

# THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

**ANNA KENDRICK** PROVES THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A BIG PERSON TO HAVE A HUGE CAREER

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# Higher Learning

Looking for a career in aviation? Look no further than the University of North Texas. By Clay Swartz

**FROM DA VINCI'S** man-powered helicopter to early-20th-century rabble-rousers who frantically flapped fabricated wings, mankind failed in just about every way imaginable to master the art of flying before the Wright brothers finally came along and got it right. And even then, from the legend of Icarus' melting wings to Amelia Earhart's mysterious flight, the message has always been clear: Flying isn't easy. But leave it to one of Texas' most trendsetting universities to try to prove the opposite. This fall, the University of North Texas is introducing its Bachelor of Science in Aviation Logistics program, which will offer students an education that focuses on the role of aviation in the transportation sector of the economy. While the program offers a traditional "flying track" for those interested in piloting aircraft (including an education on how

one reads weather patterns and executes a preflight, multipoint safety check), the brunt of the course highlights a nonflying track that will focus on the remaining 85 percent of the aviation industry: those people behind the scenes doing the decision making and supervision of everything required to successfully lead a flying business, including planning flight schedules, dispatching flights, managing safety and maintenance programs, marketing aviation services, and designing and manufacturing aviation equipment.

Program director Steve Swartz, Ph.D., wrote the curriculum for the state-of-the-art program, and he considers it a game changer not only for prospective students but also for employers.

"The focus of our program is the preparation of the aviation-industry leaders of the future," he says. "We are tasked with the role of developing knowledge about aviation as a business by preparing students for the business of aviation."

And with any luck, it could become one of the nation's most successful and promising producers of aviation professionals.

This is a task that UNT is uniquely qualified for, given its location near Dallas and Fort Worth, one of the aviation industry's largest hubs. The program, based in the College of Business at UNT, will be the first of its kind in Texas, and one of only a handful in the United States.

The whole process began just a couple of years ago, as a simple inquiry from the aviation industry and community leaders seeking to identify a shortfall between employment needs and the availability of skilled, experienced job candidates — a shortfall that was expected to worsen as the decade wore on. A charge was then issued for state institutions of higher education to respond with aviation-based programs, but none were interested.

That is, until UNT caught wind of the request.

"We became aware of the issue after the original study and request," Swartz says. "After examining the study and performing an update and benchmarking exercise, we chose to develop a new program to satisfy the regional and state needs."

Considering that two of the United States' largest air-freight companies are headquartered or have an operational presence in North Texas, and that the area also houses one of the country's largest airports, a dedicated freight airport, several regional/reliever airports, two major airlines' headquarters (American and Southwest), a number of feeder and charter operators and many aircraft and aircraft-equipment manufacturers, it was obvious that UNT was the right choice

for the program.

So Swartz, along with partner Terry Pohlen, director of the Center for Logistics Education and Research at UNT, began the difficult journey of seeking and eventually being granted approval for the program. After about a year of planning, the two developed a program that they hope will change the landscape of aviation education.

"We have already had remarkable support from the community, and from the aviation industry in general," Pohlen says. "We have a tremendous advantage in offering this program, with our physical location. Where else can students have this type of support and job market in their own backyard?"

The candidates (12 students are already committed to this fall's program, and more are expected) will graduate as some of the most educated aviation employment personnel in the country. The curriculum includes a variety of field trips, as well as guest lecturers from some of the largest aviation companies in the country, and students will gain experience through mandatory paid internships in the aviation industry.

According to Swartz, the internship aspect of the program is vital to the students' success. Not only will companies have the opportunity to observe firsthand what these students are learning, but they'll also be able to help mold their education. He calls it the "dating" experience with a "potential future hire" or "try before you buy."

"The role of the internship gives the students meaningful, value-generating experiences in the industry," he says. "It helps them sort out what types of jobs they like and don't like, increases their market value upon graduation, and helps them build networks and reputations in the industry."

Laura Rusnok, a 22-year-old senior at UNT, will be among the first to graduate with a degree in aviation logistics. Her dream is to become a professional pilot, and she says her experiences at UNT will play a large part in her future success.

"I fell in love with flying in the tiny cockpit of a Cessna 172 aircraft, during a demonstration flight on my 16th birthday," she says. "My dad and brother were squished into the backseat, nervous, but I was at the

wheel, and it was in that moment [that I realized] it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

At the time, attending a program comparable to UNT's would have meant traveling across the country and paying higher tuition at a specialized school. Because of this, Rusnok temporarily put aside her dream — that is, until she heard about UNT's aviation logistics program last year. Now, after being accepted into the program, Rusnok has a renewed and improved passion for flying. In the last year, she has earned her private pilot's license, founded the UNT Student Aviation Association and logged more than 85 hours in the air.

And it's mostly thanks to UNT.

"Just a few years ago, following my dreams would have meant an unaffordable education outside of Texas, and may have ended up an impossibility," she says. "Now I am feeling prepared and am excited for what is in front of me." **AW**

When not perfecting human flight with gargantuan, hand-fabricated bat wings, **CLAY SWARTZ** (no relation to Steve Swartz, Ph.D.) works as a Dallas-based freelance writer.

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