Andrew Veenis (Chemistry)
I am a 5th year chemistry graduate student in the Bevilacqua lab. Using molecular simulation and cheminformatics tools, I study how properties of functional groups within ribonucleic acids (RNA) are perturbed by interactions within their local environments. This research will provide a deeper understanding of how RNA may have performed critical functions during early Earth. Outside of school, I spend most of my time hanging out with my wife, Holly, and son, Adolin. We enjoyed hiking in central PA this summer and look forward to skiing and snowboarding once the weather turns cold.

Ruchi Patel (Geography)
I am a 2nd year geography PhD student in the HELIX Lab. I work with a conservation NGO, Paso Pacífico to understand the social and environmental impacts of development and land use policy in Central America, including how to better conserve biodiversity while improving the livelihoods of local people in human-modified landscapes. My research examines the uneven development impacts of current efforts to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable ecotourism along El Salvador’s Balsamo Coast. I formerly worked for the US Environmental Protection Agency and served with the Peace Corps in Paraguay. I am a certified Yoga instructor, runner, and lover of good beer and wine!

Jennifer Jackson (Education)
Jennifer Jackson is from Tampa, Florida and attended the University of South Florida where she earned her B.S. degree in Biomedical Sciences. After completing her Bachelor of Science degree, she taught middle school science for 14 years and held various leadership roles within the field of education. During her time as a science educator, Jennifer received multiple teaching awards and recognitions such as the 2018 Florida Association of Science Teachers Outstanding Educator of the Year award. Currently, she is a Teacher Liaison for the Space Foundation (Flight 16-19) and a Space Station Ambassador for the ISS U.S. National Laboratory. As a Ph.D. candidate in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Science Education, Jennifer is interested in researching the multiple aspects of teacher learning and acting as a science communicator between STEM researchers and K-12 teachers.

Peter Collins (Civil Engineering)
Peter Collins is a third-year civil engineering doctoral candidate at Penn State. He received his bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Utah State University in 2018 and his master’s degree in civil engineering from Penn State in 2019. His research focus is on understanding how microgravity influences the solidification of cementitious materials and how the in-situ lunar resources can be used to create a concrete material. This research has involved the analysis of samples that were processed on the International Space Station and compared to Earth-based control samples. Outside of school, his hobbies include an abundance of outdoor activities such as dirt biking, snowboarding, and skydiving.

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