

# asu news [business, culture & affairs]

August 19, 2015

## Non-traditional student's life a lesson to others

Posted: August 19, 2015

**Editor's note:** This story is part of our back-to-school spotlight on notable incoming students. The series will run during the first two weeks of the fall semester. Read our other profiles [here](#).

Cindy Wong had a lot of obstacles to overcome as a youth – some that have taken decades to reconcile.

Illiteracy, domestic violence and substance abuse were but a few of the issues she has had to tackle.

“I know what it’s like to live in poverty, shame and enduring major struggles at home,” Wong said. “I also know that I can help students in the same situation today and give them hope. That’s why I want to teach.”

The 36-year-old Wong, who comes to ASU this fall as a transfer student from Mesa Community College with a 4.0 GPA, will major in elementary education with a focus on bilingual education/English as a second language at ASU’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. She is the recipient of the Emma May Patton VanBockern Scholarship, which was established by private support to provide financial assistance to students over the age of 30.

The scholarship will enable Wong to not only attend ASU, but also provide her with a full year of student teaching.

“It’s one of the reasons why I chose ASU,” Wong said. “I’ll not only get the tools to teach but gain a tremendous amount of experience.”

The graduate of North High in Phoenix said she was “lost” during her teen and early adult years as a result of a tumultuous childhood.

“My mother was illiterate while my father had drug and alcohol issues,” Wong said of her parents, who were Mexican immigrants. “There was a lot of chaos and domestic violence in our house. Cops were often called, and I was very tormented inside. There was really no one around to help me, and I had to figure a lot of things out for myself.”



Cindy Wong is taking a non-traditional approach to earning a college degree. After a career as a paralegal, and taking time off for her two daughters, Raven (second from right), 10, and Sofia, 8, she's

Wong's personal turmoil caused her to develop bulimia as a teen, which carried over into her adult years after she graduated high school in 1997. She worked at a big-box retail store for several years, barely making ends meet when she had a lightbulb moment: "Education was the only way I was going to lift myself out of this rut."

So she moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and enrolled in Dona Ana Branch Community College, where she eventually received her associate of arts degree. After 12 years working as a paralegal, she decided it was time to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher.

"The time had come where I felt like I wanted to do something that made a difference," Wong said. "I realized I could make a difference in young people's lives through teaching."

In 2013 she attended Mesa Community College, where she completed an honors project of creating a STEM-based demonstration for a kindergarten class called "Earthquake in the Classroom," which teaches concepts of civil engineering. She also taught "Music Masterpiece" to second- and fourth-grade students, introducing them to such classical musical artists as Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Frederic Chopin.

Wong's goal, after she graduates in 2017, is to improve the quality of education for all students regardless of socioeconomic class or background.

"I want to be an example for my own kids and also for the children in the classroom whose parents may not have an education."

Marshall Terrill, [Marshall.Terrill@asu.edu](mailto:Marshall.Terrill@asu.edu)  
480-727-5176  
ASU News