



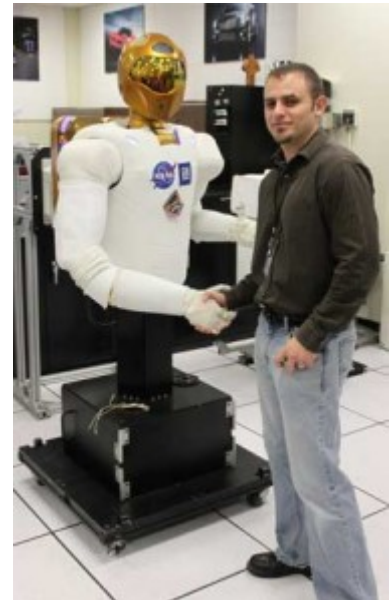
Ryan Brown

Interviewed: November 2016

“Never let yourself be the limiting factor in reaching a goal.”

After dropping out of high school, getting my GED, and serving in the Army for 8 years, I enrolled at South Dakota School of Mines & Technology in the engineering program. During my first semester I went to a career fair and talked to SpaceX. They were really interested in my resume. What a wakeup call – ‘Wow! I actually am capable of potentially getting into something like this.’ That really motivated me moving forward. In South Dakota, there’s not much for space resources. The one and only avenue that I saw that was even feasible was the South Dakota Space Grant Consortium.

They have an office at my school and I immediately started communicating with them. I applied for a scholarship with them and that was my first major stepping stone into the space industry. The South Dakota Space Grant provided me with funds to participate in an internship at Rockwell Collins working on satellite communications equipment. That got my foot in the door.



The next year I got a regular scholarship with Space Grant. Soon thereafter, their Deputy Director let me know about an immediate internship opportunity in Houston at NASA/Johnson Space Center. I talked it over with my wife and we decided to pursue it. I applied that week and a month later we moved to Houston. While I was in Houston, I applied to the NASA Pathways program which led to my full time job at NASA/Johnson Space Center. It was entirely thanks to the opportunities that the South Dakota Space Grant gave to me.

During that internship, I attended a lecture given by Gene Kranz, the flight director for the Apollo 13 mission. Listening to him relate the level of comradery and how the team worked together during those times was one of the few times I’ve ever heard of a civilian job being discussed with the same levels of comradery that I was used to in the military. That’s when I realized that I wanted to work in mission control. Just this last Monday, I passed my final examination required to be a certified flight controller for mission control. I start my first shift on Saturday!

Without the South Dakota Space Grant, I would not have had any real opportunities in the aerospace industry. I was able to go from dropping out of high school to working at NASA in mission control on the International Space Station.

Ryan Brown
NASA/Johnson Space Center
Flight Controller