

School of Public Affairs graduate found his passion in public service

After a 16-year career in local government, Augustus Elliott pursued public policy degree to become a more effective leader

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Augustus Elliott found his dedication to public service almost by accident.

After working as a bartender, he wanted a job with more stability and predictable hours. He found that balance at the municipal transit agency in El Paso, Texas, where he discovered something else: fulfillment from improving systems, engaging with the community and, most of all, helping others.

Elliott, the Spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate from the [School of Public Affairs](#), part of ASU's [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#), is completing his online bachelor's degree in public service and public policy (emergency management and homeland security). He says his decision to pursue a degree is "deeply connected to my professional journey in local government."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Elliott witnessed a number of colleagues retiring or transitioning away from public service due to uncertainty. These rapid personnel changes allowed him to become more involved in his organization's decision-making, workforce coordination, stakeholder communication and policy implementation.

Despite the difficulties, he found the experience motivated him to help others succeed through mentoring, clarifying expectations or ensuring teams were aligned with a shared mission of serving the public. He saw studying public policy as a pathway to learn new strategies for supporting the community.

“At its core, my commitment to public service is rooted in a simple principle: If I am able to make someone’s day easier, provide clarity or contribute to a better system, then I am fulfilling my purpose,” Elliott said. “That perspective continues to drive my work and reinforces why I chose to stay in this field.”

Elliott received the [Jacques Avent Scholarship](#) from the National Forum of Black Public Administrators-Central Arizona Chapter. Read on to learn more about his ASU journey.

Note: Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

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

Answer: I was surprised at how many people have genuinely good ideas yet hesitate to share them because they feel those ideas are not fully developed or polished. Through class discussions and group assignments, I realized many of my peers already have the foundation of impactful solutions. They simply needed the space and encouragement to express them. Not every idea begins as a fully formed concept. Some of the best ideas emerge through conversation, collaboration and refinement over time. This experience shifted my perspective and reinforced the importance of creating environments where people feel comfortable sharing openly.

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

A: I can’t pick one. Assistant Professor [Abigail Henson](#) reinforced the importance of never underestimating anyone’s potential contribution. The experience shaped my approach to leadership and collaboration. Perspective is not limited by experience level; everyone deserves to be heard and taken seriously.

Similarly, professor [Chris Schultz’s](#) approach emphasized the value of open, honest and judgment-free communication. He created an environment where students felt comfortable asking questions, exploring ideas and thinking beyond the immediate scope of the course. What stood out most was his ability to encourage curiosity and deeper learning, often prompting students to explore topics independently. These experiences have influenced how I engage with others professionally, particularly in training and leadership settings.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I wanted to attend an institution that had credibility and demonstrated a commitment to meaningful, forward-thinking work. Students are applying what they learn in ways that contribute to their communities and professions. That aligns with my goal to make a tangible difference.

Q: What are your plans after graduation? Where will you be working?

A: I plan to continue in my current role. There’s still much to learn and contribute. Also, a week after graduation, I will begin the Master of Human Resources and Employment Law degree, which will help me build a deeper understanding of workforce management, policy and organizational leadership.

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

A: I would focus on the social barriers that underlie many of the world's most persistent problems. A significant number of challenges we face, such as inequality, conflict and misunderstanding, are rooted in a lack of awareness, empathy and consideration for others. Too often, individuals fail to recognize how their actions impact others, which contributes to division rather than progress. To address this, I would invest in education, specifically scholarships and study abroad opportunities that expose individuals to diverse cultures, perspectives and lived experiences. By creating opportunities for people to step outside familiar environments, we can foster a deeper understanding of others and encourage more thoughtful, informed decision-making. While the results may not be immediate, the impact would be lasting, as education has the power to shape individuals and generations.

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

Main image



Augustus Elliott, the Spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate from ASU's School of Public Affairs, found his passion in serving others. Courtesy photo