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EDUCATION

They get accepted to college in Arizona before they apply. How does that work?



Daniel Gonzalez
Arizona Republic

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5 Photos

VIEW FULL GALLERY

Portraits of ASU students Paula and Lucia Arellano

Take a peek at the portraits of Arizona State University students Paula and Lucia Arellano.

It's that time of year when college-bound high school seniors anxiously wait to find out what universities or colleges have accepted them.

But nearly 11,000 high school students in Arizona didn't have to wait. They received letters telling them they had been accepted to attend one or more of Arizona's three state universities next fall — before they officially applied.

Traditionally, high school students apply to universities first and then wait for an answer. But sending out acceptance letters to high school students who meet minimum standards before they apply turns that practice on its head.

The early acceptance letters are part of an expanding effort in Arizona and [other states](#) to get more students to attend college after high school at a time when

We're always working to improve your experience. [Let us know what](#)

college and universities are battling to shore up enrollments and businesses are clamoring for more workers with higher education.

The letter program is officially called the Personalized Admissions Project. It was launched in 2021-2022 school year by Arizona State University. The university sent acceptance letters to 1,453 students in the Phoenix Union High School District who met ASU's admission standards.



Palm Walk at Arizona State University campus in Tempe. Yongyuan, Getty Images/iStockphoto

The program has since been expanded to include Arizona's two other public universities, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University, and to high schools across the state.

This year, 10,942 students attending high schools in more than two dozen districts received letters. That is a 653% increase from two years ago and a 51% increase from the previous year, when 7,269 students in 12 districts received letters.

Of the nearly 11,000 students who received letters this year, about 43% are white, 43% are Latino, 5% are Asian, 4% are Black, and 2% are Indigenous. About 41% qualified for free or reduced lunch while in high school, an indication they come from low-income households, according to data provided by the ASU Helios Decision Center for Educational Excellence.


"These letters minimize barriers to ensure students across the state are aware that they have opportunities to learn and grow in college," said Emily Ross, the assistant vice president at the University of Arizona who oversees enrollment.


By streamlining the application process, administrators hope to remove a key barrier in hopes of attracting more students, especially first-generation students — students whose parents don't have college degrees — and students of color, said Joseph O'Reilly.

O'Reilly is the director of the ASU Helios Decision Center for Educational Excellence, a partnership between Arizona State University and Helios Education Foundation. The ASU Helios Decision Center compiles data from school districts

to determine which students qualify to receive the acceptance letters and administers the program.

Version 1 for students who meet college admission requirements; Spanish translation on the back; logo & signature inserted for each district





*****AUTO**SCH 5-DIGIT 12345
 <<FirstName>> <<LastName>>
 <<Street Address>>
 <<City>>, <<State>> <<ZIP10>>


<<Date>>


Dear <<FirstName>> and family,


Arizona State University would like to congratulate you on your hard work and initiative throughout high school. We are excited to tell you:

- You are accepted to ASU. Keep up the great work to keep this admission status.
- There will be no fee to complete the application if you meet some simple requirements.
- You will receive a financial aid package and may be eligible for one of our tuition-free programs.

ASU is here to help you stay on track for admission throughout your senior year and provide you with the resources you need to succeed. We want you to be a Sun Devil, and together we can make that happen!

 **Accept ASU's conditional offer of admittance.**
 Now that you are conditionally admitted to ASU, you need to complete the required forms to accept our offer. **Apply by Nov. 1** so you can get your official decision early and be among the first in line for financial aid. This will also give you access to our scholarship portal, which opened Sept. 1, to determine how much aid you will receive.
asu.edu/apply


 **You might be eligible for an application fee waiver.**
 If you are eligible for an application fee waiver, you will answer a question and select the option that best fits your needs to determine your eligibility.


 **ASU tuition coverage programs.**
 You have shown you have the ability to succeed at ASU, so we will do our best to make sure money is not a barrier to you becoming a Sun Devil. You are likely to receive significant financial aid, so start the admission process now to determine how much you will receive. Learn more about the **Arizona Promise Program** and the **Obama Scholars Program**, both part of the ASU Advantage Program that makes low-cost attendance possible.
students.asu.edu/financialaid/types/special

You can be successful at ASU, and we want you to join us as part of the class of 2028. If you have any questions or are looking for more ways you can prepare for college, stop by your school counselor's office or connect with your personal ASU admission representative at asu.edu/findmyrep.

Welcome, future Sun Devil!

Sincerely,


Andi Fourlis
 Superintendent of Schools
 Mesa Public Schools


Matt López
 Deputy Vice President, Academic Enterprise Enrollment
 Executive Director, Admission Services

Undergraduate campus enrollment in general has remained level or increased slightly over the past five years at all three universities, enrollment data provided by ASU, UA and NAU shows.

"Our goal was to get students who wouldn't otherwise consider going, who are prepared, and in many cases that is low-income and or Latino students" and other students of color, O'Reilly said.

A growing state demands more educated workers

Arizona needs more college-educated workers to meet the needs of employers, which often recruit college educated workers from other states because Arizona has a shortage of college-educated workers, said Luke Tate, managing director of ASU's Office of Applied Innovation.

The shortage is actually getting larger, Tate said, because the state's economy is growing but the state is not producing enough college-educated workers to keep up, Tate said. That is due in part because Arizona's high school graduate rate and college-going rate are lower than the national average by 10 and 14 percentage points respectively, according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics.

By 2030, 28% of the jobs in Arizona will require a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the Arizona Board of Regents, citing federal labor data.

Businesses aren't the only ones that benefit from producing more college-educated workers, Tate said. College-educated workers are more likely to earn higher wages and therefore pay more in taxes. They are also less likely to be unemployed than those with only a high school degree, according to the [Board of Regents](#).

The admission letters program is intended to help raise the number of high school students who attend college and graduate, Tate said. In addition to acceptance letters, the universities also send letters to seniors who are on the cusp of meeting admission standards. Letters are also sent to high school sophomores and juniors letting them know if they are on track to be admitted to one of the state's universities.

"This underscores our commitment to students in Arizona and NAU's determination to expand access to more students than ever before," said Anika Olsen, NAU's vice president of enrollment management.

Twin letters

So far, the efforts have produced modest results.

Of the 7,269 students who received letters in the 2022-2023 school year, 33% applied and were formally admitted, but only 20% actually appeared on campus for freshman year, down from 28% the 2021-2022 academic year when the program was limited to just ASU, according to ASU Helios Decision Center data.



Arizona State University students Paula and Lucia Arellano on Feb. 29, 2024 in Tempe. *Rob Schumacher/Arizona Republic*

Twins Paula and Lucia Arellano received the letters in the spring of 2023 while they were seniors at Kofa High School in Yuma. They are the children of farmworkers from Mexico.

The letter notified them they had already been accepted to ASU contingent on finishing their senior year because they had completed all the required courses in high school and had a GPA of 3.0 or above. (Both had 3.7 GPAs.)

"I felt relieved," Paula Arellano said, "because then I didn't have to worry" about applying and waiting to be accepted. "I also felt proud."

"It was a big weight off my shoulders and made me feel a little bit more relaxed and focussed more on my senior year of high school," Paula said.

At the time, Lucia was planning to continue taking courses after high school at Arizona Western College, a community college in Yuma, and then transfer to a four-year university.

The letter prompted her instead to apply to ASU. She decided to enroll after being awarded an Obama scholarship, which covers the entire cost of a four-year degree, based on her high academic achievement in high school.

Receiving the letter "made me realize that I had more options than just going to community college down in Yuma," Lucia said.

Paula also was awarded an Obama scholarship.

Paula is now studying animation in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts with the goal of working for Pixar or some other animation studio in Hollywood. Lucia is studying business law in the W.P. Carey School of Business with the goal of becoming a lawyer.



Arizona State University student Paula Arellano on Feb. 29, 2024 in Tempe. *Rob Schumacher/Arizona Republic*



Arizona State University student Lucia Arellano on Feb. 29, 2024 in Tempe. *Rob Schumacher/Arizona Republic*

DIG DEEPER

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Latinos key to initiative's success

Arizona wants 60% of the working age population to have a two-year or four-year college degree or other form of higher education by 2030. But the current number is only at 48%, according to Education Forward Arizona, which tracks the data.

That goal can't be reached unless the state increases the number of Latinos who get college degrees, considering they make up a growing share of the state's working-age population but lag in high school graduation and college-going rates, said Paul Luna, president and CEO of Helios Education Foundation.

The letter program is intended to increase college attainment rates in Arizona by streamlining the application process. That can be a barrier, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"What this really does is it eliminates a lot of those historical barriers that have made it difficult for low-income, first-generation college students to find their way from high school into that university environment," Luna said.

More examples of acceptance letters from Arizona universities

Version for students who are close to meeting college admission requirements; Spanish translation on the back; logo & signature inserted for each district



*****AUTO**SCH 5-DIGIT 12345
<<FirstName>> <<LastName>>
<<Street Address>>
<<City>>, <<State>> <<ZIP10>>

<<Date>>

Dear <<FirstName>> and family,

In partnership with the Winslow High School, Arizona State University is here to help you take the next steps toward finishing high school strong and provide you with the resources and support you need to succeed. You are on your way to completing all 16 of ASU's core competencies by the end of your senior year! If you complete these simple requirements and maintain a minimum GPA of 3.00 in your courses, you can be admitted to the university. To learn more about the core competencies for admission, visit admission.asu.edu/apply/first-year/admission.

As you continue your senior year, we encourage you to take these important steps to prepare for admission:



Meet with your high school counselor.

Set up an appointment with your school counselor to make sure you're taking the right courses during your senior year so you meet ASU's admission requirements.



Apply now

ASU's application is now open. You can apply online with ASU's application for admission. Check out the admission requirements, and remember that SAT and ACT scores are not required to be admitted to the university.

asu.edu/apply



You might be eligible for an application fee waiver.

If you are eligible for an application fee waiver, you will answer a question and select the option that best fits your needs to determine your eligibility.



ASU tuition coverage programs.

You have shown you have the ability to succeed at ASU, so we will do our best to make sure money is not a barrier to you becoming a Sun Devil. You are likely to receive significant financial aid, so start the admission process now to determine how much you will receive. Learn more about the **Arizona Promise Program** and the **Obama Scholars Program**, both part of the ASU Advantage Program that makes low-cost attendance possible.

students.asu.edu/financialaid/types/special

If you have any questions or are looking for more ways you can prepare for college, stop by your school counselor's office or connect with your personal ASU admission representative at asu.edu/findmyrep.

Sincerely,

Sal Hernandez
Superintendent
Winslow High School

Matt López
Deputy Vice President, Academic Enterprise Enrollment
Executive Director, Admission Services

Students who meet or who are close to meeting college admission requirements receive this letter + generic flyer; logo & signature inserted for each district



Family of <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>
 <<Address Line 1>>
 <<City>>, <<State>> <<ZIP Code>>

Dear <<First Name>> and Family,

Northern Arizona University would like to congratulate you on your hard work and dedication throughout high school. We have great news to share:

- **You are admitted to NAU** if you stay on track and maintain a **2.75 core GPA**, and will be considered for admission
- **at a 2.5 core GPA.**
- **Your application fee has been waived**, allowing you to apply for admission at no cost.
- **You likely qualify for financial aid and scholarships.**

NAU is here to help you stay on track for admission and provide the resources you need to succeed. You have already shown that you can be successful as a Lumberjack—now, let's build your future, together!



Apply for admission.

Now that you're on track for admission at NAU, make sure to complete your application as soon as possible and begin your next steps to enrollment. nau.edu/apply



Access your full potential.

Money should never be an obstacle to reaching your academic goals. **Access2Excellence** ensures an affordable pathway to a college education for every Arizona student, including students from Arizona's 22 recognized tribes. Learn more about how NAU is increasing access to higher education: nau.edu/A2E.



Learn more about financial aid.

There is a wide variety of financial aid available at NAU to help you increase the value of your university experience: nau.edu/financial. The first step to receiving financial aid is to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) when it becomes available at fafsa.gov. If you are ineligible to complete the FAFSA, please use the CSS Profile for financial aid. Visit cssprofile.collegeboard.org.



Schedule a visit.

The best way to get a feel for college life and see if NAU might be the right school for you is to visit our beautiful campus. If you can't make it here in person, our online virtual tour is the next best thing! nau.edu/visit

We think you'd be a great fit for NAU's class of 2028. Start your application today! If you have any questions or for more ways to prepare for college, stop by your school counselor's office or connect with your personal NAU admissions officer by visiting nau.edu/findmyrep.

Welcome to the Lumberjack family!

Sincerely,

Chad Eickhoff
 Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management
 Northern Arizona University

Amy McGrath
 Managing Director
 ASU Prep

Page 1 if student is close to meeting college admission requirements



<<Student First>> <<Student Last>> and Family
1234 Mailing Address St
City, AZ 12345

<<Date>>

Dear <<Student First>>,

You have an exciting future ahead of you, and the University of Arizona wants to be part of it. As one of the nation's top public research universities, Arizona offers amazing opportunities to achieve your fullest potential.

We encourage you to apply for admission and connect with our team to learn more about how you can succeed as an Arizona Wildcat.

For information on our admissions requirements, head to arizona.edu/admissions/resources/high-school-competency.

Here's what else you can do this year to help you on your journey to becoming an Arizona Wildcat.

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Your first step is to complete a short online form and we'll follow up with instructions for submitting your application. Within your application, you will have the option to request a fee waiver to cover the cost of the application fee, if needed. The sooner you complete this step, the better! Be sure to submit your admissions application by **December 1**.

go.arizona.edu/helios

LEARN ABOUT FINANCIAL AID

When you apply, you'll automatically be considered for our merit-based scholarships. But you'll also have a variety of additional ways to help fund your education. At Arizona, nine out of ten students receive financial aid, and our Office of Scholarships and Financial aid is ready to help you understand your options.

financialaid.arizona.edu

FILE YOUR FAFSA

The best way to maximize your financial aid options is to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by our priority filing date of **April 1**.

studentaid.gov

Use **Arizona school code: 001083**

The FAFSA will be open by January 1.

For more information on completing your FAFSA, visit

financialaid.arizona.edu/apply-for-aid

VISIT US IN PERSON

Students fall in love with our main campus in sunny Tucson because it's close enough for easy visits home while still giving you a dream college experience. Plan your visit today.

arizona.edu/visit

As you think about your future, I hope that you will consider calling the University of Arizona home. I'm confident it will be one of the best decisions you'll ever make. I hope to welcome you to campus as part of our incoming class very soon.

Already submitted your application? Your official decision is soon headed your way!

Bear Down!

Kasey Urquidez
Chief Enrollment Officer
Vice President, Enrollment Management
Dean, Undergraduate Admissions
The University of Arizona

**SCAN THIS CODE
TO SUBMIT
YOUR APPLICATION!**



Page 1 if student meets college admission requirements



<<Student First>> <<Student Last>> and Family
1234 Mailing Address St
City, AZ 12345

<<Date>>

Dear <<Student First>>,

You have an exciting future ahead of you, and the University of Arizona wants to be part of it. As one of the nation's top public research universities, Arizona offers amazing opportunities to achieve your biggest, boldest goals.

Thanks to your hard work in high school, **we're pleased to offer you admission to the University of Arizona** pending grade verification and formal application review. Here are the steps to make your admission as a Wildcat official:

FINALIZE YOUR ADMISSION

All you need to do is complete a short online form and we'll follow up with instructions for submitting your application. Within your application, you will have the option to request a fee waiver to cover the cost of the application fee, if needed. The sooner you complete this step, the better! Be sure to submit your admissions application by **December 1**.

go.arizona.edu/helios

FILE YOUR FAFSA

The best way to maximize your financial aid options is to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by our priority filing date of **April 1**.

studentaid.gov
Use **Arizona school code: 001083**

The FAFSA will be open by January 1.
For more information on completing your FAFSA, visit financialaid.arizona.edu/apply-for-aid

LEARN ABOUT WILDCAT TUITION AWARDS

When you apply, you'll automatically be considered for our Wildcat Tuition Awards. These scholarships of up to \$12,500 are awarded based on your unweighted core GPA through your sixth semester of high school.

go.arizona.edu/merit-aid

VISIT US IN PERSON

Students fall in love with our main campus in sunny Tucson because it's close enough to home for easy visits while still giving you a dream college experience. Plan your visit today.

arizona.edu/visit

As you think about your future, I hope that you will consider calling the University of Arizona home. I'm confident it will be one of the best decisions you'll ever make. I hope to welcome you to campus as part of our incoming class in fall 2024.

Already submitted your application? Your official letter with important information on next steps is headed your way!

Bear Down!

Kasey Urquidez
Chief Enrollment Officer
Vice President, Enrollment Management
Dean, Undergraduate Admissions
The University of Arizona

**SCAN THIS CODE
TO FINALIZE
YOUR ADMISSION!**



Reach the reporter at daniel.gonzalez@arizonarepublic.com.





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