

MBA grad credits peers for making business personal

W. P. Carey Outstanding Graduate Student reflects on balancing full-time work, academics and community engagement

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

Despite earning dual undergraduate degrees from Arizona State University in 2022, Frankie O'Neill ('22 BA in art history and business) says the W. P. Carey School's "business is personal" motto didn't fully resonate until she joined the [evening MBA program](#) and connected with her classmates.

"They are the most inspiring, empowering and transformative part of this program," O'Neill said. "I have been honored to witness their passion, dedication, professionalism and kindness time and time again."

Named W. P. Carey's spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate Student, O'Neill credits her peers as both inspiration and motivation throughout her academic journey. Throughout her time at W. P. Carey, O'Neill, who lives in Mesa, Arizona, balanced her full-time role as a national marketing programs and operations manager at Meritage Homes with rigorous coursework and extracurricular involvement at the university. She served on the ASU MBA Student Advisory Board and the executive, full-time, evening and online ASU MBA Networking Task Force. She was also co-president of the ASU Evening MBA Women Who Lead Event Organization Committee.

In celebration of her upcoming graduation, we asked O'Neill to reflect on her time at ASU.

Question: What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to pursue an MBA?

Answer: After really getting into my first professional role, it became clear to me quickly that just doing my job and going home wasn't going to be enough. I wanted to lead major projects and help shape corporate strategy, and pursuing an MBA felt like the best way to jump-start me down that path. Even though I had an undergraduate degree in business, I never thought I would find my passion in it. It wasn't until I entered the corporate world that I realized I wanted to build a career in business operations and development. I love solving new problems every day, reimagining systems, and helping people do their jobs better. Returning to ASU for my master's degree was

the first time I could fully connect what I was studying to my life and career goals.

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

A: Almost everything I learned in my courses shifted my perspective in some way — that is the beautiful thing about working and doing your MBA at the same time; everything you study directly connects to the context you're living in every day. If I had to pick one, I think the most eye-opening course for me was ACC 503 Managerial Accounting. Working through different case studies, you really see how complex it is to try to guide an organization to your desired outcome. You have to consider your broader context and think 20 steps ahead to solve problems before they happen.

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

A: I have had so many amazing teachers throughout my time at ASU. If I had to choose one, I would say [Konstandinos Voutsas](#), assistant teaching professor of management and entrepreneurship, who taught an influence and negotiations course. He showed me that advocating for yourself does not have to come at the expense of helping others or giving back to your community. Those ideas are often framed as opposites, but when you are a strong negotiator with a desire to serve others, you really can do good while doing well — to quote the [Carey Code](#).

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: My plan is to do everything I can to keep my learning and growth going. I want to shift my focus to giving back to my community, so I am looking for different ways I can get involved and contribute now that I have more time on my hands. I was recently promoted to my current position at Meritage Homes, so in terms of work, I plan to continue leveraging my MBA learnings to grow in that role. Right now, I am focusing on developing AI enablement initiatives, so my work here, from courses like AI in Business and Leaders Who Matter, has had a huge influence on how I approach those projects.

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

A: Food insecurity in Phoenix. I would partner with local organizations already addressing the issue to help build a network that enables small businesses to establish themselves in food-insecure areas and create a self-sustaining infrastructure of locally owned food outlets. I have incredible admiration for small business owners, so the opportunity to address social issues while supporting local entrepreneurs would mean a lot to me. We need to invest in creating social outcome-focused local economies to rebuild communities.

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Main image



Frankie O'Neill is W. P. Carey's spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate Student. Courtesy photo