

# First-generation grad finds purpose in sustainability

**Joslyn Knutson combined an interest in writing, enthusiasm for technology with passion for change**

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

Joslyn Knutson had a lot of different ideas about what she wanted to study.

She was an enthusiastic writer when she was young, fully convinced that she would become an English major and published author. Then, after participating in a robotics competition in high school, she expected to become a technical writer specializing in science or engineering. It was her AP environmental science class, her teacher's realistic optimism about changing the world and collaborating on a school-wide recycling program during her senior year that solidified her path forward.

"Mr. Romero was a great and supportive teacher who introduced his students to the problems in the world, but still gave us hope that something could be done about it if we decided to do that something," Knutson said.

This lesson inspired Knutson to pursue work that positively affects communities and the environment — she said when the time came to select her major at ASU, it was an easy choice.

This December, she is graduating with a [Bachelor of Science in sustainability](#) on the energy, materials and technology track, with a certificate in energy and sustainability through Arizona State University's [School of Sustainability](#), embedded in the [Rob Walton College of Global Futures](#). Additionally, she was selected as the college's Outstanding Undergraduate Student and a recipient of the ASU Moeur Award.

Knutson credits her strong network of faculty, friends and family with helping her succeed at ASU.

"It means a lot that their support helped me get so far in my pursuit of higher education," she said.

"In particular, I want to highlight my brother Jeremy. He has been my role model for a long time. We are both first-generation college students, and I watched him put himself through college while

working full time. He is a proud 2022 graduate of the W. P. Carey School of Business, and because he went here, I was eligible to receive the ASU Alumni Association's Legacy Scholarship."

After graduating, Knutson will continue her education in the School of Sustainability, in the accelerated master's degree program in sustainability solutions.

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

**Answer:** Just as I loved English, I loathed math growing up. I picked up a lot of math topics easily, but I detested the idea of becoming an accountant like my mom always suggested. But life is full of irony, because not only have I entered a STEM field, but my School of Sustainability math professor, [José Lobo](#), actually taught me to love math. I found that I am passionate about sustainability data analytics. I took data analytics courses through the Global Career Accelerator, and now I work with university ranking data as an institutional quality aide in ASU's Office of Institutional Analysis. It's funny how things change.

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

**A:** I have learned important lessons from multiple professors, but there are two in particular I would like to highlight.

From [Milan Shrestha](#), I learned the importance of sustainability's societal impact, specifically how it pertains to the technical. Most of my other courses were focused on my interests in renewable energy and data analysis because I chose a science-oriented degree track, but SOS 320 showed me that I could approach my interests in technology and waste reduction through a societal impact lens. Ultimately, I learned how important it is not to get lost in one aspect of sustainability. Keep your mind open to the complex system of sustainability, because it is all interlinked.

[Kailin Kroetz](#) gave me a different type of revelation. SOS 325 was the most challenging course I've taken to date. I wanted to expand my knowledge in something I was not familiar with, and she was helpful and willing to meet with me as I worked toward improving my scores. From her, I learned that perseverance in learning makes the knowledge you obtain that much more valuable.

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

**A:** Take a long look at everything ASU has to offer. I haven't even discovered everything yet, but keep looking because there are so many gems — collaborative programs like the Global Career Accelerator, campus job opportunities, free amenities for students. No matter who you are or what goals you are working towards, chances are ASU offers something that will help with your health, career trajectory or simply enjoying your college days.

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

**Main image**



Joslyn Knutson, 2025 Outstanding Graduate from the Rob Walton College of Global Futures.  
Courtesy photo

## Gallery





Joslyn Knutson and her brother, Jeremy.



Joslyn Knutson with her team in ASU's Office of Institutional Analysis.



ASU Alumni Legacy Scholars, 2024.





Joslyn Knutson in her ASU graduation regalia.