Meet Philip. Ambitious. Curious. And like any college student, keen to map out his future. He knew the College would be a good fit for him because of its strong reputation in the sciences. But he wasn’t convinced that physics was the right major until after he had taken the intro courses for almost every other major in the sciences. Because of this department’s emphasis on research, Philip found himself working with a professor investigating doped carbon nanotubes. “Initially, I was involved in the data analysis. I actually spent six weeks doing independent research on this topic at another university. Mostly, I was learning about the equipment involved and learning how to interact in a larger lab. It gave me a feeling for what graduate school might be like. I owe that opportunity to my physics professor. He secured the role for me as well as the funds to make it possible.”

Among the most engaging experiences that Philip had in this major was a course entitled NASA Mission Design. “We followed the same process that scientists go through when they propose missions to NASA. To do that, we partnered with students at the University of Alabama Huntsville and a university in Paris. Together, we proposed two missions. What’s cool is that our work was actually guided by the scientists and engineers at NASA. We not only got to travel to Paris, but we presented our mission proposals to NASA’s review board.” Philip sees that course as the department offering its students real-world experience. “I’d never had a class like that. Not only was our grade riding on the quality of our proposals, but also the impression we made on people in this field. If you succeed, there are definitely opportunities. NASA’s professionals encouraged us to share our ideas with others, sending one of the previous year’s winners to an international conference. So, yes, it’s an academic exercise, but if you come up with good ideas and creative solutions, well, you never know where that can lead.”

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PHYSICS

You don’t have to be an honors student to major in physics. Actually, you just have to be interested in learning about the physical world and how it works. That’s what motivated Philip Meyer. He came to the College for the sciences and ended up in a unique program underwritten by NASA.