

PhD-bound graduate takes pride in multidisciplinary research accomplishments

Brennen Wise is the Department of Physics' Dean's Medalist

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

Phoenix native Brennen Wise is graduating this spring with a degree in biophysics and a minor in statistics. Due to his research impact, he has been named the [Department of Physics'](#) Dean's Medalist.

Wise came to Arizona State University not just because of its proximity to home, but because of its reputation as a leading research institution.

"It's also one of the few schools in the U.S. where one can specifically study biophysics as an undergraduate, and we have one of the largest groups of biophysicists here in the [Center for Biological Physics](#)," Wise said.

In his sophomore year, he got involved with Assistant Professor [Navish Wadhwa's lab](#), where he studied the mechanical behavior of the bacterial flagellar motor. This macromolecular machine propels bacteria by rotating helical flagella. Also a student in [Barrett, The Honors College](#), Wise has been able to apply theories to new research, leading to a manuscript set for submission to a leading biophysics journal.

"Brennen brings rigorous physics training that he is eager to apply to questions in a wide range of biological problems," [Wadhwa](#) said. "He is an excellent communicator who delivers clear and concise presentations and has already won multiple awards."

Wise was also heavily involved in student organizations on campus, such as the [Society of Physics Students](#) and [Scholars of Physical Mathematics](#), and he participated in the [Sundial Physical Sciences Mentoring Program](#) as a mentor to peers.

After graduation, Wise will head to Yale University to begin his PhD in the biochemistry, quantitative biology, biophysics and structural biology track and to continue research within biophysics.

Learn more about Wise's Sun Devil journey below.

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

Answer: I've always been really interested in different types of science, and I guess I've always been interested in the idea of biophysics, but I only really learned about it when I started searching for undergraduate programs.

One moment I can point to is when I was learning about mitosis in high school biology. Biology books usually show the important parts of mitosis, such as the chromosomes and microtubules. However, this didn't match what we had learned about the cell being a crowded environment with many organelles. I was fascinated by how a process so fundamental to life could be controlled and performed precisely in such a complicated system.

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

A: This is unrelated to my major, but I was surprised by a lot of things that we discussed in [The Human Event](#) (a yearlong intensive seminar required of Barrett students). I found it surprising that the themes and ideas on the human condition from these ancient texts paralleled what we see in current media and our own lives. I was especially interested in the Daoist and Buddhist texts that we read. Some of the lessons from these texts have influenced my thinking and how I approach my life.

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

A: My principal investigator, Navish Wadhwa, taught me the most important lessons in my time here at ASU. If I had to choose one lesson as the most important, it would be to take advantage of all of the resources available to you. There are tons of opportunities, such as workshops and classes that are freely available to you at ASU and also through other institutions.

Additionally, there are a lot of things that you can apply for or be nominated for, like conference travel, grants, scholarships and awards. It's worth the effort to apply to these kinds of things even if you think you can't get them.

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

A: My best advice would be to find hobbies outside of school that you are super invested in. It may seem counterintuitive, but I have found that having an extra outlet makes me better at schoolwork. For example, playing piano has been a huge part of my life outside of school.

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

A: I would tackle the problem of education disparity in disadvantaged areas. I believe that education is a basic right, and that equal access to quality education is possible with the resources we have. Specifically, I would want to support teachers in the sciences, especially physics and chemistry, as those are taught less than biology.

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

Main image



Brennen Wise, the Department of Physics' Dean's Medalist, will begin his PhD program at Yale University in the fall after graduation. Photo by Meghan Finnerty/ASU