



The University of Akron
**College of Polymer Science
and Polymer Engineering**

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Tell us about a talented student you want to see in the spotlight by emailing us at cpspe-alumni@uakron.edu.

Nate Orndorf is currently studying to earn his doctorate in Polymer Science under Dr. Ali Dhinojwala. Read more about Nate and his academic journey in CPSPE.

How does your major fit into your life's plan?

About halfway through my undergraduate studies, I realized that I wanted to earn a Ph.D. I wanted to do work in fundamental science, but also wanted to know that my work is directly applicable to solving some of society's critical problems. After completing the summer Research Experience for Undergraduates in Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering (REU) program at CPSPE, I knew that polymer science checked both boxes.

What have you learned that makes a difference to you?

I've learned that passion is what leads to long term success. You can work as hard and as much as you can, but if there is no passion driving you to do what you're doing it is much harder to come out of inevitable burnouts and failures.

Why did you choose The University of Akron, specifically the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering?

I was born and raised in Ohio, but earned my undergraduate degrees in Michigan. Coming back to Ohio for my Ph.D. felt like I was coming home, and I love the Akron area with all of the parks. On the academic side, once I realized how prominent the polymer programs are at UA, I realized that The University of Akron was a great choice for me.

Tell us about your experience in an internship or research project.

Over the past year, I've had the privilege of working as a research assistant in the Revolutionary Icing Materials Evaluation Laboratory (RIMELab) at NASA Glenn Research Center. The work I do in the RIMELab is connected to my dissertation work, but more towards the engineering side than the science we do at UA, so I'm getting to experience solving the same problems from different perspectives. It is also interesting to experience the differences and similarities of how research is run in government labs and academia.

Who is your favorite professor (or staff person) and why?

I have a great advisor in Dr. Ali Dhinojwala, but I think my favorite professor is Dr. Hunter King. He is always intrigued about any problem, and I look up to his excitement and curiosity towards science. Another standout staff member is Ed Laughlin. Much of our research couldn't be done without his skills and creativity, and he always gives me a chuckle when I stop by the machine shop.

What are your plans after graduation?

As of now, I'd like to pursue a career in academia. As long as the research I'm doing makes a positive difference



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in the world, and I enjoy living in the respective area, I'm not too worried about whether I choose a career in academia or private industry.

Anything else you would like to share?

I spend a good amount of time and effort training for marathons, running up to 120 miles each week. I also enjoy exploring the local Cuyahoga Valley National Park system, whether it's by running or hiking with my fiancée. In 2017, the summer before I came to UA, I spent a month living in a tent near Yosemite National Park with no cell phone, car, or way of contacting anyone.