

ASU students help improve app that connects student-athletes to families with childcare needs

Sport Sitters gives ASU computer science students hands-on experience building for a live marketplace

By Kelly deVos, ASU News
September 15, 2026

Suhaib Ahmad Siddiqui thought he was helping solve a simple problem.

[Sport Sitters](#), a startup that connects families with college athletes for childcare, needed an easier way to notify athletes when they had been approved to work through the platform.

Siddiqui is an undergraduate computer science student in the [School of Computing and Augmented Intelligence](#), part of the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#) at Arizona State University. He and his teammates were working on the app through their capstone project, and automation seemed like the right fix.

Then the email went out.

Not to one athlete. Not to a small test group. To everyone in the database.

The mistake cost the company about \$70 in extra email charges. More importantly, it showed the students what it means to work for a business on software that people are already using. Sport Sitters was not a mock app built for a grade. It was a live platform for a business with real users, real payments, real babysitters and real families depending on it.

“After that, we realized we were dealing with a lot more than school requirements and grades,” Siddiqui says. “There was money involved, and people’s lives were affected.”

Through the capstone program, led by Fulton Schools Associate Teaching Professor [Steven Osburn](#), students work with industry partners on practical problems. The structure gives companies a way to collaborate with emerging engineers while giving students something difficult to recreate in a classroom: responsibility to stakeholders.

That exchange is what drew Sport Sitters founder Meaghan Franks to the program.

“I realized, wait a minute, we’re right next to this incredible school of engineering with so much talent,” Franks says. “How could I not give these students, who have so much drive and curiosity, the kind of real-world opportunity they can put on their resumes?”

A startup assignment

Franks started Sport Sitters after seeing two problems that could solve each other. Families needed reliable, energetic childcare, and college athletes needed flexible work that could fit around practices, games, travel and changing team schedules.

The company she founded connects families with student-athletes who can provide childcare while also serving as active role models for children. Franks saw how naturally athletes connected with kids through camps, clinics, outreach events and postgame interactions.

“We’re having parents use their phones to get their kids away from phones and screens,” Franks says with a laugh. “It’s bizarre, but that’s what we’re doing. We’re leveraging technology to create time without technology.”

The idea also grew out of the changing landscape of [name, image and likeness](#), or NIL, opportunities. Franks noticed that many NIL deals went to athletes in high-profile sports or to those with large social media followings, while other student-athletes had fewer opportunities.

Sport Sitters offered another model. Athletes could earn income by doing something many already knew how to do well. Show up for kids, keep them engaged and model the value of practice and persistence.

The company has since grown to about 800 registered families and athletes, expanded to five schools and built a waiting list of 32 more. But that growth created new technical needs. Sport Sitters needed help improving its app, strengthening its infrastructure and preparing the platform to serve more families and athletes across more schools.

Last spring, a Fulton Schools capstone team helped rebuild the first version of the Sport Sitters app, rewriting code and adding features for a platform already serving users. Now, the current collaboration continues that work.

Porter Sweet, an informatics major, and Siddiqui joined the current capstone group, which began in June. Their work focuses on automating outreach to athletes and parents to help Sport Sitters better organize and engage its growing user base.

A second group, which began in August, includes computer science undergraduate students Rudheer Reddy Chintakuntla and Dhanush Koyi. They will focus on scalability and mobile app feature development as Sport Sitters prepares to expand beyond its early university markets.

Learning from a live app

For the students, the project requires a different kind of thinking than a typical class assignment.

In a class, the problem is usually defined in advance. The requirements are clear. The deadline arrives. The assignment is submitted. If something goes wrong, the consequences are usually limited to a grade.

Sport Sitters works differently. Students must understand what Franks needs, translate those needs into technical requirements and make changes carefully enough that the platform continues to work for the people using it.

Chintakuntla says that responsibility changes how students approach the work.

“We need to think through everything, check it thoroughly, test it end to end, and stress it so that it doesn’t break,” he says.

That pressure is part of the learning experience. The students are not only practicing coding skills. They are learning how software decisions affect users, business operations and trust.

For Koyi, the project’s technical challenges are part of what makes it valuable. Because the app is still growing, the team is working through development processes that are not yet as formalized as they might be at a larger company. That means students must consider how features move from planning to implementation to testing.

“We have to be involved in every step of getting a new feature ready, from planning it to testing it,” Koyi says. “It’s challenging, but I think that experience is going to prepare us better for the real world.”

The students also see the mission behind the technical work. Outreach automation, for example, is not only about sending more messages. It is about helping Sport Sitters reach athletes who may want flexible work while also ensuring the platform maintains training, background checks and safety expectations for families.

The balance matters because Sport Sitters depends on trust. Families need to trust the people entering their homes. Athletes need clear pathways to training, approval and bookings. Franks needs technology that can support both groups as the company grows.

“I know Sport Sitters is unique compared to many other capstone projects because everything is live,” Franks says. “There are real credit cards. There are real children. There are parents that are leaving their homes.”

The bridge between class and work

Franks says that engineering students and athletes may seem to work in different arenas, but she sees a similar spirit. Both groups understand repetition, discipline and persistence. Both know what it means to keep working when something does not go right the first time.

“Coding and engineering require you to keep showing up, because things are always broken before they’re fixed,” Franks says. “It takes patience, curiosity and determination to work through a problem again and again. I think that’s why these two groups complement each other so well.”

Osburn says that is also where the capstone model can be most powerful.

“Companies get technical support from students who bring curiosity, training and new ideas,” he says. “The students gain experience solving problems that are not neatly packaged for them.”

For Fulton Schools students, Sport Sitters is more than a class project. It’s an opportunity to shape a growing startup with clear community impact. For Franks, the collaboration provides the engineering talent needed to scale carefully while preserving the trust that makes the platform work.

For families, the result is a platform that makes finding childcare easier. For athletes, it is a flexible way to earn money and build community. For students, it is a chance to learn what software engineering feels like when the work has to survive outside the classroom.

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

Main image



Entrepreneur Meaghan Franks founded the startup Sport Sitters, an online app designed to connect college athletes with families searching for childcare. As part of the engineering capstone

program, Franks leads teams of students from the School of Computing and Augmented Intelligence, part of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University, through the process of creating real functionality and features for a live platform. Graphic created by Rhonda Hitchcock-Mast/ASU

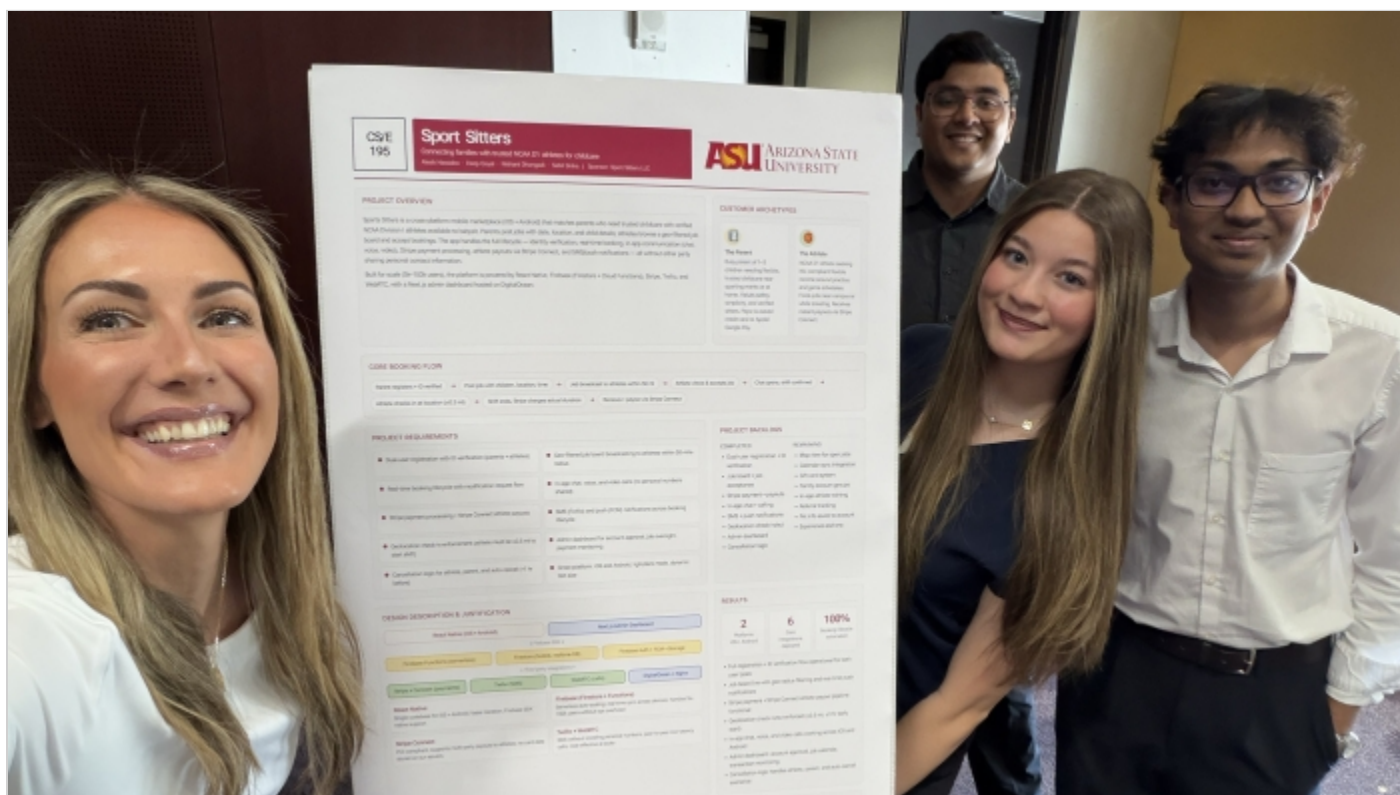
Text image(s)



From left: Franks poses with then computer science undergraduate students Nishant Dhongadi, Sahil Sinha, Aleah Hassabo and Deep Goyal. Photo courtesy of Sport Sitters



The spring 2025 capstone team pictured at a Phoenix Business Journal Award event alongside Franks and a group of student-athletes. Photo courtesy of Sport Sitters



Franks, Goyal, Hassabo and Dhongadi attend a poster presentation for the spring 2025 team. Photo courtesy of Sport Sitters