

Graduating student turns lifelong passion for urban design into urban planning degree

First-generation graduate and Dean's Medalist Nathaniel Bush distinguished himself through academic excellence, leadership and community service

By Bianca Squicciarini, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2025 graduates](#).

Nathaniel Bush, a first-generation college student from Gilbert, Arizona, will graduate with a bachelor's degree in [urban planning](#) and a minor in [geography](#) from ASU's [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#), where he will be honored as the Dean's Medalist.

This recognition celebrates his exceptional academic achievements, including an impressive 4.22 GPA, and his contributions to the field of urban planning. Beyond his academic success, Bush has been actively involved in campus leadership and community service, further demonstrating his commitment to the field.

Bush has received several prestigious scholarships, including ASU's [New American University Award](#) and the [Dorrance Scholarship](#) Program, which has supported his personal and professional growth. His involvement extends beyond the classroom, where he serves as vice president of the [Student Planning Association](#) after previously holding the role of undergraduate representative.

Bush's commitment to urban planning and community service is further evident through his community volunteer work with [Keep Tempe Beautiful](#) and [Hope for the Homeless](#).

Through his time at ASU, Bush gained invaluable hands-on experience in urban planning through his internship at [Espiritu Loci](#), where he was able to apply what he was learning in the classroom to real-world projects. Through this internship, he honed skills in AutoCAD, engaged with clients in public meetings and expanded his professional network.

As Bush prepares to continue his studies in urban design, he remains dedicated to using his education and experiences to shape future urban spaces.

"I will continue my studies at ASU, earning a master's degree in [urban design](#)," Bush said. "I will also gain more experience as a planner through my internship, applying what I learn in the classroom to real-world situations."

Question: What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: In kindergarten, when everyone was talking about becoming astronauts or doctors, I knew I wanted to be some sort of designer. For most of my life, I thought that would mean architecture. In my junior year of high school, my mom told me about a niche field called urban planning. After doing some research, I discovered that it would allow me to be creative while also utilizing my organizational skills, and I have not looked back since.

Q: What’s something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: During Dr. Jason Kelley's Theory of Urban Design class, I discovered that planning was about more than just policy and regulations, like zoning codes. Learning about the New Urbanist movement fueled my passion, and I quickly fell in love with the aesthetics and placemaking aspects of city design. At the same time, while taking this class, I secured an internship with a local design firm called Espiritu Loci.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I chose to attend Arizona State University because it offered the program I was looking for, was close to home and provided the best financial support. and it provided me with the best scholarship and financial aid package. As the first person in my family to attend and earn a degree from a university, I knew the only way to do so was as a Sun Devil. Forks Up!

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: In the fall semester of 2022, I decided to enroll in Dr. Stacie Foster's personal growth and relationship class. Although it was not a part of a typical planning student's progression plan, I am extremely grateful I took this course, as it taught me about myself and gave me a moment to reflect on the relationships in my life. Though it may sound cliché, the most important lesson was that meaningful change in the world begins with oneself.

Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?

A: Do not be afraid to explore new skills and interests, even if that means taking courses outside of your major map or progression plan.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: The peace and tranquility found in the atrium of the Social Sciences Building was unmatched. I would often go there to escape the heat, work on homework and even

sketch!

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: With \$40 million, I would partner with local nonprofit organizations, such as Hope for the Homeless, to provide our neighbors without homes a place to escape the hot Arizona summers and get back on their feet. As a planner, I want each person to feel like they have a voice in their community and a place to call home each night they rest their eyes.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Nathaniel Bush

Text image(s)

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Drawing by Nathaniel Bush