
The Next Step for Man's Insatiable Curiosity

The television series "Star Trek" calls outer space "the final frontier." The brave men and women aboard the USS Enterprise, under Captain James T. Kirk, exemplified human ambition, boldly going where no man had before. Although these characters may be fictional, their desire to explore new realms is quite real. Mankind has been driven to explore before we developed written language.

Today, man no longer has a New World to discover or a West to settle. We have explored nearly every piece of land on our home planet, yet we have never dared to venture more than about 250,000 miles away from our pale blue dot. The potential for untold scientific discovery lies beyond our home planet; but first, we must find a way to explore the great expanse of space. For this reason, I have chosen to pursue a degree in Aerospace Engineering, hopefully working in the space program.

Space exploration provides a wealth of benefits to mankind. From memory foam to light emitting diodes, hundreds of everyday conveniences find their roots in the space program. Space exploration gives us a better understanding of the mechanics of our universe, allowing us to protect ourselves from the threat of asteroid impact. Even without these benefits, however, we are still compelled to push into the unknown. Mankind has yet to outgrow its desire to conquer the frontier, and we will continue to push into our final frontier, beyond the reaches of our planet.

Our next step in inching our way into the vastness of space is placing a man on the surface of Mars. Critics claim it is an impossible feat; a mission to Mars is over 100 times further than any human has ever traveled from our planet. Admittedly, it is a daunting task. Equally daunting, however, was the lunar mission in 1969, when Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. The lunar landing required a host of innovative and specialized systems, chief among which was the Saturn V rocket. The most powerful machine ever built, its detractors claimed it would be nothing more than a massive bomb. Yet through the dedication of thousands of engineers in various disciplines, the Saturn V successfully delivered six crews of astronauts to the surface of the moon.

A mission to Mars will require even more complex solutions to the problems of crew delivery and life support. It is easy to dismiss these challenges as insurmountable, but to continue our advance into the unknown, we have no choice but to conquer them. The Saturn V project serves as an inspiration to engineers today working to solve these problems. As in any project, there will be challenges and setbacks in putting a man on the surface of Mars. An education from the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Cornell helps prepare

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students to conquer these setbacks. The school's broad curriculum helps prepare its students to think outside their engineering concentrations to find unconventional solutions. This broad base of knowledge also prepares students to collaborate in the field, both with other mechanical and aerospace engineers, and with engineers of other disciplines. Cornell also prepares students specifically for the space sciences field with a number of research projects. Cornell offers many research opportunities, including working with rocket control surfaces and microsatellites, affording students hands-on experience in their field before graduation.

It will take more than just courage for man to shake off the bounds of his home planet. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin may have been some of the bravest people to ever live, but without the hundreds of engineers who designed the Saturn V, they simply could not have set foot on the moon. As an aerospace engineer, I will use the knowledge and skills I learn to overcome these challenges, and play an integral role in conquering space - the final frontier.

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