

# ANCHORED TO THE COSMOS

Dark skies are integral to my mental health and well being. Growing up in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I only knew perfectly clear night skies, flickering stars, fluorescent galaxies, and dancing auroras. Looking up to the sky after closing time let my mind wander and inspired my creativity. A deep relationship with the cosmos naturally became an anchor that helps balance my sanity.

Living in Salt Lake City has been a wake up call. Everyone deserves quality opportunities to observe the reality beyond our atmosphere, but those chances are rare in light polluted areas like Salt Lake City. This fact is what inspired me to enter the Dark Sky Studies (DSS) Minor Program here at the University of Utah. I have learned so much about responsible lighting that prevents sky glow and promotes darkness, but also promotes safety, economic benefits, and prevents harmful ecological effects.



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Last semester, one of my class projects was to evaluate walkway lighting in various areas on campus. The conclusion we came to was quite eye opening — it had never occurred to me that there could be too much light, specifically concerning pedestrian safety.

My current position is Assistant Coordinator with the Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative (CPDSC) as a result of my interest in dark skies and experience in the DSS Minor program. In association with other dark sky preservation entities such as the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), Basin & Range Dark Sky Cooperative (BRDSC), National Park Service (NPS), and many others, we help communities, parks, and other entities throughout the region preserve their natural night skies.

Together, we are constantly expanding the “dark-sky network” through outreach & education, tools, guides, and resources. I have met so many amazing people and heard incredible stories from near and far. I’ve even met with some folks from Australia and learned about their struggles to protect newborn sea turtles from predators because of disorienting beach lights.

My professional life in dark skies has only been about 6 months (so far) but I am positive it will be a lifelong passion. After graduating in Spring 2022, I will commission as a Naval Officer and I am especially excited to see some of the world’s clearest night skies in the middle of the ocean. Post navy, I plan to earn a graduate degree in planning or architecture and integrate my passion for dark skies into my work.

One of the most gratifying moments in my life was returning home and looking up to the stars with some of my best friends. The looks of bewilderment and wonder in their eyes as I walked them through the worlds beyond our sticks in my head as if I had seen them yesterday. I want that opportunity for everyone. I encourage everyone, even if only mildly interested in dark skies, to get involved. There are many simple ways to do so, a simple google search of any of the aforementioned organizations will reveal a wealth of resources, suggestions, and easy ways to make a difference - even putting a lampshade on outdoor lights could help. The reward is tremendous, I promise!



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COLORADO PLATEAU DARK SKY COOPERATIVE GUEST SPOTLIGHT