When I entered University, I was very narrow-minded. I wanted to get into engineering classes as soon as I could, and the distraction of other classes just made me frustrated. But as I grew and went into junior year, a different viewpoint emerged from me. My work and passion for the commercial space industry exposed the true and vital importance of a workplace that is interdisciplinary. Personally, my richest moments so far in my career have been working on projects with different people, weather that be from their studies, life experiences, gender, or cultural upbringing.

My work in the future will be within the space industry. I fell in love with space initially because of the affect it can have on the world; particularly on the human species. I quickly learned that you can’t build a rocket with a bunch of mechanical engineers… even all types of engineers. It takes people from every facet of industry, including law, business, government, academia, etc. When I think of something that makes people want to get up in the morning, I think of an industry that is inclusive. An industry that needs people from around the world to achieve their goals. That, to me, is awe-inspiring.

At UNH, I created a community that promotes the ‘Interdisciplinary Experience.’ When I started as a freshman, I was disappointed by the engineering clubs that were within the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences. It didn’t foster an environment that was inclusive. The engineering college organizations were made up of primarily seniors, and often of only one major. How much can you really learn in that dynamic? It was so common that all engineering teams were filled and run by seniors that not much true ‘learning’ was taking place. I needed to change that.

That is why I started UNH SEDS, now the largest engineering organization on campus. As active members, it has people from every class, and every major within CEPS. But it wasn’t like that immediately. When I realized the importance of fostering this community, it took me TWO years to really change the culture that was so (and kind of still is) instilled within CEPS. It is true, culture is very hard to change. Finally, though, I am confident that this family that has formed around the exploration and development of space will remain when I leave and continue to grow stronger. It takes years to become fluent in the language of an engineering field, and aerospace is one of the hardest. It can’t be done in one year while still growing.

Most of my real-world knowledge was gained from managing UNH SEDS. It taught me how to interact with people in a professional setting. It taught me the differences in people from major to major, and what knowledge can be expected from them each academic year. By creating a club for everyone, it has allowed us to become stronger year-to-year, not restart. It allows more free-thinking, and original thought. People studying different subjects bring different ideas and outlooks on design. UNH SEDS taught me the true applications of an interdisciplinary team.

The longest and hardest thing to learn on my end when managing a club and its engineering projects has not been overcoming the toughest engineering obstacles, like most people think, but the people aspect. I have always struggled with interpersonal connections and interactions. Understanding people and their overall body language has been a huge barrier for me. But through the years, I have grown as a person and have learned the importance of this. I spent active time learning and working at it. Initially, I always managed under the assumption that everyone has the same imperatives as me. It caused overwork, frustration in both parties, and an unwelcome workplace. I then learned that everyone has different imperatives and reasons they do things. The trick to managing a group of people is understanding each imperative, and managing to the person, not the group. It supports cross-learning, fair assumptions of abilities, and promotes more people to participate and contribute to the club.

The experiences I had with my REAP, NIST and Matthew Isakowitz have assisted this idea of people from different places coming together for a common goal. The Matthew Isakowitz experience was the greatest of them all, landing me a dream internship and then my dream job. It got me connected directly to the industry I love, and I will forever be grateful to that experience as it opened my career to what I have been chasing for three years. I am happy I went this route to graduate with honors, as it has opened my mind to the importance of an interdisciplinary environment.