

Outstanding Graduate Grace McCurdy finds her degree path under the hood of a car

Hands-on experiences early on and time spent working alongside her father influenced her educational path.

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

Some engineers are shaped in classrooms. Others are shaped in garages, under the hood of a car. For Grace McCurdy, it started with hands-on experiences early on and was influenced by time spent working alongside her father.

McCurdy will be graduating with a bachelor's degree in engineering with a concentration in [automotive systems](#) from [The Polytechnic School](#), part of the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#) at Arizona State University. She was drawn to this major because it's more than just working on cars.

"People often think automotive engineering is just about becoming a mechanic, but it actually involves a wide range of engineering disciplines like systems, electronics, thermodynamics and safety," she says. "It's a very interdisciplinary field that prepares you for much more than just working on your own car."

That perspective came into focus during her senior capstone project with the U.S. Marine Corps. Tasked with improving a tablet mount used in Osprey aircraft cockpits, McCurdy worked to enhance stability and usability in high-vibration conditions. The project blended technical precision with user-centered design, incorporating direct feedback from pilots, which was a valuable experience.

Beyond the lab, she built community as a peer mentor, guiding first-year students through the transition to college. The role sharpened leadership skills and reflected a commitment to helping others succeed.

McCurdy also remembers the late Scott Hillery, former faculty associate in the engineering program, as a meaningful influence on her academic and professional growth at ASU. Hillery brought a real-world perspective to the classroom through his own experiences in the workforce, which helped her better understand the industry and played a major role in shaping her into the engineer she is today.

“His classes were challenging, but they pushed me to develop perseverance, strong attention to detail and the ability to consistently meet deadlines,” she says. “These skills directly contributed to me securing both my internship and my post-graduation job.”

Balancing two jobs while maintaining dean's list recognition for all four years, she also began flight training toward a private pilot license. This showed her ability to manage her academics, work and other personal goals, and maintain a high-level of success, which is an accomplishment she is proud of.

After graduation, McCurdy plans to join the U.S. Air Force as an officer, continuing to build technical expertise and leadership experience before moving into the defense industry.

In celebration of her graduation, we asked McCurdy to share some of her favorite things:

Hobby: Plane spotting

Band: Lynyrd Skynyrd

TV show: "Game of Thrones"

Movie: "War Dogs"

Activity: Snowboarding, wakeboarding and off-roading

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Text image(s)



Grace McCurdy, courtesy photo