

# Auburn Aerospace: A Legacy Reclaimed

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## I. A Narrative on Auburn University's First Aerospace Industry Day

AUBURN University's inaugural aerospace engineering career fair, called the Aerospace Industry Day, was not born of a fleeting inspiration- rather, it was forged over 18 months of relentless struggle, growing frustration, and an unyielding determination to empower aerospace engineering students who had long been sidelined.

At Auburn, opportunities in aerospace were few. While other engineering disciplines enjoyed exclusive career fairs and targeted networking events, our field was confined to general career fairs where aerospace companies were a rarity- mostly limited to defense, leaving those interested in commercial space, aviation, or satellite technology stranded. Each year, we watched as over 660 talented aerospace students grappled with a system that failed to recognize their potential. Other disciplines, such as civil engineering, had events crafted specifically for them, while we were forced to compete in overcrowded halls with little regard for our unique aspirations. This glaring inequity became impossible to ignore. After enduring years of being sidelined, I realized as the AIAA Student Chapter President that waiting for change was no longer an option. If the system would not serve us, we had to serve ourselves. Determined to alter the status quo, our Student Branch set out to create a dedicated event where companies from every corner of the aerospace sector could meet Auburn's aspiring engineers face-to-face, thereby transforming distant aspirations into tangible opportunities.

Gaining the support of the university administration, however, proved to be challenging. Their initial response was steeped in skepticism, claiming that major aerospace companies would not come to Auburn for an event that, in their eyes, held little promise. Their doubts stung deeply, reflecting a belief that Auburn's aerospace program was not significant enough to attract industry attention. Instead of succumbing to this resistance, we leveraged it as fuel, identifying 35 aerospace companies poised to benefit from Auburn's emerging talent and conducting personalized outreach to highlight the exceptional students ready to lead innovation at those companies. The responses were overwhelmingly positive; companies not only expressed interest but many confirmed their participation almost immediately. It became clear that the disconnect was not due to a lack of employer interest, but rather the absence of a proactive pipeline between our campus and the industry. The logistical challenges soon followed. Organizing the event required us to secure a suitable venue, coordinate schedules, and align the diverse needs of both students and companies- a process that tested our resolve every step of the way. Thankfully we found an unexpected ally in the President of the University, whose endorsement lent the initiative the credibility it needed to push through administrative hurdles- proving that sometimes, leadership recognizes potential even when the established system does not.

Aerospace Industry Day became a grassroots movement- rather than being handed to us by administration or faculty, this event was something we built from the ground up, and every obstacle was a reminder that we had to fight for our place in the broader engineering landscape. In the days leading up to the event, we felt a blend of anxious anticipation and measured hope, although the promise of a long-overdue breakthrough kept our determination alive. On the morning of the event, the air was charged with excitement as over 300 students- both from Auburn and from Tuskegee's AIAA student chapters- were in attendance. As the event began, it felt as though every moment of doubt was replaced by a tangible surge of possibility. In that charged atmosphere, what had once been an abstract dream materialized into a real, direct link between our students and recruiters from industry-leading organizations. The barriers that had once rendered our aspirations out of reach crumbled in the face of real, immediate opportunities- internships, co-ops, and even full-time roles were openly discussed and pursued. In those few hours, the narrative of Auburn's aerospace program was rewritten, replacing long-held misconceptions of inaccessibility with the vibrant reality of connection and growth.

Reflecting on that incredible day, I am struck by how a single determined effort can spark monumental change. Aerospace Industry Day was more than an event; it was a resounding declaration that Auburn's aerospace students will no longer be sidelined. By taking the initiative, we proved that our talent is undeniable and our ambitions are worth investing in, thereby transforming marginalization into momentum, frustration into opportunity, and doubt into progress. Now, Auburn's aerospace program stands as a thriving hub of innovation, ready to propel future generations of Auburn engineers forward. Aerospace Industry Day serves as a lasting reminder that true progress is built by those who dare to take the first step. With this new chapter in Auburn's history, we no longer ask for opportunity- we create it.

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