



## The Questions Students Are Asking

Something interesting has been happening at VFS over the past few months.

If you follow my Instagram account, @vtol\_executive, you may have noticed an increase in engagement. The response has surprised even us. In roughly two months, the content has generated nearly 400,000 views. The number itself isn't what has caught my attention. It is who is engaging with us; students and young people actively trying to understand what a career in engineering is like. They want to hear directly from real engineers, asking practical questions that many of us probably remember wondering about ourselves. How important is my GPA when I apply for my first job? Which electives should I take? Should I join a design team or focus on getting better grades? How important is an internship? What do aerospace engineers actually do all day? What do employers look for that isn't written in the job description? And how do I get my foot in the door if I don't already know someone in the industry?

For more than 80 years, the Society has been extraordinarily good at bringing together the people who advance vertical flight. Our technical community, publications, conferences and archives represent generations of accumulated knowledge. The question I have been thinking about lately is how we make sure the next generation can access not only that knowledge, but the people behind it.

We need to build pathways that can take someone from curiosity to career; from seeing something remarkable to asking questions, meeting practicing engineers, finding an internship or first job, and eventually to becoming an active contributor and leader in the vertical flight community. That presents VFS with an opportunity.

We already have many pieces of that pathway. This year, the Vertical Flight Foundation awarded more than \$130,000 in scholarships to students pursuing careers related to vertical flight. Our student design competitions give university teams an opportunity to tackle real engineering challenges. Our technical committees connect students and young professionals directly with some of the most accomplished experts in their fields. Forum provides an extraordinary opportunity to present research, meet prospective employers and build relationships across industry, government and academia.

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One idea we are currently exploring is a Vertical Flight Career Summit, an event built specifically around connecting people with careers in our industry.

The concept is intentionally different from Forum. Rather than organizing the event around technical sessions, we envision bringing together employers, students, transitioning professionals and experienced members of our community for recruiting, networking, résumé reviews, career discussions and professional development. Companies could showcase not only what they build, but the people and skills they need to build it.

This effort also goes beyond a single event. We recently re-launched a Career Center for VFS members, and we are looking at ways to strengthen our relationships with universities, expand student participation and create more opportunities for early- and mid-career professionals to become involved in the Society.

Social media can introduce someone to vertical flight. Vertiflite and our other publications can help them understand it. Scholarships and student programs can help them pursue it. A Career Summit can connect them with an employer. Forum and our technical committees can give them a professional community. Over time, VFS can provide opportunities for them to contribute, mentor others and lead. That is the cycle we need to strengthen.

If VFS created a Vertical Flight Career Summit, what would make you attend? What would inspire your organization to participate? What advice would have helped you when you were a young professional trying to find your way into this field? What opportunities are missing today?

Please consider how VFS can do a better job connecting the tremendous enthusiasm that exists for vertical flight with companies, universities, mentors and professional opportunities that make careers possible. I encourage you to send me your ideas.

Our Society has always existed because people who cared deeply about vertical flight chose to share their knowledge with the people coming behind them. The platforms may change. The aircraft certainly change. But that responsibility, and that opportunity, remains remarkably constant. There is another generation out there watching. Let's make sure they know there is a place for them here.

