



Carly Sandin Kijewski

“A chance to explore multiple opportunities.”

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When I started college at South Dakota School of Mines & Technology (SDSM&T), I was worried about having access to opportunities in my field of interest because there was no aerospace program. In my intro to mechanical engineering course we were asked to write about our goals, so I wrote about my passion for space exploration and wanting to find a path to lead to a career in the space industry. After reading this, my professor recommended that I look into joining a team at SDSM&T called the *Moonrockers* that participates in a NASA robotics competition. This initial opportunity motivated me to look for others.



At the end of my first year, a few students and I came together to reestablish the local chapter of Students for the Exploration and Development of Space (SEDS) at SDSM&T. This organization encourages students to apply to space related opportunities, plans activities and led me to attend Space Vision, the largest student-organized space conference. I also continued to stay involved with *Moonrockers* and the annual NASA Robotic Mining Competition. I remained on the team for the duration of my time at SDSM&T and went to three competitions at NASA Kennedy Space Center. It was so impactful to receive the South Dakota Space Grant award and then use it to fund the work I was doing.

After my sophomore year, I applied for a NASA internship. Again, I thought lacking an aerospace-related program would make it difficult to be competitive, but I found out that was not the case. I accepted an internship at NASA Johnson Space Center that was funded by the South Dakota Space Grant.



In 2014, I graduated from SDSM&T and pursued graduate school at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. I was looking for an opportunity to get back to NASA and found it in the form of a graduate co-op, called a pathways internship. I have now spent two summers and one semester at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center through the co-op, and after graduation I plan on accepting an offer to convert to permanent status.

Exploring the different sides of the space industry is one of the main benefits the Space Grant program gave me. I attended a space conference, traveled to team competitions at a NASA center, participated in a NASA internship and connected with many other space enthusiasts at my school and from other organizations.

When I look back on my college education, especially the start of my freshmen year, I did not realize how many opportunities were out there. The South Dakota Space Grant really gave me a chance to explore multiple opportunities and encouraged me to seek them out. Connecting with others is also an important part of learning and having support. I met many other students and people across the space industry, and I value the ability to have had these experiences and make those connections.

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