

Dear Younger Me,

A year ago, you were sitting in a classroom that felt both familiar and temporary, refreshing your email over and over again, waiting for answers that you believed would define your future. Each decision felt like a verdict. Acceptance meant possibility, and rejection felt like a door closing on the life you had imagined so clearly. You told yourself that you needed to leave that success had to exist somewhere else.

I wish you knew then that your life was never going to be decided by a single email.

You were so focused on where you thought you needed to go that you almost missed the value of where you already were. You imagined the East Coast, a city, constant motion. You thought that was what it meant to expand your world.

Instead, you stayed.

At first, it felt like settling. It wasn't. It was the moment you began to build a life rather than chase one.

Now you are in a place you never imagined choosing, facing winters that reach 40 below. You are still nervous. You still feel uncertain. That feeling doesn't disappear overnight. But something else has grown alongside it. There is a quiet excitement in not knowing exactly what comes next. There is strength in stepping into that uncertainty instead of running from it.

You do not need to have everything figured out to be moving in the right direction.

This year will stretch you beyond academics. You will walk into spaces that once felt distant. At SciTech, you will listen to astronauts speak and realize they are not unreachable. You will meet engineers whose work you once only read about and find yourself asking them questions, standing there as a peer in the making. You will travel to conferences like AISES, present at Lead On, and fly to Juneau for a pre-law immersion trip that makes your interests feel real and possible.

You will take on more than you think you can handle, because you have always equated being busy with being successful. But there is a difference between being productive and being overwhelmed.

You will burn out if you are not careful.

So learn balance. Some of your most meaningful moments will not be awards or titles, but quiet ones. Late nights in the library. Movie nights with your roommates. Conversations that last longer than you planned. These moments matter. Protect them.

You will also learn what happens when you take risks before you feel ready. You will apply to everything. You will sit through interview after interview, unsure if any of it will lead somewhere. And then it will. You will secure a summer internship. You will make the Dean's List. You will be selected as an AIAA Rising

Star and attend SciTech. You will serve as a UAF senator, lead your prelaw club, and even get accepted to study abroad.

Not everything will go your way. You will become a finalist for a national aerospace fellowship and not be selected. But you will realize that being close means you belong in the room. It means you are already on your way.

Here is what matters most. Your worth is not defined by outcomes. It is defined by your willingness to keep going.

I know you are afraid of making the wrong choice. I know you think staying will limit you. It will not. Choosing a different path does not mean giving up on your dreams. It means learning how to adapt them.

You will still see the world. You will still grow. But you will do it on your own terms.

So carry this with you.

Stop waiting for the perfect plan.

Say yes to things that scare you. Protect your peace as much as your ambitions. Do not measure your life against anyone else's timeline. Keep applying, keep trying, keep showing up. It only takes one yes to change everything.

Most importantly, live without regrets. Not because everything will go perfectly, but because you will know you gave yourself the chance to try.

And as I write this, I realize this is not just a letter to you. It is a promise to myself. To keep taking risks. To keep believing there is more ahead. To not let fear or comfort define the life I am building.

You are capable of more than you think. You always have been.

Trust yourself. I will keep going.

Sincerely,

Your present self, finishing her first year at UAF