Daniel Henderson was introduced to the field of photonics at the Columbia Area Career Center in Columbia, Missouri, which offers technical classes that students can take for high school credit. Daniel and a few of his friends decided to enroll in a light science class, which Daniel found fascinating. Daniel enjoyed the class so much that, after high school, he enrolled in the associate degree program in laser electro-optics technology at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) in Ottumwa, Iowa.

“Photonics started, for me at least, as an interesting course to take and suddenly turned into something much more. The science is very interesting to me, and I soon caught myself applying it to everyday phenomena. It is very extraordinary.”

Daniel's high school decision ultimately led him to a position as a laser technician at Cutting Edge Electronics, a subsidiary of Northrop Grumman that provides services to the medical, industrial, research, and military sectors. At Cutting Edge, Daniel is responsible for building and analyzing commercial laser systems.

Daniel’s enthusiasm for technology and love for scientific theory led him to pursue additional education. He is now pursuing a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, which he hopes will help him earn a promotion from laser technician to electrical engineer at Cutting Edge. Meanwhile, Daniel is enjoying the variety in his current position.

“What I like most about what I do is the variability in the actual job. One day I will be working on laser X, and then the next day I will be working on a completely different laser meant for a completely different application, or I will be able to use these lasers in testing things that are pretty crazy to test.”

Daniel’s advice to students considering their options is “not to jump at the first opportunity” but instead to “give the future much consideration before doing any one thing.” Knowing something about his field paid off in his own life, and he recommends the same to others: “I would advise potential students to look at things like the number and quality of available jobs along with average salaries,” he says, “because not everyone can get a great job with every degree. I think it is a lot easier to get a job with a technical degree such as my own than it would be to get a different degree.”

Daniel Henderson earned an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology from Indian Hills Community College and graduated with honors in 2013. He is currently working on a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering.