

ASU Law grad revives a long-paused dream of legal study

By Andrea Marisa Estrada, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

Two decades ago, when Lisa Buckallew stepped away from her banking career to help her husband open their Phoenix law practice, she expected to manage the administrative side of the business. What she didn't expect was to fall in love with the law itself. As she took on more paralegal responsibilities, she became fascinated by how legal principles shape people's lives, protect their rights and influence questions of justice and fairness. But with two young children and a growing practice, her own academic goals had to wait.

Years later, with her children grown and her commitment to the field stronger than ever, Buckallew decided it was time to pursue the legal education she had long envisioned. That path led her to ASU Law's Master of Legal Studies program, where she found a curriculum that aligned perfectly with her work, her aspirations and her goal of becoming a licensed legal paraprofessional. The program didn't just deepen her understanding of the law; it broadened her perspective, strengthened her skills and reinforced her confidence as a legal professional.

Now, as she prepares to graduate this fall, Buckallew is prepared to take the next step in her career, armed with new knowledge, a renewed sense of purpose and a desire to serve clients with even greater clarity and compassion.

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

Answer: I had the opportunity to leave my career in banking about 20 years ago to help my husband open his law practice. I initially focused on administrative tasks but quickly became very intrigued with the legal side of the practice and began taking on paralegal tasks. I became fascinated with the law and how it could be used to help people solve problems, protect their rights and ensure they are treated fairly in the justice system. This was the “aha” moment that made me realize I wanted to pursue a career in law. Raising two toddlers at the time and managing a busy law practice were my priorities, which left little time, though, for academic pursuits. Once my kids graduated from high school, I shifted my focus towards my educational goals and decided to pursue a master's degree in legal studies.

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

A: I began my legal education with the primary goal of broadening my knowledge as a legal professional. What I learned went far beyond that. I gained a much deeper understanding of the historical context of laws and how the law has developed and evolved over time in response to technological, societal, and other changes. This knowledge has also broadened my perspective on how the law affects individuals and its role in shaping issues of fairness, justice and equality.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: While researching law programs, I learned about the Master of Legal Studies program at ASU. I was immediately drawn to this program as it offered a legal paraprofessional track with an emphasis on criminal law. This aligns with my goal to sit for the Arizona LP licensing exam. Once licensed, I will be able to expand my role as a criminal defense paralegal and more directly serve our clients.

Furthermore, the flexibility of this program allowed me to continue working full time while completing it on a part-time basis.

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

A: One of the (many) valuable lessons I learned while at ASU was from Professor Sands, who always encouraged his students to speak with confidence. Preparation is necessary, but equally important is communicating with confidence. This helps convey credibility and trust with your clients and colleagues. I am grateful to have had so many wonderful professors with a wide range of backgrounds, from whom I learned a great deal. It is evident that they are truly invested in the success of their students.

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

A: The best piece of advice I would give to students would be to 1) attend events on campus (or virtually), and 2) utilize TA and professor office hours.

I feel privileged to have had so many unique experiences at ASU Law. Whether observing oral arguments by the Arizona Supreme Court, the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals or the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, or attending a "Free Speech on Campus" panel and "lunch-and-learn" presentations, there are so many different events to enhance your academic experience. Take advantage of these opportunities!

TAs are invaluable resources as they have typically already taken the class you are in and can share insights into good study habits and final exam preparation. Most professors are/were practicing attorneys and have a wealth of practical insights to share with students. I found it very productive to attend office hours with both TAs and professors.

I believe that you truly get out of this program what you put into it. Take advantage of all the resources, experiences and tools available to you, and you will walk away with invaluable knowledge.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I plan to study for and then take the Arizona legal paraprofessional exam while continuing in my current role as a paralegal. I am also considering pursuing a law (JD) degree, so LSAT prep may be in my future as well.

Q: How has this degree helped you in your professional journey?

A: Completing this master's program has equipped me with a stronger legal foundation and a deeper understanding of legal principles, as well as strengthening my legal research and writing skills. It has also given me the knowledge and confidence to sit for the LP exams, which will enable me to provide more direct legal assistance to our clients.

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

A: We are in a digital era where misinformation, disinformation and AI have become rampant. I would use these funds to develop a curriculum for educators to teach digital and media literacy skills. The focus would be on teaching students to learn how to examine the credibility and biases of sources, understand the differences between misinformation, disinformation and "fake news," and differentiate between truth and propaganda. The curriculum could also provide students with tools to learn how to engage in civil and respectful online discourse. This type of curriculum could help reduce some of the negative effects of mis/disinformation online, including the undermining of public health policies, distrust of the democratic process and erosion of trust in journalism and other institutions.

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

Text image(s)



Lisa Buckallew