modernizing campuses, creating jobs today and building infrastructure for tomorrow’s health care, technology and other industry leaders.

Investing in AZ Opportunity is not just good policy — it’s good business. Supporting Arizona’s public universities drives economic growth, increases lifetime earnings and fuels job creation. It builds a stronger, more vibrant community and workforce for the state and nation.

Arizona’s strength — its people, stunning landscapes, thriving industries and deep-rooted values — depends on education. To learn more, explore this report and join us in shaping a future where Arizona leads.

Recognizing service

To students and the state



Regent Cecilia Mata concluded her tenure as chair of the board, a term marked by strategic reforms in governance, expansion of student access, and the launch of major initiatives such as the Military, Aerospace and Defense Initiative and the AZ Opportunity plan. She also played a key role in navigating the U of A through financial challenges and increasing FAFSA completion rates. Regent Mata led efforts to expand access for underrepresented students and championed Regents’ Grants to advance research and state partnerships.



Regent David Zaragoza completed his two-year term as a student regent, advocating for underrepresented students in Arizona and promoting mental health resources on campus during his tenure. He also continued the student regents’ efforts to advance awareness of and advocacy for student food and housing insecurity. Regent Zaragoza graduated from ASU with an engineering degree and spoke to over 1,400 graduating high school students and addressed ASU’s 2025 undergraduate graduating class, emphasizing the power of education.



Regent Liz Archuleta was recognized for her service to the board and Arizona’s public higher education system. Throughout her tenure, Regent Archuleta remained steadfast in her commitment to expanding access and affordability for Arizona students and families. A longtime public servant, her leadership at the local and federal level delivered a meaningful impact for Arizona.



Regent Lee Stein was unanimously confirmed to the board by the Arizona Senate in May 2025. A former assistant U.S. attorney and special assistant attorney general in the Arizona Attorney General’s Office, he has over 25 years of experience representing clients in white collar prosecutions and government investigations. Regent Stein graduated magna cum laude from the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at ASU.



Regent Felipe Garcia was appointed to the board as a student regent by Governor Katie Hobbs. A rising junior at the U of A’s W.A. Franke Honors College pursuing dual bachelor’s degrees in political science and innovation, Regent Garcia is focused on expanding student support services and improving educational attainment.

Measuring impact

Universities innovate to save money

Arizona’s public universities are committed to fiscal responsibility, working to reduce costs while advancing goals that support student success, research and service to the state. Each university takes a proactive approach to cost management, implementing strategies such as project consolidation, energy efficiency upgrades and technology improvements. Examples include:

ASU achieved more than \$63.7 million in cost efficiencies through initiatives such as enterprise-wide resource realignments and salary savings from vacant positions.

NAU’s procurement and contracting teams saved \$3.9 million and implemented LED lighting replacements across campus, resulting in about \$89,000 in annual savings.

The U of A reduced operating expenses by \$83.9 million and achieved approximately \$2 million in personnel savings through information technology centralization.

Arizona’s public universities are job creators and are also among the largest employers in communities across the state. They are developing hundreds of innovative inventions and start-ups, helping to drive Arizona’s economy. As the universities’ enrollment continues to rise, data from the Alumni Wages Report show that completing a bachelor’s degree has a striking effect on Arizonans subsequent earning power and that college graduates have lower unemployment rates, than those without a postsecondary education. Get a snapshot of public higher education’s impact in Arizona below:

ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$1.7B

Total state taxes paid by university alumni
Source: FY 2023 Alumni Wages Report

32K

Total employees working at Arizona’s public universities
Source: FY 2025 Personnel Report

\$ 26,035

Wage gap in Arizona for those with a bachelor’s degree compared to someone with a high school diploma.
Source: FY2023 Alumni Wages Report

247

Patents earned by university students and faculty
Source: FY 2025 Technology and Research Initiative Fund Report

30

Startup companies formed by universities’ students and faculty
Source: FY 2025 Technology and Research Initiative Fund Report

ENROLLMENT

237K

Students enrolled at Arizona’s public universities
Source: 2025 Fall Enrollment Report

54K

Bachelor’s and graduate degrees awarded by Arizona’s public universities
Source: 2023 College Completion Report

87K

Online students enrolled at Arizona’s public universities
Source: 2025 Fall Enrollment Report

Impacting the future

AZ Opportunity is the board's long-range vision and is rooted in the principle that public higher education remains the best investment an individual student – or state – can make in our shared future.

Impacting the future



Regents launch **AZ Opportunity**: A plan for Arizona's future

To strengthen Arizona's long-term competitiveness and meet growing workforce demands, the Arizona Board of Regents this year launched AZ Opportunity — a comprehensive plan to align public higher education with the state's economic future. The initiative focuses on expanding access to affordable, high-quality degrees and workforce credentials that prepare Arizonans for in-demand careers and support statewide prosperity.

The five pillars of progress incorporated in the initiative include operational funding restoration, AZ Healthy Tomorrow; workforce, innovation and growth; increasing affordability and access for Arizona students; and capital investment. The initiative also emphasizes

the universities' talent development in high-demand industries such as health care, advanced manufacturing and aerospace. Together, these efforts underscore Arizona's public universities as powerful engines of economic advancement, innovation and opportunity across the state.

The board launched a new website - AZOpportunity.com - to inform Arizonans of the board's ongoing efforts and featuring video testimonials from business and community leaders who support the initiative. Additionally, the board launched a newsletter and the AZ Opportunity Podcast to further connect with citizens and highlight the initiative's impact on the state to key stakeholders. ■

Regents’ Grants: Working together to address challenges facing Arizona

Backed by Arizonans through Proposition 301, the board’s Regents’ Grants ensure that public university research delivers public benefit—where it’s needed most. From wildfire mitigation to cancer prevention, these state-funded research investments are transforming academic expertise into real-world solutions that protect lives, strengthen communities, and drive innovation across the state. Here are some examples of Regents Grants that have served the state this year:

Harnessing artificial intelligence for enhanced disaster planning

In collaboration with the Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs, university researchers are developing an AI-powered system to improve disaster planning and response. The platform will help predict wildfires, floods and other infrastructure threats, enhancing the department’s capabilities in data analysis, modeling and decision-making. By enabling faster, more informed responses, the system aims to protect lives, property and public resources.



Maj. Gen. Kerry Muehlenbeck, DEMA director, presents to the board on how AI can enhance disaster planning and response.

Smart tree watering in Arizona’s urban environment

Researchers at Arizona’s public universities are exploring scalable, efficient urban tree-watering strategies to reduce water use and mitigate the urban heat island effect. Working with the city of Tucson, smart watering methods have cut water use by up to 60% on Tucson’s public lands. Experimental slow-watering techniques maintained 22% to 37% higher soil moisture than conventional drip irrigation. The research team estimates each tree could save 1,700 gallons of water annually during early growth. Findings will be shared through workshops with municipalities, counties and community groups to help shape water-use policies.



Mitigating risks associated with inexperienced drivers on roadways

University researchers are partnering with the Arizona Department of Transportation to improve safety for inexperienced drivers using engineering, technology and psychology. The 24-month study includes two phases: assessing the scope of safety issues and existing strategies, then using advanced simulators and wearable technologies paired with surveys to analyze driver behavior. Findings will inform department policy, training, licensing and manuals.



Professor Shiva Pooladvand, Ph.D. leads a team of researchers from ASU, NAU and the U of A that aims to increase safety for less experienced drivers using engineering, technology and psychology to better understand and mitigate driving risks.

Containing the bark beetle outbreak in northern Arizona

Climate-change driven heat and drought in northern Arizona triggered the state’s largest-ever bark beetle outbreak, weakening millions of trees and increasing wildfire risk. In response, university researchers and the Department of Fire and Forestry Management are developing mobile tools to monitor tree health and expand detection of infestations. Forestry agencies in neighboring states have already expressed interest in adopting the technology once finalized.



Reducing cancer and cardiovascular risk in firefighters

After three years of research, university researchers and the Arizona Fire Chiefs Association shared promising preliminary results that could transform firefighter health outcomes across the state. The study, involving more than 1,900 firefighters from across Arizona, found that blood or plasma donations can reduce levels of PFAS, also known as cancer-causing “forever chemicals.” Preliminary findings are encouraging, offering a potential life-saving intervention for those who protect our communities. Firefighters face a 9% higher cancer diagnosis rate and a 14% higher mortality risk than the general U.S. population.



Goodyear firefighter Gilbert Aguirre shares with the board his experience fighting occupational cancer.



President Garimella and his wife, Lakshmi, in front of Old Main during an event welcoming him to campus.

Board appoints **Dr. Suresh Garimella** as the 23rd president of the University of Arizona

In August, the Arizona Board of Regents appointed Dr. Suresh Garimella as the 23rd president of the University of Arizona. The unanimous board vote followed a comprehensive national search, led by Regent Cecilia Mata as board chair and fueled by the work of the U of A Presidential Search Advisory Committee and informed by robust community feedback.

Dr. Garimella is celebrated in higher education for his innovative leadership, his profound commitment to the land-grant mission and an exceptional record of putting students first. He previously served as the 27th president of the University of Vermont (UVM) and is the former executive vice president for research and partnerships at Purdue University. During his time at UVM, Dr. Garimella stabilized tuition and spearheaded a scholarship program similar to the Arizona Promise Program, providing a tuition-free education for lower-income Vermont students.

“Dr. Garimella is student focused and considers himself first and foremost a faculty member. With a 35-year career in higher education, Suresh is engaging, a great listener and a collaborative leader,” said ABOR Chair Cecilia Mata. “Wildcats are part of our state’s DNA and Dr. Garimella has shown he is the right leader at the right time to heal and grow Arizona’s land-grant university.”

Dr. Garimella is not only a highly cited scholar, researcher and professor of mechanical

engineering, but he also helped increase and strengthen the research enterprises of both UVM and Purdue. He has a strong financial management background, helped build both universities’ online education footprints and worked to diversify funding sources without increasing tuition. Additionally, he is a member of the National Science Board and served with the U.S. Department of State as both a Jefferson Science Fellow and a senior fellow in the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas.

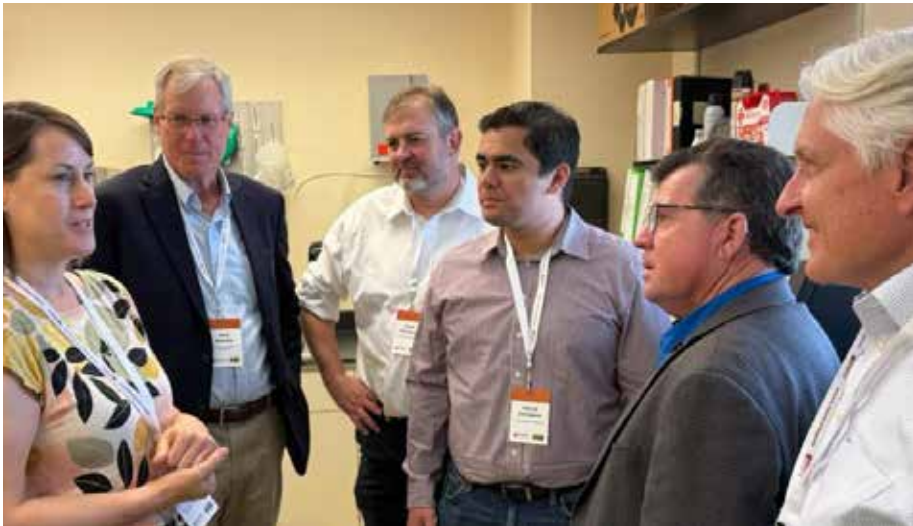
Throughout the search, the board and committee engaged stakeholders through 19 listening tour sessions, dozens of individual meetings, three public town halls, and through emails and a campuswide survey that drew responses from more than 4,200 students, employees and community members.

In March, President Garimella was officially installed as the president in a special ceremony that gathered Gov. Hobbs, board and committee members, community members and state dignitaries. He emphasized the importance of three key focus areas for the university going forward. “I propose we couple a sense of urgency with purpose built around three shared strategic imperatives: access and success for every student, research that shapes the future, and engagement with our communities to create opportunity together,” he said. ■

Future of Arizona Series: Advancing statewide solutions through collaboration and university expertise

Solving Arizona’s toughest challenges requires more than ideas—it demands collaboration. That’s why the Arizona Board of Regents launched the Future of Arizona series this past year: to bring together state agencies, university experts and community leaders to co-create solutions that deliver real, measurable results for the state. From advancing biomedical innovation to securing the future of agriculture, this initiative is turning shared knowledge into statewide action.

Debuting with two high-impact convenings, the series started with a focus on technology transfer and biomedical innovation - supported by a new grant from ABOR that aims to amplify the economic impact of tech transfer in life sciences, biomedicine and high-tech. The event showcased how Arizona’s public universities are accelerating the commercialization of research, with tangible outcomes including startup formation, patent activity and industry partnerships. Attendees heard from university leaders and entrepreneurs whose work translates academic discovery into real-world impact - advancing health, sustainability and economic growth.



Paul Brierley, Director of the Dept. of Agriculture, leads collaborative discussions at the Future of Arizona sustainable agriculture convening in Yuma, AZ

Addressing the urgent challenge of food production in an arid climate, the second convening in the Future of Arizona series brought together more key stakeholders to shape a roadmap for agricultural resilience. Discussions centered on water scarcity, workforce development and food security—critical issues for sustaining agriculture in one of the nation’s driest states. Held at the University of Arizona’s Yuma Agricultural Center, the convening also spotlighted the state’s \$30 billion agriculture industry and Yuma’s significant role in this sector.

By aligning university research with regional needs, the event laid the groundwork for a long-term, collaborative strategy to strengthen one of Arizona’s most vital economic sectors. “Our public universities’ unique programs can address the challenges that agriculture is facing and then bring it all together with state, university and elected leaders along with the board of regents,” said Paul Brierley, director of the Arizona Department of Agriculture. “With all of us working together, we can understand what the challenges are and bring solutions.”

Next, the board will collaborate with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management to address wildland fire mitigation.

Through this initiative, the board is reaffirming its commitment to leveraging the full capacity of the state’s public universities to serve the people of Arizona, today and into the future. ■

Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association, ABOR partner to boost workforce development in hospitality industry

The Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association partnered with the board to strengthen workforce development in the state’s growing tourism and hospitality sector. The collaboration highlights the critical role Arizona’s public universities play in shaping the future of the industry by attracting new talent and equipping students with 21st-century skills to meet evolving demands.



ASU alum Katrina Schubert is helping drive Arizona’s tourism and hospitality sector, which supports more than 180,000 jobs statewide.

A multimedia awareness campaign showcased the many amazing career opportunities within Arizona’s tourism and hospitality industry and highlighted degree pathways that lead to these careers. Through success stories, industry insights, and profiles of diverse roles, the campaign continues to demonstrate how pursuing a career in this field not only contributes to Arizona’s thriving economy but also offers a fulfilling and impactful professional journey. ■

Board launches Military, Aerospace and Defense Initiative

Recognizing Arizona’s growing role in national defense and the potential for deeper collaboration with military partners, the Arizona Board of Regents launched the Military, Aerospace and Defense Initiative to strengthen ties between the state’s public universities and the U.S. Department of Defense. The effort is designed to expand research partnerships, workforce development and innovation in sectors critical to defense and security.

Board Chair Cecilia Mata has led statewide conversations with military leaders to understand opportunities and challenges to advance collaboration. “Our state’s public universities are leaders in sectors critical for the military and defense, including cybersecurity, hypersonics, defense technologies, aerospace, workforce development and more,” Mata said. “While the research collaboration between our universities and the defense sector in these areas is significant, there is a growing recognition that the universities have the potential to secure even more funding and partnerships with the Department of Defense and other military entities.” ■



Chair Mata and ABOR executive director Chad Sampson met leadership at military facilities across the state including Commanding General Appelhans at Fort Huachuca.

Arizona Teachers Academy: A vital pipeline for the state’s classrooms

This initiative underscores ABOR's recognition of the critical intersection between academia and national security, ensuring that Arizona's public universities remain at the forefront of defense-related research, workforce development and technological innovation. Arizona ranking eighth nationally in 2023 as a recipient of federal defense spending.



The Arizona Teachers Academy has been instrumental in addressing the state's need for qualified teachers. Since its inception, the academy has successfully graduated nearly 6,400 teachers, significantly contributing to the education sector. Despite a \$14 million cut in budgeted funds and a \$10.5 million infusion in funding for a total academy budget of \$26.5 million in fiscal year 2025, enrollment in the academy decreased by over 375 students. It is crucial that this program continues to receive funding to ensure a steady supply of qualified educators for Arizona's classrooms. ■



Advancing health care workforce through AZ Healthy Tomorrow

The AZ Healthy Tomorrow initiative, a cornerstone of the board's efforts to address the state's health-care workforce shortage, made significant progress in fiscal year 2025 by expanding medical education and training programs at ASU, NAU and the U of A. With nearly 3 million Arizonans facing limited access to primary care, the initiative is critical to building a stronger health-care system and meeting the long-term needs of both rural and urban communities.

First announced in 2023, AZ Healthy Tomorrow includes major investments by ABOR, the state's public universities, partnerships with the private sector and support from state government. Gov. Katie Hobbs' office and the Legislature appropriated \$24 million in the fiscal year 2026 budget to support SPEED bonding, enabling ASU, NAU and the U of A to unlock \$325 million in bonding capacity for capital projects — including new medical and nursing schools.

AZ Healthy Tomorrow progress includes:

Arizona State University

ASU is advancing its new medical school with the announced headquarters of ASU Health in downtown Phoenix. Set to welcome students to its new campus in 2028, the school aims to train a new kind of physician who integrates medicine, engineering, technology and the humanities. Graduates will use new tools such as artificial intelligence and data science to improve patient care and health outcomes.

Northern Arizona University

Under its new College of Nursing, NAU graduated its largest nursing class in 60

years. The university also expanded programs in physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant studies, behavioral health, clinical psychology and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner training. This expansion is part of NAU's design for a medical school in Flagstaff focused on training primary care physicians. A feasibility study is underway, with an emphasis on serving rural, underserved and Indigenous communities.

University of Arizona

The U of A launched a three-year medical degree program at its Tucson and Phoenix campuses, set to enroll 36 students in fall 2025. The accelerated M.D. pathway is designed to reduce student debt and address the shortage of primary care physicians, particularly in rural and tribal areas. The university's new Master of Science in Midwifery program will also welcome its first class in fall 2025, preparing certified nurse-midwives to improve maternal and women's health care, notably in underserved communities. ■

Distinguished faculty named Regents Professors

The board named six distinguished faculty members as Regents Professors — the highest faculty honor — for their exceptional contributions to research and education during the past year.

The title “Regents Professor” is reserved for faculty members with exceptional achievements that have brought them national or international distinction. The title serves as recognition of the highest merit and unusual contributions to the quality of the individual’s university. At any one time the number of Regents Professors at a university shall not exceed three percent of the total number of tenured and tenure-track faculty members. The honorees, from ASU and the U of A, have earned national and international recognition for advancing knowledge in their fields and inspiring future generations. Professors honored during the past year include:



Professor Jim Bell
ASU, School of Earth and Space Exploration

Professor Bell is the director of ASU’s NewSpace Initiative and a leader in planetary science. He contributed to the development of the panoramic camera on NASA’s Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity and is a co-investigator on Psyche, the first ASU-led deep-space NASA mission.



Professor Amber Wutich
ASU, School of Human Evolution and Social Change

A 2023 MacArthur Fellow and director of the Center for Global Health, Professor Wutich’s research on water insecurity develops solutions for communities in the United States, informs global health policy and addresses environmental challenges.



Professor Jiang Wu
U of A, College of Humanities

Professor Wu is director of the Center for Buddhist Studies and a leading scholar of Chinese and East Asian Buddhism. His work deepens understanding of East Asian religious and cultural history, enriching global scholarship.



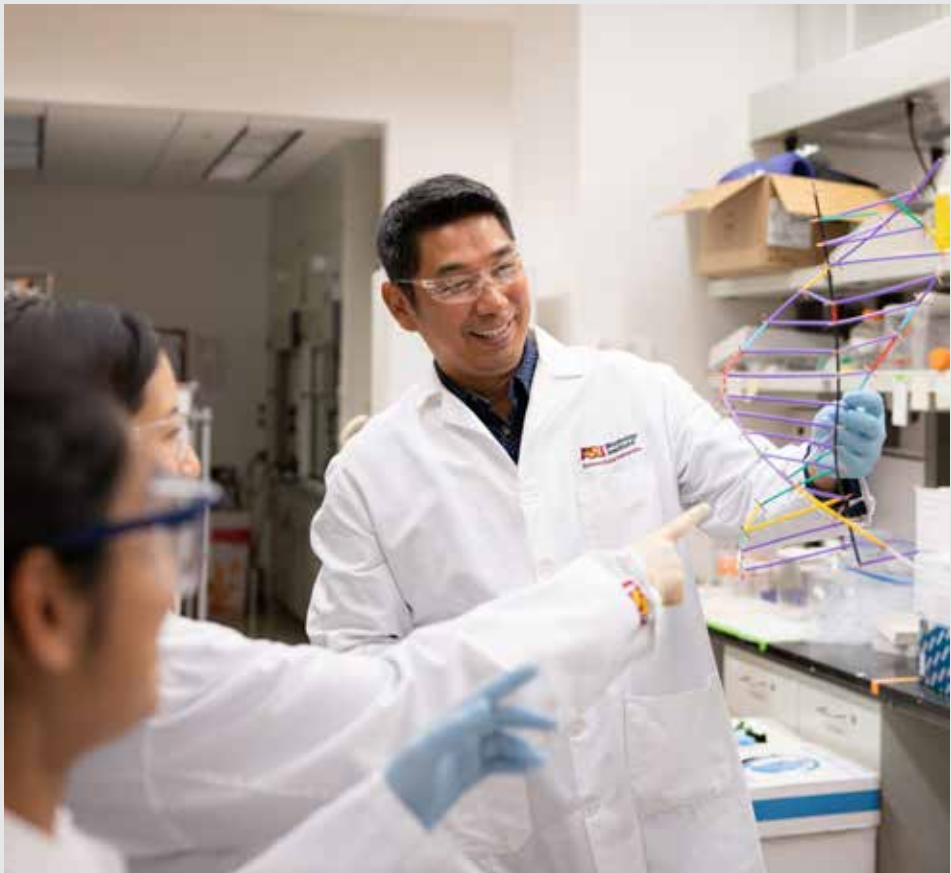
Professor Dennis Zaritsky
U of A, College of Science

Professor Zaritsky’s research on galaxy evolution and dark matter has shaped modern astrophysics and our understanding of the universe. He is deputy director of the Steward Observatory and recently completed a six-year term as chair of the Giant Magellan Telescope Science Advisory Council.



Professor Janko Nikolich
U of A, College of Medicine

Head of the Department of Immunobiology, Professor Nikolich’s research on immune system aging has led to new strategies for improving resilience in older adults and advancing health-care solutions.



Professor Hao Yan
ASU, School of Molecular Sciences

Professor Yan is a pioneer in DNA nanotechnology, developing nanostructures for biomedical and materials science applications. He directs the Biodesign Center for Molecular Design and Biomimetics.

Top Five Stories: University of Arizona



The U of A community gathered on the steps of Old Main to celebrate the installation of President Garimella, honor tradition, leadership and the university's enduring commitment to academic excellence

Suresh Garimella begins tenure as 23rd U of A president

Suresh Garimella officially assumed the presidency of the U of A, beginning his first full day on campus on Oct. 2, 2024. A mechanical engineer and highly cited researcher, Garimella has pledged to prioritize students while advancing the university's research mission. He came to the U of A from the University of Vermont, where he served as president since 2019. He received a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, and earned advanced degrees from Ohio State University and the University of California at Berkley.

U of A mirrors key milestone as Vera C. Rubin Observatory releases first images

The Vera C. Rubin Observatory released its first images, revealing millions of galaxies and celestial phenomena during just 10 hours of testing. The observatory's massive mirrors were fabricated at the U of A's Richard F. Caris Mirror Lab, marking a milestone in the university's decades-long leadership in astronomy. Built in Chile with federal funding, the observatory will conduct a 10-year survey of the southern sky, gathering data on dark matter, exploding stars and planetary defense. U of A researchers will help lead upcoming discoveries using the observatory's unprecedented data.

U of A launches accelerated medical degree and MBA programs

The U of A will offer a three-year medical degree at its Tucson and Phoenix medical schools, designed to address the state's primary care physician shortage. The program will allow graduates to enter the workforce a year earlier than traditional four-year programs. Arizona meets just 39% of its current primary care needs, with thousands more physicians required by 2030. The U of A also began offering a one-year accelerated MBA program from the Eller College of Management, which empowers students to minimize time away from the workforce while maximizing their educational experience.

U of A discovers Yuma County agriculture drives \$4.4 billion in economic impact for Arizona

A U of A study found that agriculture and agribusiness in Yuma County contributed \$4.4 billion to Arizona's economy and \$3.9 billion locally in 2022. Yuma ranked third nationally in vegetable, melon, potato and sweet potato sales, generating \$3.2 billion in retail value. Researchers also highlighted the region's water efficiency, with Yuma farmers using 0.63 acre-feet of water per \$1,000 in crop value — less than half the Colorado Basin average. The study underscores Yuma's role as a national leader in agricultural production.

U of A's OSIRIS-REx team finds building blocks of life in asteroid Bennu sample

Samples collected from asteroid Bennu by NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission, led by the U of A, show the building blocks of life were present before Earth formed, according to two studies published in Nature and Nature Astronomy. The research revealed that Bennu contains key ingredients like amino acids, nucleobases and high levels of ammonia — suggesting life's precursors may have been widespread across the early solar system. The findings support theories that organic chemistry capable of producing life may have begun in space and been delivered to planets like Earth.





Arizona achieved its 40% statewide FAFSA goal and ranked sixth nationally in year-over-year FAFSA improvement.

Growing the attainment pipeline

Board leads statewide push to boost **FAFSA completion**

Without completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), thousands of students miss out on federal financial aid each year. The board, in partnership with the office of Gov. Katie Hobbs and the Arizona FAFSA Coalition, led a coordinated statewide effort to help students and families navigate the FAFSA process. The campaign aimed to ensure every eligible student had access to the resources, guidance and support needed to complete the form — an important step toward college and career readiness.

Backed by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education and supported by partners across Arizona, this year's campaign introduced regional workshops, expanded virtual appointments, personalized assistance and added new community-based incentives. These efforts were designed to equip counselors and educators with tools to boost FAFSA completion and motivate students to secure financial aid to achieve their academic goals.

Gov. Hobbs proclaimed January 2025 as FAFSA Month in Arizona, underscoring the importance of completing the FAFSA to unlock financial aid opportunities for postsecondary education.

"Arizona recognizes that increasing FAFSA completion rates is essential to ensuring more students are able

to pursue postsecondary education and contribute to the state's economic growth and workforce development," said Hobbs. "Ensuring that students and families understand the importance of the FAFSA, as well as the steps to complete the application, is crucial to overcoming financial barriers to higher education and promoting long-term success for Arizona students."

Throughout the campaign, Arizona high school counselors tracked student-level FAFSA completions using Arizona College Connect, the board's interactive FAFSA database. The board also launched a dashboard to track 2025–26 FAFSA completion efforts among 12th graders at public high schools across Arizona. Organized by county and high school, the dashboards helped educators and communities track progress and target support where it's needed most.

Completing the FAFSA opens the door to grants, work-study and federal student loans — and there is no income cutoff to apply. It is also a requirement for the Arizona Promise Program, the state's guaranteed scholarship program for Pell-eligible and qualified Arizona residents that ensures all tuition and fees are covered at Arizona's public universities. ■



El Valle Puede Celebration tips off Arizona Decision Day 2025

More than 1,400 high school seniors from across Arizona gathered at PHX Arena for the second annual El Valle Puede Celebration, marking the official tipoff of Arizona Decision Day 2025. The event, a collaboration between the Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation, Helios Education Foundation and the Arizona Board of Regents, celebrates achievements of these students as they prepare to graduate and embark on the next steps of their educational journeys.

Arizona Decision Day, proclaimed in 2024 by Gov. Katie Hobbs, is a statewide celebration designed to inspire students to take charge of their futures. Whether pursuing college, trade school, military service or the workforce, the event encourages high school students to make meaningful post-graduation plans.



The El Valle Puede Celebration featured a college resource fair, Phoenix Suns entertainment and a live concert by Phoenix-born music artist Xavi. Students also heard inspirational remarks from Student Regent David Zaragoza, Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego, Helios Founding Chairman Vince Roig and Helios Vice Chair Jane Roig. ■



College Ready AZ builds partnerships, gains momentum

Launched just over two years ago, College Ready AZ has quickly become Arizona’s statewide platform for college planning — connecting students and families with tools, resources and peer-driven content to support the journey to higher education. Created by the Arizona Board of Regents, the initiative and website serves as a centralized hub offering step-by-step guidance on preparing for college, applying for financial aid and exploring career pathways.

This year, College Ready AZ continued its collaboration with the Arizona Cactus League and Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation and launched new partnerships with the Arizona Diamondbacks and Cox Communications – all focused on celebrating college decisions and incentivizing high school seniors to complete a

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). A key feature of the platform is the College Ready Ambassadors program, which engages current university students to share personal insights and experiences about navigating college life. Through original videos and posts distributed across College Ready AZ’s social media channels, ambassadors deliver relatable, timely messages designed by students for students — helping to demystify the college process and inspire their peers.

With more than 100 million impressions from targeted awareness campaigns and thousands of direct engagements, College Ready AZ’s reach continues to grow across middle and high schools statewide. As momentum builds, the platform is a trusted destination for empowering Arizona’s next generation of college-bound students. ■

WICHE program enhances higher education impact on region’s success

Arizona’s participation in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) opens affordable pathways for students to pursue degrees in high-demand fields not offered by the state’s public universities. Through WICHE, students saved \$30.3 million in tuition costs during fiscal year 2025. Through the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), students can train in areas like dentistry, optometry and occupational therapy at partner institutions across 15 states and U.S. Pacific territories before returning to serve Arizona communities. Alongside PSEP, the Western Undergraduate Exchange and Western Regional Graduate Program offer reduced tuition at participating out-of-state colleges and universities, helping Arizona students access undergraduate and graduatedegrees in critical fields while addressing regional workforce shortages. ■

ABOR joins national effort to support incarcerated students

Arizona has been selected by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) to join a national initiative aimed at expanding access to quality postsecondary education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. As one of five participating states, Arizona will workwith key partners to identify and address policy barriers that limit educational and workforce opportunities for this population.

In addition to Arizona, other participating states include Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota and Virginia. Each state will evaluate policies and potential barriers to workforce-aligned

educational opportunities for currently or formerly incarcerated individuals.

In Arizona, ABOR will collaborate with the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry, and Valley of the Sun United Way to coordinate opportunities and share expertise. The goal is to better support the diverse needs of formerly incarcerated individuals while also addressing workforce demands. ■

Helios awards ABOR \$1.1 million grant to support AZ Comeback Initiative

The Arizona Board of Regents has launched the AZ Comeback Initiative, a statewide effort to re-engage the nearly 770,000 Arizonans who have some college credit but no degree. With support from a \$1.1 million grant from the Helios Education Foundation, the program seeks to boost re-enrollment and help these individuals achieve their educational goals while strengthening personal, community and economic development across Arizona.

Supported by ASU, NAU and the U of A, the initiative will identify, pilot and evaluate evidence-based strategies to reduce barriers to re-enrollment and degree completion. ■

ABOR selected for 2025–26 FAFSA beta testing by U.S. Department of Education

The board was selected by the U.S. Department of Education in November to participate in Beta 3 testing of the 2025–26 Free Application for Federal

Student Aid (FAFSA), a national initiative aimed at improving the FAFSA experience for students across the country. In response to the technical challenges and glitches that accompanied the previous year’s federal FAFSA rollout, ABOR — working with members of the Arizona FAFSA Coalition — led testing workshops at high schools statewide to proactively identify and resolve potential issues.

Nearly 450 high school seniors submitted their FAFSA forms during the beta period, taking advantage of early access. Through this effort, Arizona’s high schools, students and ABOR played a critical leadership role in ensuring a smoother, more successful national launch of the 2025–26 FAFSA application. ■

AZTransfer program helps thousands of students save on tuition

AZTransfer, a statewide program in partnership with the ABOR, helps thousands of students save on tuition by transferring from Arizona’s community colleges to the state’s public universities. The collaboration, born out of legislation passed in 1996, includes more than 2,000 academic leaders from Arizona’s public universities, 10 community college districts and two tribal colleges.

Together, they facilitate seamless credit transfers, supporting nearly 7,500 students in 2023–24 who transitioned to ASU, NAU or the U of A. The annual AZTransfer Summit brings together institutions and stakeholders from across the state to promote networking and share best practices, ensuring accessible, high-quality pathways to degrees for all Arizonans. ■

Scholarship supports families of law enforcement and correctional officers

As part of ABOR policy, the Arizona Legislature appropriated \$2 million in the state budget passed in 2023 to fund a scholarship for the families of law enforcement and correctional officers attending the state’s public universities during the 2024–25 academic year. The scholarship covers the cost of tuition and mandatory fees — after other financial aid is applied — on a first-come, first-served basis. Funding will be available again for the 2025–26 academic year. To qualify, students must be either a dependent under the age of 27 or a spouse of a currently employed law enforcement or correctional officer. ■

Arizona Promise Program expands to community colleges

The Arizona Promise Program, a statewide financial aid initiative that covers tuition and fees for eligible Arizona students attending public universities, received \$16.3 million in state appropriations and was expanded to include community colleges — a vital pipeline for students pursuing higher education. A key strategy in the board’s effort to increase educational attainment, the Promise Program helps make college more accessible for low-income students, allowing them to pursue degrees and achieve their academic goals. Students who earn a bachelor’s degree from an Arizona public university are estimated to triple their earning potential on average compared with those who hold only a high school diploma, underscoring the importance of expanding access to higher education across the state. ■

ABOR, Cox Communications celebrate 2024-25 AZ FAFSA Challenge winners

Nearly 90 high school seniors and administrators from across Arizona gathered in May at Cox Communications’ Deer Valley campus for a luncheon celebrating the completion of the 2024-2025 AZ FAFSA Challenge.

A collaboration between the board, Cox Communications and the AZ FAFSA Coalition, the event recognized the outstanding efforts of Arizona high schools to boost FAFSA completion rates.

Thanks to a generous donation from Cox, 63 students from winning schools received iPads to support their postsecondary education journeys. Schools were also awarded signed certificates from Gov. Katie Hobbs and ABOR Chair Cecilia Mata, along with trophies for first, second or third place in the categories of Highest FAFSA Completion Rate and Most Improved FAFSA Completion Rate.

The partnership with Cox Communications reflects ABOR's continued commitment to building community collaborations that expand access to higher education and financial aid for Arizona students. ■



Gov. Hobbs’ Advisor Erin Hart and Cox Communications Phoenix Market VP Susan Anable helped celebrate AZ’s outstanding FAFSA schools.

All-Arizona Academic Team honorees recognized

The board awarded in-state university tuition scholarships to 68 outstanding community college transfer students through the All-Arizona Academic Team program. Recognized for academic excellence, leadership and community service, these scholars will continue their education at Arizona's public universities.

Each year, Regent Larry Penley joins the award ceremony to acknowledge the honorees’ achievements and commitment to earning their bachelor’s degrees. The annual celebration, coordinated by Mesa Community College and Phi Theta Kappa, highlights the students’ accomplishments and future aspirations. ■



ABOR, Cactus League hit a home run with FAFSA

A statewide collaboration between the Arizona Board of Regents and the Arizona Cactus League is helping more students access financial aid by encouraging completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Now in its third year, the “Hit a Home Run with FAFSA” campaign incentivizes students with free spring training tickets in exchange for submitting their FAFSA forms.

“With all that is great in our state, we want to do our part to help build a strong labor force and create a pipeline of success that graduates exceptional students and keeps that talent and their families here in Arizona,” said Bridget Binsbacher, executive director of the Cactus League Association.

As a result of this year’s campaign, Arizona’s FAFSA completion rate for the Class of 2025 reached 30% by the end of March 2025 — up from 18% in April 2024. That increase represents approximately 14,000 additional FAFSA submissions compared to the previous year. During the campaign, 1,155 students requested Cactus League tickets, and 4,532 free tickets were distributed during spring training.

Building on the success of the Cactus League effort, ABOR also partnered with the Arizona Diamondbacks to further encourage FAFSA completion. Through this new initiative, Arizona high school seniors in the Class of 2025 who submitted the 2025–26 FAFSA form were eligible to receive two free tickets to a Diamondbacks regular season game. Nearly 500 students participated in the incentive.

As part of the expanded campaign, the Diamondbacks and ABOR hosted a College Readiness Night at Chase Field. While fans enjoyed an evening of baseball, ABOR attainment staff were on-site providing students and families with resources and guidance on financial aid, admissions and education planning through College Ready AZ.

These campaigns demonstrate how sports can be harnessed not just for entertainment, but as a powerful force for public good — turning ballparks into gateways for educational opportunity. ■





ABOR Executive Director, Chad Sampson greeting students during the FAFSA Symposium

FAFSA Symposium and Peer Coaching Program expand college access in Arizona

The FAFSA and College Readiness Symposium and the FAFSA Peer Coaching Program have emerged as cornerstone board initiatives to improve college access and affordability across Arizona. The 2024 symposium brought together more than 400 counselors and educators, along with 160 student peer coaches, to launch the annual Free Application for Federal Student Aid campaign. The student Peer Coaching Program — a key driver of the campaign and FAFSA completions — has helped reclaim millions in unclaimed financial aid.

FAFSA Symposium success: The 2024 symposium equipped Arizona high school counselors and educators with up-to-date information and resources to help students prepare for education beyond high school. The event featured keynote presentations, breakout sessions, professional development opportunities and networking gatherings. Breakout sessions covered topics ranging from using FAFSA data effectively to understanding Arizona high school students' perceptions of higher education. Arizona Gov. Katie

Hobbs delivered a video message thanking educators for their support and announcing the Arizona FAFSA Coalition's statewide FAFSA completion goal.

Peer Coaching Program impact:

The nationally recognized Peer Coaching Program, led by ABOR, continues to drive year-over-year gains in FAFSA completion and is inspiring similar efforts in other states. Now operating in 40 high schools across Maricopa and Pima counties, the program trains students to serve as peer coaches who help classmates navigate the FAFSA process, answer questions and dispel misconceptions. The average FAFSA completion rate by FAFSA Peer Coach schools is 47% and schools participating in the program have a completion rate that is 33% higher than the state average of 35.5%. Since its launch in 2022, the number of participating schools has increased by 67%. The board is actively developing partnerships to expand the program to all public high schools in Pima and Coconino counties, with the goal of reaching even more students statewide. ■

FAFSA Peer Coach schools achieved a 32.87% higher FAFSA completion rate than the state average



Top Five Stories: Northern Arizona University

1

NAU names college of engineering after **Steve Sanghi** following \$10 million gift

NAU has renamed its College of Engineering, Informatics, and Applied Sciences the Steve Sanghi College of Engineering following a \$10 million gift from Maria and Steve Sanghi, the largest cash gift of its kind in NAU's 125-year history. Steve Sanghi, former president and CEO of Microchip Technology, is a longtime advocate for engineering education. The gift will fund the college's first named deanship and support expanded student access, hands-on learning and faculty recruitment, helping NAU meet workforce demands in Arizona's growing semiconductor industry.



NAU achieves **prestigious R1 research designation**

NAU earned R1 research activity status from the Carnegie Foundation, the highest classification for U.S. research universities. The designation recognizes NAU's commitment to high-impact research, including projects in wildfire management, microbiology and interdisciplinary health, and its focus on preparing students for technology-driven careers. NAU meets the R1 criteria by spending over \$50 million annually on research and awarding at least 70 research doctorates each year, joining the nation's top tier of research institutions.

NAU researchers explore **safer Valley fever treatments**

NAU researchers, in partnership with the University of Colorado Boulder, are testing new treatments for Valley fever, a fungal lung infection that affects tens of thousands annually in the Southwest. Led by Biology Professor Bridget Barker, the team is studying the antifungal agent ambruticin S and its analogs, which target the fungus without harming human cells. Supported by National Institutes of Health funding through 2029, the four-year project aims to develop safer, more effective therapies to reduce the disease's severe side effects and improve patient outcomes.

NAU juniors earn **Goldwater Scholarships for Indigenous health research**

NAU juniors Amaya Pablo and James Davis have earned prestigious Goldwater Scholarships for their research on Indigenous health in Assistant Professor Naomi Lee's lab. Pablo, a chemistry and applied Indigenous studies major from the Hopi village of Mishongnovi, works on treatments for antimicrobial-resistant bacteria and aims to address health-care disparities in Native communities. Davis, a biomedical sciences major from Sacramento, is developing an HPV vaccine designed for rural and Indigenous populations. The scholarships, which provide up to \$7,500, support the students' goals of pursuing graduate degrees and advancing careers in science and medicine.

NAU publishes **free wildfire recovery guide for Arizona communities**

NAU and partners have released "After Wildfire: A Guide for Arizona Communities," a free resource designed to help residents and local officials navigate post-wildfire recovery. The guide, produced with input from fire and emergency management leaders, utility administrators and municipal officials, offers information on safety, financial assistance, emotional support and recovery planning. Andi Thode, director of NAU's Arizona Wildfire Initiative, said the guide addresses a critical need, providing clear, actionable steps before, during and after wildfire events. The guide is available online through the Southwest Fire Science Consortium.



Impacting the future



ABOR modernizes governance of Arizona public universities

In fiscal year 2025, the board launched a comprehensive initiative to modernize its governance framework by focusing on improving operational efficiency, strategic oversight and institutional accountability. New governance measures for Arizona's public universities include:

Metrics overhaul The board finalized a simplified, forward-looking metrics framework that eliminates outdated measures and emphasizes high-impact indicators aligned with institutional priorities and systemwide goals. It also advances a broader strategy to strengthen Arizona's postsecondary infrastructure, enabling

more coordinated approaches to student outcomes and statewide attainment.

Data integration In collaboration with the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, ASU's Decision Center for Educational Excellence and AZTransfer, the board began supporting the migration of key data sets —

specifically post-graduate outcomes and ASSIST transfer tracking — into a shared data environment. This alignment brings key partners and assets into a common space to reinforce quality standards, foster best practices and support statewide strategies for transfer, admissions and financial aid.

Governance process updates

The board restructured its meetings and committee workflows. Meetings were reduced to two days and streamlined through a single, combined agenda for public and executive sessions. Committee agendas now include a consent calendar for routine matters, maximizing time for strategic discussions.

Presidential evaluation and performance management

The board revised the timeline for setting and reporting annual goals, now concluding the process in July. It also reviewed and updated performance-based evaluation criteria and eliminated at-risk goals for the Enterprise Executive Committee, made up of university presidents and the board's executive director.

Operational efficiency improvements

The board modernized its policy processes by expanding the use of policy-making software and launching a systemic review to identify outdated policies for revision or repeal. It also introduced a continuous request for proposals process to pre-qualify consulting and advisory partners across key operational areas. These changes allow the board to make decisions more quickly and engage expert support more efficiently. ■

Board approves annual enterprise budget

The annual fiscal year 2026 budget for Arizona's public university enterprise - ASU, NAU, the U of A, and the board office - was approved by the board in June and included projected revenues and expenditures for each university and the system office. The preliminary FY 2026 annual operating budget for the universities and system totals \$8.4 billion in net revenue. Arizona general fund appropriations represent 12% of the total operating budget. University revenues including tuition make up 56% of the budget, with the remaining 32% from federal and state grants and contracts. ■

SPEED bonds accelerate Arizona's higher education infrastructure

Arizona's public universities will receive a \$325 million boost in infrastructure funding through an expansion of the state's Stimulus Plan for Economic and Educational Development (SPEED) bonding program, approved in the latest state budget. Backed in part by Arizona Lottery ticket sales and repaid jointly by the state and universities, SPEED bonds are the primary source of state support for university construction and maintenance projects.

With enrollment surging and state funding declining over the past decade, the expansion is critical to meeting facility needs that align with Arizona's workforce demands. The expanded SPEED bonding capacity will be used at ASU to build its new medical school in the Phoenix Bioscience Core; NAU will construct a nursing facility to train more than 1,200 additional nurses annually; and the U of A will revitalize a science building to support the state's mining, agriculture, energy and water sectors. This investment ensures Arizona's public universities can continue to grow, innovate and serve the state's future. ■



Arizona talent shines at 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympics

Arizona’s public universities were well-represented at the 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympics, with 66 athletes or coaches with connections to ASU, NAU and the U of A making their mark on the global stage.

Competing across 21 sports and representing 27 countries, these student-athletes and alumni earned 17 medals. Their success — highlighted by historic performances in both the Olympic and

Paralympic games — showcased the universities’ role in developing world-class athletes and elevating Arizona’s global sports presence.

Olympic highlights include: Former ASU swimmer and French athlete Léon Marchand dominated the pool, winning four gold medals in the 200- and 400-meter individual medley and the 100- and 200-meter butterfly, along with a bronze in the 4x100-meter medley relay for

the host country. Canadian swimmer and ASU student-athlete Ilya Kharun earned two bronze medals in the men’s 100-meter butterfly and 4x100-meter medley relay. ASU alumni and sisters Lieke and Bente Rogge helped lead the Netherlands women’s water polo team to a bronze medal. At just 22 years old, NAU alumnus and distance runner Nico Young was the youngest U.S. Olympian to participate in the 10,000 meters event in 20 years. U of A alumni and renowned professional coaches Steve Kerr (men’s basketball) and Twila Kilgore (women’s soccer) led their respective U.S. teams to gold.

Among Paralympic highlights: ASU alumni Korban Best and Taylor Swanson each earned silver in Paralympics track and field events. Former ASU student-

athlete Allysa Seely won bronze in the Para triathlon, and the U.S. 4x100-meter universal relay team — featuring ASU representation — also earned bronze. NAU athlete Keegan Knott competed in the women’s 400-meter freestyle in para swimming. U of A alumnae Whitney Dosty won gold in sitting volleyball. U of A connected athletes also helped the U.S. men’s wheelchair rugby and women’s wheelchair basketball teams secure silver medals.

Combined medal count: If Arizona were a country, it would have ranked 21st in the Olympic medal standings. Nine university-affiliated medals contributed to a combined total of 231 medals across both games for the U.S. ■



Universities celebrate **standout 2024–25 athletic season**

Arizona’s public universities delivered outstanding athletic performances during the 2024–25 season, marking a year of major achievements across multiple sports. The transition to the Big 12 Conference proved highly successful for ASU and the U of A, with each securing multiple conference titles in their first season. NAU continued its dominance in the Big Sky Conference. The universities combined won 15 conference regular-season or tournament championships and were represented in the College Football Playoff, NCAA men’s basketball tournament’s Sweet 16 and the men’s College World Series.

Arizona State University

ASU’s football team won the Big 12 championship and made history as one of 12 teams in the first College Football Playoff (CFP). The Sun Devils earned a first-round bye and lost in a double-overtime thriller to Texas in the CFP quarterfinals. The program finished with an 11–3 record and the No. 7 national ranking in the final Associated Press poll, its highest ranking since 1996.

The men’s and women’s swimming and diving teams each claimed Big 12 conference titles. The women’s conference championship is the first in program history. The men have won three straight, including the last two Pac-12 championships. A total of 29 ASU swimmers and divers won individual Big 12 titles.

The women’s volleyball team lost only one conference match with a perfect 13-0 home record to finish 17-1 and win the Big 12 championship, the program’s first conference title. They earned a No. 3 seed in the NCAA tournament and hosted the first two rounds, the first time since 1995 tournament matches were played in Tempe. ■

Northern Arizona University

The Lumberjacks won the 2025 Big Sky Men’s and Women’s All-Sports Trophies, awarded annually to the conference’s top athletic programs. The men’s program has now won the trophy in back-to-back years and 19 times overall, while the women’s program has claimed it four of the past five years, with 10 total wins.

NAU earned eight Big Sky titles, fueled by a “Calendar Sweep” from the men’s and women’s cross country and track and field teams. The men’s and women’s tennis teams also swept the regular-season titles.

The women’s swimming and diving team, which competes in the Western Athletic Conference, won its 12th consecutive conference championship.

Football finished 6-2 in the Big Sky and returned to the Football Championship Series Playoffs for the first time since 2017. ■



University of Arizona

The men’s wheelchair basketball team won its first national championship at the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball tournament. The U of A will host the 2026 men’s and women’s national championships at McKale Memorial Center.

The baseball team’s postseason run started with a Big 12 tournament championship followed by six more wins to advance to the College World Series, the program’s 19th appearance.

In men’s basketball, the team also made a deep postseason run by advancing to the NCAA tournament’s Sweet 16 for the third time in four seasons.

The women’s golf team won a three-way playoff to claim the Big 12 championship, and the men’s tennis team captured its second straight conference tournament title and advanced to the NCAA tournament’s round of 16. ■

Top Five Stories: Arizona State University

1

ASU to host **nation's largest CHIP research and development hub, advancing U.S. semiconductor leadership**

ASU has been selected as the site of a major national semiconductor research hub, a landmark win for the university, the state and the country. The U.S. Commerce Department and Natcast announced ASU Research Park in Tempe will host the CHIPS for America Prototyping and Advanced Packaging Piloting Facility — the largest of three national R&D sites under the CHIPS initiative. Backed by billions in investment, the facility will drive cutting-edge semiconductor research, development and workforce training, positioning ASU at the center of America's efforts to reclaim global leadership in digital technology.



ASU nears **\$1 billion in research funding**

ASU is nearing \$1 billion in annual research funding — a milestone reached by only 33 universities nationwide and just a few without a medical school. ASU's rapid rise as a research powerhouse stems from its New American University model, which emphasizes access, interdisciplinary innovation and use-inspired research. Fueled by public and private investment, strategic state support and a strong entrepreneurial culture, ASU's research has transformed the university's role in Arizona's economy and its national standing. With plans underway for a new engineering-based medical school, the university's research impact is poised to grow even further.



ASU drives **\$32 billion economic impact, powering Arizona's growth**

ASU contributes more than \$6.1 billion annually to Arizona's gross domestic product through operations and construction alone — the economic equivalent of hosting eight Super Bowls each year. When including alumni earnings and ASU-linked business activity, the university's total statewide impact is estimated at \$32 billion, according to the Office of the University Economist. ASU fuels Arizona's growth through education, research, innovation and community partnerships, playing a central role in workforce development, economic revitalization and global investment attraction.



ASU, Mayo Clinic develop **10-minute rapid test for Valley fever**

An ASU professor, in partnership with Mayo Clinic, is developing a 10-minute rapid blood test for Valley fever, a potentially serious fungal disease that annually affects up to 3% of Southwest residents. The current median time to diagnosis is 23 days. ASU Immunologist Douglas Lake and Mayo Researcher Thomas Grys co-founded Cactus Bio to create the test, which could be available by late 2025. The goal is faster, more accurate diagnosis to reduce misdiagnosis, unnecessary antibiotics and delayed treatment.



ASU-led project brings **internet connection to thousands in Arizona**

ASU is leading a \$34.6 million, five-year effort to expand internet access and digital skills training across underserved areas of Maricopa County. The Maricopa County Broadband Initiative — the largest university-led project of its kind in the nation — has laid 80 miles of fiber, distributed nearly 10,000 devices and provided over 30,000 hours of digital support. Through partnerships with the Institute for Digital Inclusion Acceleration and Sun Corridor Network, ASU is helping communities bridge the digital divide, connect to jobs and services, and gain vital tech skills.





Free speech in focus: 2025 Regents' Cup elevates civil discourse on campus

In a powerful testament to free expression and academic excellence, the University of Arizona claimed the top honor at the 2025 Regents' Cup, the board's annual speech and debate competition that brings together students from the state's three public universities to celebrate civil discourse, democratic engagement and independent thinking.

Held in April at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, the sixth annual Regents' Cup drew a record number of participants, spectators and more than 50 judges from across the nation. This year's theme, "The Government and the People: The Social Contract," challenged students to explore society's evolving civic obligations through Oxford-style debate and storytelling.

The U of A led with standout storytelling performances from Yvonne Davis (first place) and Ananya Singhvi (second place), along with a second-place finish in Oxford debate by Conner Hunting and Desiree Riley.

NAU's Courtney Hoffman and Karli VanderMeersch claimed first place in Oxford debate, and Hayder Alainizi secured third place in storytelling. ASU's debate teams of Jack

Hinrichs and Alina Bozhko, and Abhinav Saxena and Aden Smith, tied for third place.

In total, the board awarded nearly \$100,000 in scholarships: \$15,000 for each first-place winner, \$12,000 for second place and \$5,000 for third place. All other student competitors received \$500 in recognition of their preparation and participation.

Beyond the event, the Regents' Cup reflects the board's leadership in supporting freedom of expression. All three of the state's public universities rank in the top 30 in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings and hold a "green light" rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, making Arizona the only state where all rated, public four-year institutions earn the highest possible mark for protecting student speech.

Much like the Territorial Cup in athletics, the Regents' Cup trophy will now reside on the winning team's campus until next year's event. More than a symbol of victory, the Cup represents a shared commitment by Arizona's public universities to elevate ideas, embrace differences and prepare students not just for careers, but for citizenship. ■



The U of A won the sixth annual Regents' Cup, the board's showcase of free speech and civil discourse among the state's three public universities

Student regents lead **mental health** efforts across university campuses

ABOR's student regents are helping prioritize student mental health and well-being through the board's new Mental Health Workgroup. This action, announced at the board's September meeting, aims to promote student wellness, address basic needs and respond to mental health concerns across the state's public universities.

Through on-campus, in-person listening sessions, Student Regents David Zaragoza and Jadyn Fisher engaged with students, faculty and staff to gather feedback on mental health needs and existing support systems. The regents heard firsthand about the challenges students face — from academic pressures to personal struggles — and the importance of accessible mental health resources. These conversations help foster a supportive educational environment and inform board strategies to improve student well-being.

"As students, we have a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities that come with higher education," said Zaragoza. "We're proud to be part of a system that values student voices and prioritizes mental health."

This effort builds on a larger initiative to prioritize student mental health. Over the past year, the board and student health leaders from Arizona's three public universities participated in the inaugural Student Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community. The 15-month collaborative project is sponsored by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and The Jed Foundation, a national nonprofit focused on protecting

emotional health and preventing suicide among teens and young adults.

Over half of students surveyed in the 2023-24 Best Colleges Student Mental Health Report said their mental health worsened during college. Over three-quarters of college students experience moderate to serious psychological distress.

In partnership with the SHEEO learning community, the board hosted the initiative's first student mental health convening to support the development and implementation of state- and systemwide policy recommendations. Like the listening sessions, these recommendations focus on collaborative strategies and innovative solutions to strengthen institutions' ability to promote and support student mental health. Arizona is one of five states participating in the learning community.

Building on this momentum, Fisher and Zaragoza traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the inaugural National College Attainment Network Leadership Summit and meet with staff members of Arizona's elected leadership. Their conversations focused on student mental health, access to higher education and federal Pell Grant funding.

"We're committed to ensuring that students have access to the resources they need to thrive," said Fisher. "By sharing our experiences and insights with policymakers, we hope to drive positive change and support student success." ■



Board convenes conversations that shape Arizona's future

ABOR continues to play a vital role in convening and participating in statewide conversations that address the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing students, institutions and communities across Arizona. In the past year, ABOR not only facilitated these critical conversations but also lent its voice and leadership, reinforcing the critical position Arizona's public universities play as engines of student success, economic development and community well-being. Recent events underscore ABOR's commitment to convening impactful discussions:

Elevating women's sports

The rapidly growing popularity of women's sports and the important role Arizona's public universities are playing in that growth has been a recurring theme in conversations led by ABOR throughout the year. In discussions held at events across the state, including the Arizona Chamber of Commerce's Game Changers Sports Summit and the Phoenix Business Journal's annual Business of Sports summit, Regent Jessica Pacheco emphasized how increased visibility, investment and community engagement are creating new opportunities for female athletes and enhancing the reputation of the state's public institutions. "Arizona's public universities have been at the forefront of women's sports for decades," noted Regent Pacheco. "I'm confident (they) will continue to drive engagement in women's sports and leverage this success for greater impact across college sports and the state of Arizona."

Advancing Arizona's financial future

In partnership with the Arizona Fund Managers Association, ABOR participated in a forum focused on how Arizona's public universities are fueling the state's economy through research, innovation and workforce development. The event, LIFT AZ 2025, brought together university leaders, investment professionals

and entrepreneurs to explore how academic programs are being aligned with the needs of Arizona's fastest-growing sectors, from health care and engineering to emerging technologies. Through its engagement in this dialogue, ABOR emphasized the critical role of higher education in preparing a skilled workforce and supporting the state's long-term economic competitiveness.

Inspiring leadership through GRIT

ABOR hosted a panel discussion titled, "GRIT: A conversation on leadership, resilience and perseverance." The conversation explored the mindset required to lead with purpose, overcome adversity and inspire others both on the field and in the community. Moderated by Regent Pacheco, the panel featured ASU Head Football Coach Kenny Dillingham, Pastor Warren Stewart and filmmaker and advocate Bill Way. The event served as a reminder that Arizona's public universities are not only academic institutions but also incubators for the next generation of leaders who will shape the future of their communities and the state.

Engaging Latino leaders

The board hosted intimate convenings across the state to bring the board together with Latino leaders and

stakeholders, fostering meaningful dialogue and exploring opportunities for collaboration. These gatherings created space for candid conversations, strengthened relationships and opened the door to new partnerships. In total, more than 100 guests participated in these events, contributing to a strong foundation for continued engagement. ■



ASU football coach Kenny Dillingham, Pastor Warren Stewart and Oscar-nominated producer Bill Way shared stories of failure and success



Regent Brewster emceed the Regents’ Cup Storytellers Showcase where students shared powerful narratives on The Social Contract

ABOR, Phoenix Art Museum host inaugural Regents’ Cup Storytellers Showcase

Storytelling competitors from the 2025 Regents’ Cup took center stage at the Phoenix Art Museum in May during the inaugural Regents’ Cup Storytellers Showcase, presented by the board and the museum as part of its May First Friday festivities.

ABOR hosted a reception at the museum in conjunction with the showcase, offering attendees a chance to connect and celebrate the power of storytelling. The event was emceed by Regent Gregg Brewster, whose leadership and presence helped set the tone for an inspiring evening.

Students from ASU, NAU and the U of A offered the Phoenix community a compelling glimpse into how Arizona’s public universities are championing civic dialogue and encouraging constructive debate.

Attendees were treated to six exceptional stories from students Omar Aljoubouriy (ASU), Yvonne Davis (U of A), Niki Meyari (ASU), Charis Hayward (NAU), Ben Ash (ASU) and Ananya Singvhi (U of A). With commanding presence, each storyteller delivered heartfelt accounts of resilience — exploring personal experiences, historical reflections and forward-thinking ideas.

Each story — distinct yet interconnected — reinforced the importance of free speech, expression and engagement in shaping a more informed and active citizenry. ■

Arizona’s public universities set national standard for free speech

Arizona’s three public universities were ranked in the top 11% nationally in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. The rankings, produced in partnership with College Pulse, reflect input from nearly 60,000 college students across the country.

The universities also each have a “green light” rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression – its highest rating -- making Arizona the only state where all rated, public four-year institutions earn the highest possible mark for protecting student speech.

These recognitions highlight the board’s and universities’ commitment to fostering a learning environment where diverse perspectives and intellectual freedom can thrive. ■

Freedom of expression - a core value in Arizona higher education

Arizona’s public universities remain steadfast in their commitment to intellectual freedom and the open exchange of ideas. In the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression’s 2025 College Free Speech Rankings, ASU ranked No. 14 nationally, NAU No. 28, and the U of A No. 25 out of 251 U.S. colleges and universities. Protecting free speech and intellectual freedom is a bedrock principle at Arizona’s public universities, which continue to encourage and protect all lawful speech on campus. ■

Rankings




Universities earn global recognition

Arizona’s public universities are consistently ranked nationally and internationally for excellence in higher education through academics, innovation, stewardship and research. Recognition for Arizona’s institutional excellence includes:

Arizona State University

-  **No. 1 in the U.S.** for innovation for the 10th year in a row
-  **Leads the U.S.** for impact with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
-  **Top-ranked** university for graduate employability

Northern Arizona University

-  **Best** nursing schools (BSN and RN-to-BSN Programs)
-  **Best** online business degrees – bachelor’s and master’s
-  **Best** online social work degree – bachelor’s

University of Arizona

-  **Top 0.5%** of world universities, **top 50** in the U.S. in Center for World University Rankings
-  **No. 4** globally and **No. 2** among U.S. public universities in space sciences
-  **Top 5** universities for service members by the Military Times



TRIF drives innovation at Arizona's public universities

The Technology and Research Initiative Fund, as known as TRIF, fuels research and innovation at Arizona's public universities, driving scientific discoveries, boosting the state's economy and creating opportunities for residents to thrive. Administered by the Arizona Board of Regents, this taxpayer-supported fund, allocated \$149.8 million in fiscal year 2025 to Regents' Grants, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona to support projects in health, national security, sustainability and more.

TRIF investments generated nearly \$1 billion in outside related sponsored project funding, launched 13 startups and trained thousands of students in 2025. TRIF ensures Arizona's public universities strengthen communities from rural towns to urban centers, building a prosperous future for all.

Dozens of projects were funded through TRIF; examples include:

Arizona State University

TRIF funds are helping Biodesign Institute researchers, in conjunction with Mayo Clinic, develop a rapid test for Valley Fever, a fungal infection that affects 3% of people in the Southwest, including many Arizonans.

Northern Arizona University

The newly designated R1 research university leveraged TRIF to create an open-source exoskeleton platform as a community resource to enable and accelerate the development of new next-generation exoskeleton devices that assist and enhance human mobility.

University of Arizona

TRIF contributed to the U of A's record \$1 billion in research activity, including a collaboration with the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality, Las Aguas and Sunnyside Unified School District that deployed air quality sensors, providing critical data for under-resourced communities. ■

The board's promise to Arizona

Increase postsecondary access
and attainment for Arizona students;
to seek solutions to societal challenges;
and to do both while increasing
quality, affordability and efficiency.

Arizona Board of Regents
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