

Outstanding W. P. Carey grad channels discipline, curiosity into academic excellence

Former Marine Alex Holt builds community, elevates peers and advances his passion for finance at ASU

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

Alex Holt defined his path to graduate school by resilience, discipline and an unwavering commitment to growth.

Before stepping into the classroom, Holt spent four years serving in the Marine Corps as an infantryman and scout sniper, earning four meritorious promotions and leading teams built around precision, accountability and mental toughness.

When he transitioned out of the military, Holt carried those values with him into his academic journey — first at the University of Oklahoma, where he earned his bachelor's degree in finance with special distinction, and now at ASU as a Master of Science in finance student, where he's graduating this December with a 4.0 GPA.

“Along the way, I’ve learned that resilience keeps you moving forward, but it is curiosity that allows you to grow,” says Holt, who credits this stage of his life with teaching him not just how to persevere, but how to remain curious and driven by purpose.

As a student, Holt quickly gained recognition for his leadership, service and dedication to the community. Serving as chairman of the ASU MSF Student Advisory Board, he organized high-engagement events, strengthened relationships between students and faculty, and built sustainable structures to support future cohorts. Outside the classroom, Holt passed two levels of the Chartered Financial Analyst program, attended professional conferences and got involved in the local community.

After seeing firsthand how many small business owners are seeking to transition their businesses to the next generation, Holt plans to combine his leadership and finance experience after graduation to acquire and operate an established small business in the Southwest — offering a thoughtful transition option for an owner looking for a long-term steward.

“A lot of businesses have been founder-run for decades and are looking for a succession opportunity, but they either aren’t a natural fit for or don’t want to sell to private equity, and may not have a child or key employee who wants to run the business,” Holt says. “Since the business is typically their life’s work, they want to ensure its continuity with new leadership that will carry it forward and preserve their legacy. This work aligns well with my skills, experiences and professional goals, and gives me the opportunity every day to lead people, solve problems and make investment decisions.”

Here, he shares more about his college journey.

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

Answer: After my first economics and financial accounting courses as an undergrad, I realized how much I enjoyed thinking about how businesses actually work — as systems of people, processes and decisions that all show up in the numbers. As I got further into business school and work, I also saw how much of it comes down to people, and that the best outcomes happen when a team trusts one another and is aligned around a shared mission.

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

A: My perspective shifted at ASU because I was learning inside a large research university set in a fast-growing metro area. Arizona and Phoenix, in particular, are attracting talent and capital, and seeing that up close reshaped my sense of scale and possibility. It taught me that opportunity is as much about place and network as it is about ideas.

Q: Why did you choose to study at ASU?

A: I was looking to move back West, where a lot of my personal community lives, to go back to school to focus on the Chartered Financial Analyst program and develop other relevant skills. I chose W. P. Carey for its unique third-semester option, which blends CFA finance curriculum with computer science coursework. I had a lot of questions about finance but needed the technical tool kit to explore them. Learning to use AI, Python, SQL and other technologies gave me the ability to test ideas and get the answers I was looking for.

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

A: Associate Professor of finance [Seth Pruitt](#)’s quantitative methods courses were pivotal. They were my first deep dive into Python and statistical analysis, and became the foundation for everything that followed. That experience made data a primary tool in how I think and work.

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

A: Don't just complete assignments — apply your skills to problems you genuinely care about. The moment I started building my own projects, the technology and analytics really clicked. You retain far more when the work ties to your curiosity and ambitions.

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

A: I loved the courtyard in front of the McCord Hall classrooms. It was where I spent most of my time between classes or on breaks with my classmates, and it became a hub for quick conversations that often turned into real friendships and collaborations.

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

A: I'd fund a nonprofit transition program to support veterans during their first few years back in civilian life. That window is crucial for veterans' long-term well-being, affecting their health, education, careers, families and communities. Through conversations with my peers and involvement with other organizations, I've seen how challenging it can be to go from having purpose, leadership and community in fast-paced, high-risk environments to navigating college classrooms, office jobs and everyday life.

I was fortunate to be both a mentee and a mentor in an organization called Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) during my undergraduate studies, where I saw these challenges up close. I'd use the \$40 million to build a scalable, peer-driven support network that helps veterans find community, understand their benefits, and thrive personally and professionally.

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Main image



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Text image(s)



Alex Holt is graduating this December with a master's degree in finance. Courtesy photo