

Helping ASU students choose a degree, Outstanding Graduate Markisha Farrier finally found one perfect for her

She created an MLSt program tailored to her goal: Enhancing employees' skills, leadership capabilities and career growth

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

[Markisha Farrier](#) has worked in education for more than 15 years, with student-facing positions at the University of Southern California and, currently, for [Sun Devil Athletics](#) at ASU. She says colleagues have often asked her when she would get a master's degree.

"I would usually respond with something vague, like 'one day' or 'soon,'" Farrier says, "but I had no real intention of pursuing a degree."

Over the years, she says, "I realized my hesitation stemmed from not being entirely sure about my passions, aside from a strong desire to serve people."

Farrier says her position as an Sun Devil Athletics academic coach and coordinator allows her to exercise her favorite expression of that desire: mentorship and professional development, "helping young professionals discover their passions, define their career aspirations and determine their next steps." She was surprised, then, when helping others charted a new path for herself.

One of the most popular majors among the student-athletes Farrier works with is liberal studies. ASU's liberal studies offerings allow a student to build an undergraduate or graduate degree program around their interests. As she assisted students in selecting their majors and learned more about the [Master of Liberal Studies](#) program in the [School of Applied Sciences and Arts](#) in the [College of Integrative Sciences and Arts](#), "I thought, 'This was created for me!'" she says. "The MLSt degree offers the freedom and flexibility to customize my studies and focus on my passions."

That focus is carrying Farrier — being recognized this May as the Outstanding Graduate from the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts — toward her ultimate goal.

"I aspire to become a professional development manager," she says, "designing, implementing and evaluating programs that enhance employees' skills, leadership capabilities and career growth within an organization. I am particularly drawn to this role because it sits at the intersection of training, talent development and organizational strategy."

(Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rFpoXlsYpg>)

That career choice goes deeper than professional aspiration.

"I've realized that my sense of accomplishment is deeply rooted in the strength of my community," Farrier says. "We are not designed to navigate life alone, so always keep in mind that collaboration with others and showing compassion — both to yourself and to those around you — are vital elements that will help you not only endure but thrive in the face of adversity. Together, we can uplift one another and create a network of support that fosters genuine success," she says.

That commitment is reflected in the applied project Farrier carried out as part of her degree.

"My project focuses on career advancement for women of color. I am exploring a sponsorship model, which serves as a form of mentorship, but is specifically aimed at promoting career advancement."

Farrier's research showed her that "women tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored. I wanted to delve deeper into this by specifically addressing the experiences of women of color, as this is particularly relevant to my own career path. My goal is to empower individuals with power and influence to support women of color, helping them not only advance in their careers, but also feel seen, heard and protected in environments where they are often underrepresented."

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—

Markisha Farrier

CISA Outstanding Graduate, '26 MLSt

Farrier appreciates the support she received as an ASU student.

"I was pleasantly surprised by how important it was to rely on my peers, and collaboration played an important role in my academic success," she says. "After each class, I walked away with valuable tips, constructive feedback and a strong support network. This experience not only carried me through my program but also helped me grow as a professional."

Her workplace experience at Sun Devil Athletics has been similar.

"The best part was having a fantastic support system from my managers and close colleagues, which made it much easier to manage my job while finishing my degree. I kept them in the loop about my big projects and deadlines, and they were there for me every step of the way," she says.

She also credits two CISA faculty members who were particularly important to her success.

"In my Advanced Liberal Studies and Possibility course, Associate Teaching Professor [Megan Todd](#) recognized my struggles at the beginning of the program as I tried to understand my identity as a master's-level student. Now that she is my program chair, I am fortunate to call Dr. Todd not just a professor, but a friend," Farrier says.

"In Women and Leadership, Assistant Teaching Professor [Paula Veach](#) expanded on concepts I was previously unfamiliar with, igniting my interest in mentorship and sponsorship. I am grateful to her for pushing me beyond my comfort zone, helping me develop into a strong graduate student."

Now, Farrier draws on both her work and student experiences to counsel student-athletes. Her advice: "Embrace the journey and seek out your tribe. Life is often challenging, and there will be days that test your resilience, presenting obstacles that feel overwhelming. However, it's crucial to take these experiences as opportunities for growth and learning. Surround yourself with the right individuals who can provide support and encouragement during tough times."

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

Main image



ASU spring 2026 graduate Markisha Farrier is being recognized as the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts Outstanding Graduate. She is receiving her Master in Liberal Arts. Photo by Alyssa Thornhill/CISA