

From Kerala to the cosmos: ASU international student prepares for launch into space industry

Aerospace engineering graduate reflects on her journey from student to space engineer

By Shireen Dooling, ASU News
April 29, 2025

Editor's note: *This story is part of a series of profiles of notable spring 2025 graduates.*

When Ana Girish moved from Kerala, India, to Arizona State University, she brought with her a dream that had first taken shape at age 12: to one day work in the space industry. This spring, that dream becomes a reality.

Girish is set to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in aerospace engineering with a concentration in astronautics from the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#). She has already accepted a full-time role as an associate product engineer at [Solestial](#), an Arizona-based startup developing solar panels designed for long-term use in space.

She says her coursework at ASU laid a critical foundation for her new role.

“From day one at ASU, I’ve been learning something new, and it’s been an amazing experience,” Girish said. “The interdisciplinary nature of the aerospace program really helped shape my foundation. Courses like structural analysis, thermodynamics and signals provided the technical depth I needed, and the hands-on lab work, especially building circuits, directly translated into projects during my internship at Solestial.”

In addition to her academic work, Girish participated in the [ASU Space Student Ambassadors](#) program, a leadership and outreach initiative run by the [Interplanetary Initiative](#), where she developed communication skills, explored interdisciplinary aspects of space, and connected with

like-minded peers and space industry experts.

“Being part of the Space Ambassadors program helped me get more confident in sharing my ideas clearly and effectively,” she said. “Those communication skills have already made a difference, and I know they’ll be especially important as I move into a full-time role where I’ll be interacting with customers and cross-functional teams.”

Her love for space began after reading “An Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth” by Chris Hadfield. One idea from the book — the concept of “attitude” as a spacecraft’s orientation — stuck with her.

“If you lose your attitude, the spacecraft starts spinning and veering off course,” she said. “That metaphor has stayed with me ever since, and I often think about it when life feels chaotic. It’s always motivated me to realign and stay on course.”

This fall, she’ll begin her new role at Solestial, working on product development across the life cycle of a space hardware system. But first, she’s planning a well-earned road trip — and maybe learning a bit of chess.

We caught up with Girish to hear more about her time at ASU and what’s next.

Question: What’s something you learned while at ASU — in your courses or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

Answer: I ended up taking a couple of ethics classes just out of curiosity, and they opened my eyes to a whole new side of space, one that raises important questions like should we be doing certain things, not just can we? With how fast things are moving with asteroid mining and colonizing moons or planets, I think we need to be talking more about what the long-term impact could be. Topics like space debris and planetary protection shouldn’t be afterthoughts and need to be part of the main conversation. It’s definitely something I want to advocate for as I move forward in my career.

Q: What did you learn from being part of the Space Student Ambassadors that you might not have gotten from the classroom?

A: Being part of the ASU Space Student Ambassadors program opened up an entirely new side of the space world that I never really considered before. Coming from an engineering background, I always thought of space exploration in purely technical terms, things like orbital mechanics, propulsion and spacecraft design.

But through this program, I was introduced to so many other crucial aspects like space policy, space law and even planetary geology. It really shifted my perspective on how multidimensional space missions actually are. I started to see how every successful mission is the result of collaboration across disciplines — scientists, lawyers, engineers, communicators, policymakers and more, all working toward a shared goal.

Q: What excites you most about working in the space industry after graduation?

A: I’m finally getting to work on something I’ve dreamed about for years. It’s incredibly fulfilling to be part of this field. I’m especially excited to join the product team, where I’ll be able to contribute to the entire life cycle of a space product, from initial concept to final deployment. That kind of end-

to-end experience is rare, and I can't wait to see how each stage connects and evolves.

What energizes me even more is the chance to collaborate with an interdisciplinary team. Through my time at ASU, I've learned that the most impactful space missions come from diverse teams working together, and I'm thrilled to be part of that process.

Q: If you could give advice to other ASU students who are interested in a career in the space sector, what would you tell them?

A: Stay passionate and keep going. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, try new things and take on challenges that might seem intimidating at first. Train your mind to be a creative problem solver, as that's one of the most valuable skills you can have in this field.

And remember, space isn't just for engineers. There's room for writers, artists, biologists, lawyers, policymakers, literally everyone. So explore your interests, find what excites you and know that there's always a place for you in the space sector.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Ana Girish is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in aerospace engineering with a concentration in astronautics from the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering. After graduation, she will take on a full-time role as an associate product engineer at Solestial, an Arizona-based startup developing solar panels designed for long-term use in space. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



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