

## From the **Corner** Office

### LOOKING BACK ON A YEAR OF CAREER GROWTH

*In the December 2014 AIAA Bulletin, you were introduced to Samantha Waters and Nathan Wasserman, two seniors at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD), who have been serving as AIAA's inaugural Norris Space View Interns. With their graduation upon us, I asked them to co-author this month's column to share their experiences and perspectives with you, their fellow members, as they begin their careers as aerospace professionals. —Sandy*

When the school year began, we came to the organization with very different experiences and expectations. Nathan comes from an aeronautics background and spent the previous academic year interning full time at Sikorsky Aircraft before returning for his senior year and accepting the Norris Internship. He admits that initially, he was interested in the job because the salary would help him to pay for his education, but now believes the internship will help shape his career in aerospace. Sam, who has a focus in Space Systems and was previously the president of UMD's student chapter of AIAA, was looking to serve the organization in a broader way. Despite our differences, we have both gained more than we ever could have expected from this experience, and have grown both as engineers and business professionals. Thanks to the networking, public outreach, and countless learning opportunities, we have gained experience and connections that are worth more than any paycheck.

One of our favorite experiences of the internship was attending AIAA SciTech 2015. For both of us, it was our first real conference experience, and it definitely did not disappoint. AIAA SciTech is the premier conference for aerospace technology, and we had an all-access pass. Sam was amazed by the size of the event, which included over 3,000 aerospace professionals and students. Nathan enjoyed just about every aspect, from the impressive speakers to the inspirational student leaders; he relished the opportunity to meet and speak with so many people in the industry attending AIAA SciTech. We both left the conference feeling inspired by the week's events, and even more excited to begin our professional careers.

During the Norris Internship, we both had a chance to learn about the importance of policy and politics in the aerospace industry. Aerospace companies and agencies like the ones we will be joining after graduation rely heavily on funding from Congress, but we had never considered just how important the government is in supporting the aerospace industry. We both had the privilege of meeting freshman Congressman Steve Knight

(R-CA), a staunch supporter of aerospace throughout his career. Nathan also had the opportunity to attend AIAA's Congressional Visit Day (CVD).

Once we got to know each other a bit more, we realized that we were both passionate about education and public outreach. We had a chance to put that enthusiasm to work when we were asked to help out with designing, planning, and executing AIAA's programming for National Engineers Week 2015. Our work, along with that of the professional staff and other section participants, generated a twofold increase in traffic to the Engineers Week webpage, and several hundred views and visits to our videos and quiz. Included in this year's programming was a chance to do some outreach of our own. We visited Parkland Magnet Middle School for Aerospace Technology in Rockville, MD, and spoke with 150 eighth-grade students about the engineering profession. Nathan gave a talk on how to become an aerospace engineer, and Sam taught students about the Curiosity rover. On our drive home, we agreed that getting to share our stories with the students and encouraging them to pursue engineering was one of the best parts of our internship so far. Seeing their excited reactions reminded us, in the midst of our midterms, just how cool aerospace engineering really is.

We owe an exceptional amount of gratitude to Laurie Norris for funding our internships. Without her generosity, all of the growth we have achieved and experience we have gained over the year would not have been possible. Ms. Norris reached out to AIAA, saying that she wanted to create the Norris Internship to honor her father, Alexander Norris, an aerospace industry pioneer. His legacy has allowed us, and we hope it will allow future Norris interns, to diversify our experiences in the industry and to grow personally and professionally as aerospace engineers. In addition to the Norris family, we owe thanks to the entire AIAA team for their welcoming attitude, unfaltering patience, and willingness to teach us about what it means to be professionals in the aerospace industry. They have given us a range of exciting jobs to do and have opened doors to many more incredible experiences than we could list in this article.

Over the past few months, we have made incredible personal connections with both AIAA employees and industry engineers. We have learned aspects of our future profession beyond engineering, from networking to politics to public outreach. We have been involved in everything AIAA does and have realized that this organization is much more than what we had experienced at the university level. As we begin our careers, at Boeing for Nathan and JPL for Sam, we know AIAA will be a constant throughout the lifetime of our aerospace careers. It has been an honor to serve as the inaugural Norris Space View Interns.



Networking at AIAA SciTech 2015. From left to right: Al Romig, executive officer, National Academy of Engineering; Sam; Nathan; and John Tracy, chief technology officer, The Boeing Company.