

THE NEVADA STEM STUDENT VOICES PROJECT



Autonomous Vehicles

By Jamie Poston

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About Me

I'm a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno pursuing a Master's degree in Computer Science and Engineering. In particular, **I work in the Intelligent Mobility Laboratory** and I work on motion planning systems for an autonomous vehicle. My interests include Machine Learning, Robotics, and Data Science.

Why STEM?

My parents are super into STEM stuff; my dad is a civil engineer and my mom is a geologist. But nothing really seemed to catch my eye until I started participating in FIRST robotics. **I hadn't ever programmed before, so a lot of it was really hard. But it was so much fun!** I really enjoyed figuring out all the logic in the programs, and finding bugs in my code. When I went to UNR, I naturally started as a CS major. But as I took more and more classes, I found I really liked math as well! **What I do now, using machine learning on an autonomous vehicle, is really a good combination of the two.** I use math to calculate the best possible path for the vehicle, then I implement it using code.

My Career Goals

Strangely enough, I'm still figuring that bit out! I know I would like to work in computer science or data science, I'm not exactly sure what that will look like in the future. I could continue my education and try for a doctorate, or I could go further into the field of data science by leveraging statistics to find neat results, or I could join some company that is trying to build autonomous vehicles. Who knows! As I complete my degree, I'll narrow my focus a bit, but for now I'm happy to continue researching in a laboratory.

My Advice

I struggled a lot as STEM student. If I came across a hard concept in my studies, my gut reaction was to assume I wasn't smart enough to figure it out. But that's just silly, and self-destructive! Now, I still feel like that sometimes, but I have to remind myself that: **anyone can learn anything, as long as they work hard and take the time to learn it!** It might be hard to believe that when you're first starting out. But I've completed a whole bunch of difficult computer science courses at UNR that just seem super incomprehensible at the beginning. Even worse, for some classes it seemed that other people already knew a lot of stuff, whereas I didn't know anything! **But every time, I studied hard and challenged myself to figure out every word or every concept I didn't know that everyone else did.** Even now, I sometimes have no idea what's going on. But, I know that as long as I put in the time to understand it, I can eventually figure it out. Hopefully that helps you as well!