

Advancing in the field of urban planning through applied experiences

ASU honors grad Evan Rao uses classroom knowledge in 3 public-sector internships

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

An Arizona native, Evan Rao is graduating this spring with a Bachelor of Science in [urban planning](#) and a certificate in [geographic information science](#) in Arizona State University's [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#).

Rao, who is also a student in [Barrett, The Honors College](#), is in the [accelerated 4+1 program](#), which allows students to obtain their bachelor's and master's degrees in as little as five years.

During his time at ASU, Rao received the New American University President's Award, RaiseMe scholarship funding for ASU and a city of Tempe scholarship.

He has also been involved in the [ASU Student Planning Association](#) and serves as the first-year representative for the [Master of Urban and Environmental Planning program](#).

Rao also served as a teaching assistant for Barrett's required course The Human Event for two semesters. As a student who had taken the course the previous year, the experience deepened his appreciation for the literature covered in class.

"My experience as a teaching assistant encouraged me to think more critically not only about the class content but the assignments our professor created. When giving students advice on writing their essays, I was able to see the writing process from a different perspective, which I believe has made me a better writer overall," Rao said.

As a planning intern with the [Tempe Community Development Department](#) and a transportation planning intern with the [Scottsdale Transportation and Infrastructure Department](#), he developed a foundation for understanding urban planning practice in the public sector. While classroom learning provided helpful context, his work with the city of Tempe offered his first in-depth experience with typical land-use planning processes in practice.

At the city of Scottsdale, he built on that foundation through transportation planning work, gaining a stronger understanding of how transportation and land-use planning intersect at the city level. Across both roles, he also developed valuable skills in data collection and research, which later assisted in securing his current internship with the [Greater Phoenix Economic Council](#) research and analytics team.

GPEC works to attract businesses to the Phoenix metropolitan area, and Rao supports that mission by gathering socioeconomic data and conducting analyses on operating costs, labor markets and economic impacts. His work helps demonstrate how Phoenix compares economically with other regions, providing information that supports business attraction and regional economic development.

After graduation, Rao will continue at ASU for a final year to complete his Master of Urban and Environmental Planning (MUEP) degree.

Question: What did you learn from your time in the MUEP program so far, what advice would you give to incoming students?

Answer: So far, I have been able to learn a lot more practical research methods as well as theory in my graduate classes, compared to what I have learned in my undergraduate curriculum. This has provided me both with technical skills that have already helped me in my current internship, as well as stronger theoretical underpinnings shaping my approach to a planning career.

I would advise incoming students to be ready for a lot of reading, writing and talking. Some may appreciate the lesser frequency of exams in the graduate classes, but thinking deeply about the concepts learned in class and their implications becomes more and more important.

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

A: My favorite spot on campus has changed over the course of my time at ASU. I enjoyed my experience living in the Barrett dorms my first year, and especially in the Vista Del Sol complex my second year. Now, I would say that I'm a fan of Noble Library for studying, but ASU favorites like the MU (Memorial Union) and the Secret Garden are nice spots to hang out as well.

Q: What are your plans after graduation, what are your career goals?

A: After I graduate my master's program, I obviously really want to work in urban planning, as I'm getting two degrees in it specifically. However, it's a very broad and varied professional field, and I'm currently feeling open to a number of job possibilities. I'm drawn to a public-sector, long-range planning, zoning or community planning job, but I could also see myself working in transportation or for a private company similar to where I intern now.

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

A: A simple piece of advice I would give to those in school, especially those with a lot on their plate, is to be kinder to yourself in terms of academics. It can be very disappointing when you do not finish everything you planned to during a study session or over the course of your week. Life can get in the way of your best-laid plans, especially when you're just getting on your feet as a young adult while pursuing a college degree. As long as you're getting your assignments in on time

and doing quality work, it's totally OK to have slower, incremental progress, so there's no need to be as strict on yourself as you might plan on doing at first.

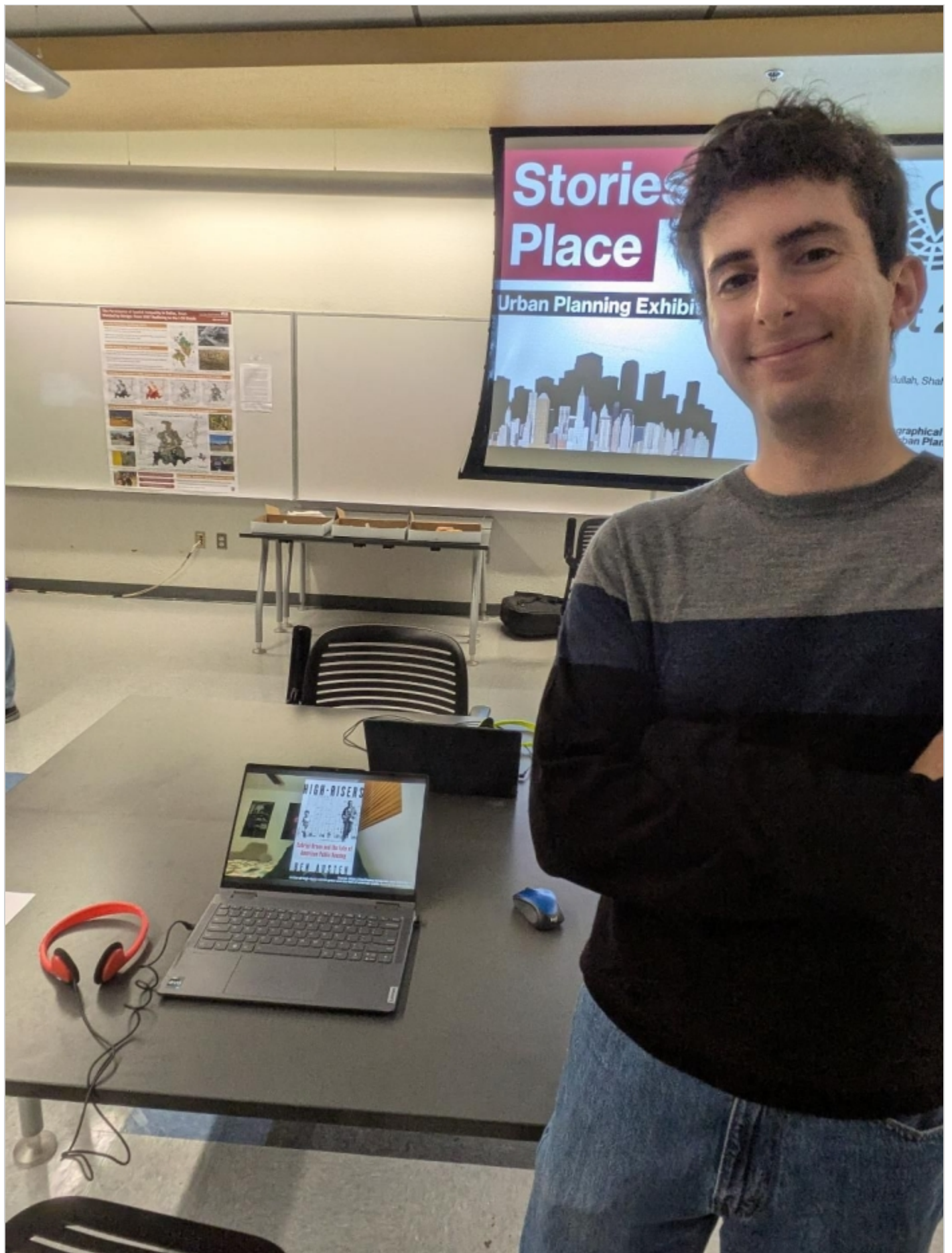
This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Evan Rao presents his Barrett, The Honors College thesis. Photo courtesy of Evan Rao

Text image(s)



Evan Rao presents a video essay he made as a creative project for the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning's [planning history and theory](#) course. Photo courtesy of Evan Rao