

# Getting there



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there

# Let ATSU light your way

A.T. Still University of Health Sciences (ATSU) is deeply committed to an educational and collaborative environment embracing cultural proficiency. Students striving to become the best healthcare professionals possible must understand and embrace society's diversity. This is also true for ATSU's faculty and staff.

ATSU is the founding institution of osteopathic healthcare, established in 1892 by Andrew Taylor Still, DO. As a leading health sciences university, ATSU is comprised of three campuses (Kirksville, Missouri; Mesa, Arizona; and Santa Maria, California) on more than 200 acres with seven prestigious schools.

# More than an idea

“Getting there” is more than an idea at ATSU! The journey for most prospective health professions students begins at their earliest recognition of career opportunities. For others, a career in healthcare was sparked by a moment of enlightenment; they were either inspired by a health professional delivering care to someone close to them, or their own receipt of care. No matter what form of inspiration these young minds succumbed to, a dream of becoming a professional in healthcare was crafted, often with no clear pathway.

If students, particularly those from historically underserved groups, don’t realize early in their K-8 education that these professions exist or don’t believe they are capable of achieving this level of success, they won’t be exposed to learning environments that prepare them effectively. In addition, these health professionals in waiting may be faced with systemic infrastructural barriers that delay or dissuade their pursuit of these goals. Research suggests that having mentors and allies whose life experiences and cultural backgrounds reflect this population improves their chances for succeeding in these fields.

The Getting There series accentuates ATSU’s Dreamline Pathways™ and Graduate Health Professions Scholars (GPS) program by connecting similarly situated mentors and allies for prospective students. The only way graduate health professions schools are going to effectively educate enough healthcare providers reflective of the populations being served, and stem the tide of an aging workforce, is to bring more prospective K-12 students into the healthcare delivery system who are on the right academic trajectory and connected to healthcare providers and educators throughout their dreamline journey.

This booklet contains a few stories of ATSU’s healthcare professions students to show that if they got there, so can others.



## Troy Sena, MS, '24

ATSU-Arizona School of  
Health Sciences alumnus

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Growing up in the Central Valley of California has engrained in me the value of community. The underserved community I grew up in lacks healthcare professionals, and the GPS program not only provided financial support that enabled me to help change that, but also connected me with like-minded individuals who desire to be the change they want to see in their community.

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Diversity Means More  
Than **HUE** at ATSU



# My journey

My story starts in the same place where it continues to thrive today, Fresno, California. Born and raised in California's Central Valley, I always knew that wherever my career took me, I wanted to return to the community where I grew up. That commitment is why, after high school, I chose a different path than many by staying local for my undergraduate studies.

## Go where hope is needed most.

Staying in my community continued to foster my love and desire to reach the underserved populations I lived among. As a city that thrives on agriculture, Fresno and the surrounding areas are designated as health professional shortage areas. This, along with a large Spanish-speaking population, makes it difficult to establish and connect with healthcare providers. When I decided to become a physician assistant, I knew I had to learn Spanish, a language deeply engrained in my community. After college, I took a gap year to travel abroad to Guatemala and study Spanish. There, I stayed with a local Guatemaltecan family and learned what it was like to grow up in Latin America and how the culture impacts their health decisions and family bonding. This experience further cemented my ambition to return to my community and help the underserved community by providing healthcare. Specifically, I wanted to connect with the Spanish-speaking population to give them a voice within the community.

## I did it, and you can too.

This is what lead me to ATSU and the GPS program. The GPS program not only provided financial support that helped me pursue a career as a healthcare professional in an area lacking such roles, but also connected me with like-minded individuals who share a desire to return to their communities, support them, and improve the health of the people they serve. The program gave me the necessary tools to return to my community with a strong voice and leadership qualities to support my underserved community.

Raven Burrell-Williams,  
MSPAS, MPH, PA-C, CPH, '20

ATSU-Arizona School of Health Sciences (ATSU-ASHS) alumna

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My passion is to reduce health disparities for underserved communities. I understand the importance of public health and the social determinants that influence health inequalities. I received my master's in public health with a concentration in maternal and child health, which allowed me to further understand the multifactorial influences of health on minority communities.

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# My journey

Practicing my passion for medicine as a public health physician assistant (PA) professional student was an experiential confirmation when I started my clinical rotation in pediatrics. There were two young girls, ages 8 and 3, whom I was blessed to be the first health provider they saw in a while. The two young patients were recently placed into their grandmother's guardianship because of physical abuse they experienced while living with their mother. The moment I stepped into the room, I felt a spirit of empathy, comfort, and inspiration. The 3-year-old fixated her beautiful brown eyes on me the entire visit. I developed good rapport with the family, and before leaving the room, I received a hug of gratitude from the 3-year-old. At that moment, I realized it was my confirmation from God that I needed to position myself to uplift and allow youth to make their dreams a reality. Representation among healthcare providers who look like the patients they serve plays a significant role in inspiring the next generation.

## Go where hope is needed most.

Following completion of my master's degree, I worked in one of Tampa, Florida's low-income, underserved communities, providing maternal and child health education using evidence-based practice and, most importantly, collaborative community-based practice. As a PA, I specialize in women's health, providing holistic, culturally competent, and collaborative community services to help reduce the high rates of infant and maternal mortality in African American communities. I can further impact communities using multidisciplinary strategies to prevent disease and maintain population health through education, treatment, and empowerment.

## I did it, and you can too.

As a first-generation student from South Central Los Angeles, my career has led me to places beyond what I could imagine. In 2022, I was appointed clinical lead at Wesley Community & Health Centers and assisted with opening two new clinics in Phoenix, Arizona, and on ATSU's Mesa, Arizona, campus. I currently serve as adjunct faculty for ATSU-ASHS, and I was the guest speaker for the PA class of 2027 White Coat Ceremony. From 2022-24, I was the regional director of PA education in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, for ATSU's Central Coast PA program. I have also served as a board member of the Social Mission Alliance since 2024.

## Kristinicole G.

ATSU's College for  
Healthy Communities  
Central Coast Physician  
Assistant (CCPA) program

“Throughout my life, I have found one of my biggest joys is serving others. During my undergraduate career, I worked and volunteered in various underserved communities, as I personally have been in their shoes. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue my dream of becoming a physician assistant (PA). As a practicing PA, I will continue to serve and advocate for patients in underserved communities.”



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# My journey

From a very young age, my desire to pursue a career in healthcare was shaped by my grandfather's battle with Stage IV bladder cancer. As an immigrant from Argentina, he faced immense challenges navigating the healthcare system, including language barriers, limited access, and moments when compassion seemed scarce. This experience drove my early passion to become a healthcare professional who would be an advocate and a resource for patients, especially in underserved communities. Having experienced and overcome numerous adversities, including the passing of my father and being a single parent, I credit all my triumphs to God's grace and guidance, which continue to shape both my purpose and perseverance. Throughout my undergraduate years, I dedicated my time to working and volunteering in underserved communities. These places felt deeply familiar because I once stood in those patients' shoes. Those experiences continued to reaffirm my calling to pursue my career as PA.

## Provide hope for those who need it most.

I plan to return home to Southern California, a region within a state that is tied with Louisiana for the highest poverty rate in the nation when cost of living is taken into account. Behind those statistics are families struggling with limited access to quality healthcare, education, and basic resources. These systemic barriers have long shaped the lives of those in my community, and they are the very reasons I feel called to serve there.

## I did it, and you can too.

While working at City of Hope in California, I began searching for a PA program that truly reflected my values and prioritized compassion, service, and a deep commitment to the underserved. As someone who grew up in an underserved community, I understood firsthand the impact of having a provider who goes the extra mile when you feel like you have nowhere else to turn. ATSU's emphasis on service, diversity, and community engagement mirrored my own lived experience and aspirations. From my very first interaction with faculty and staff, ATSU felt like home - a place where compassion met purpose and everyone shared the same mission to be a light for others and patients. I chose ATSU not only to become a skilled clinician but to grow into a PA who listens deeply, fights for her patients, and delivers care with genuine empathy and heart.

## Joshua A., MS

ATSU's Kirksville College  
of Osteopathic Medicine  
(ATSU-KCOM)  
Doctor of Osteopathic  
Medicine program

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Bridging the gap and caring for medically underserved communities is one of my greatest goals. I've seen how great the need is for dedicated physicians who are willing to serve these populations. The GPS program has not only deepened my understanding of these challenges but also provided the tools, mentorship, and connections to help turn that goal into reality.

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# My journey

The first inspiration to pursue a career in healthcare came during childhood visits to our family physician's office. As a kid, I struggled with recurring respiratory issues, which meant I spent a lot of time sitting beside my mother in a waiting room. Even though I was there because I was sick, I always found myself excited to see the doctor who seemed to have all the answers. When he walked in with a warm smile, he'd listen to my lungs and heart and, within moments, confidently diagnose me with bronchitis. He explained what was happening in my body in a way I could actually understand, describing how the lungs make different sounds when you breathe in and out. What stood out most wasn't just his knowledge, but the comfort and care he gave us felt like being treated by family. That experience planted a seed in me at a young age. I knew I wanted to provide that same sense of reassurance and compassion to others one day. As I grew older, I carried that inspiration with me through school and into college, determined to explore opportunities that would confirm my passion for helping and healing others.

## **Go where hope is needed most.**

My goal is to remain in Missouri, where there is a growing need for physicians who represent and understand the communities they serve. I am committed to providing high-quality, compassionate care to all patients, including the Spanish-speaking population. Language barriers prevent individuals from fully expressing their needs or understanding medical information. I hope to bridge that gap by offering culturally sensitive care, ensuring every patient feels heard, understood, and valued.

## **I did it, and you can too.**

My journey at ATSU began with a master's degree in biomedical sciences, where I learned to appreciate the scientific process and the hard work it takes to succeed in a challenging program. That experience strengthened my determination and helped me stand out to medical schools. What encouraged me to stay at ATSU-KCOM was the faculty's genuine dedication to their students. They did more than just say they wanted to help. They proved it through their actions, guidance, and constant support. I feel truly fortunate to continue my education at ATSU-KCOM and will always be grateful for the opportunity to pursue my dream of becoming a physician.



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For a comprehensive list of our online resources and social media accounts, visit [linktr.ee/atsudiversity](https://linktr.ee/atsudiversity) or scan this QR code.



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## Diversity & Inclusion