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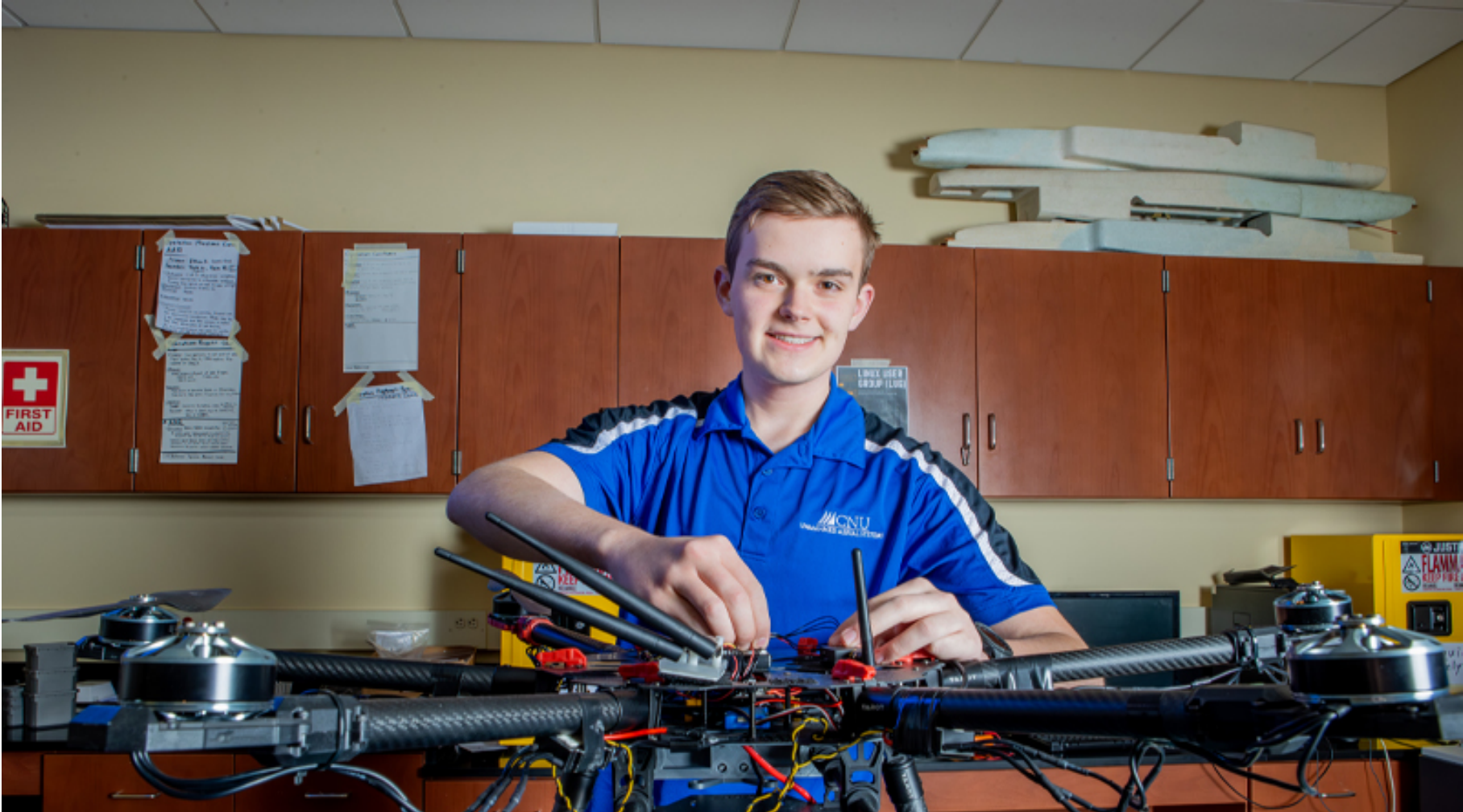
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Drone Team Takes Flight

CNU STUDENTS LOOK TOWARD INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION.

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | January 15, 2025

Read time: about 2 min

Ethan Steider's fascination with drones began at an early age. When he arrived at CNU and discovered a team dedicated to them, he knew he had landed in the right spot.

"I'm so excited to be somewhere that has this," said Steider, '26 [Electrical Engineering](#).

Steider quickly joined the [Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Team](#), a student organization focused on remotely operated air vehicles, including drones. Three years later, Steider is now captaining the team as it prepares for its next mission: an international competition in June.

The competition's challenge is for the team's UAS, which in this case is a fixed-wing plane, to drop a payload on a specific spot.

The competition comes at an exciting time for the team, with a state-of-the art drone lab scheduled to open inside the new [Science and Engineering Research Center](#) in 2026.

"Our entire club is really looking forward to it," Steider said. "It will have space for us to fly inside."

The two-story lab will be equipped with cutting-edge technology and is designed to be a hub of innovation and progress, for both students and the community to develop and test UAS and other robotics. Steider expects the lab will be pivotal for members wishing to advance their research and technical skills.

"It's really important for us to have a place to apply what we have learned," Steider said.

The hope, he added, is that students pursuing careers involving UAS can use the experience they garner from the new lab, the team, and the competition to position themselves well in the job market after graduation.

"This looks great on your resume," Steider said.

Dr. Anton Riedl, associate professor and Head of School at the School of Engineering and Computing, said the new lab is expected to add dimension and depth to the team's knowledge base and fuel students' ability to advance in the fast-growing UAS field.

"The UAS team is a great example of how hands-on experience and interdisciplinary teamwork can prepare students for success in rapidly evolving fields," he said. "The new drone lab will not only enhance the students' technical skills but will also provide a space to innovate, experiment, and push the boundaries of what's possible in unmanned aerial systems."

The team, which includes students with a variety of majors, currently practices outside, and works out of a lab in Luter Hall. Its priority is now readying for the June competition, during which the team is hoping to compete against university teams from around the world at an airport in California, Md.

While competition is important, Steider says the team's main goal is to advance UAS knowledge while bonding over a shared enthusiasm for drones and all their capabilities.

"The most important part is that it's a fun learning process," Steider said. "We are able to apply concepts from classes to real life."

Patrick Wood, '25 Computer Science, another member of the team, has infused much of what he has learned into his senior Capstone project.

"It's been largely influenced by what we are doing here," he said.

Wood said being able to practice what he loves on campus has been a boon to his CNU education.

"I am obsessed with flying," he said. "There is something about flying that is just so cool to me. I am so excited to be able to do it here."

Merging his passion for flying and drones with the education he has received in the classroom has been ideal in both helping shape his Capstone project and in setting him on a trajectory to success. He plans to stay at CNU for a fifth year to earn his master of computer science, using his experience with UAS to enrich his skill set and further his knowledge.

"I am hoping to use all this to leverage my career plan," he said. "I am getting to do what I have always wanted to do."