“When I started at UNH, I had so many things I wanted to do,” says environmental engineering major Nicola Elardo ’20. While her outward demeanor is calm, cool and collected, Nicola's high level of involvement has her hustling around campus each week, balancing her passions for music and engineering. Most semesters, she takes up to three extra credits, is in at least two or three music ensembles at a time and is active in many clubs including the Society of Women Engineers, Kappa Kappa Psi, and the Environmental and Water Research Institute. She is also a member of the New England Water Works Association and serves as an Environmental Engineering Department Representative.

Clearly, Nicola has achieved her goal of doing a lot of things at UNH. She also works at least two part time jobs at any given time — citing experiences dog walking, working in the Parker Media Lab, and serving as a gallery attendant at UNH's Museum of Art.

Nicola came to Durham knowing she wanted to major in engineering. The selling point for her was the music department and marching band program — Nicola plays the trombone. “All my friends have come from marching band,” Nicola says. One of her favorite memories at UNH was playing the song “This Is Me” from the movie The Greatest Showman. Part way through the song, each band member took off their uniform jacket, revealing shirts each member had made. The shirts included pride flags, country flags, or quotes that resonated with them. Nicola took a comedic approach — putting her LinkedIn headshot on the front and on the back the phrase “Hire Me!”

While Nicola has a great sense of humor and passion for music, she also cares deeply about the sciences. “I stayed in environmental engineering because I really liked the faculty there and they all get to know you,” she explains. “The courses that I have learned the most from are probably the ones that have also required the most work” like Fate and Transport in the Environment (about contaminants in water) and Fundamental Aspects of Environmental Engineering. To complement her classwork, Nicola conducts research in Dr. Jim Malley's lab — studying ultraviolet disinfection for bacteria and viruses in wastewater samples. Nicola has also worked with Dr. Nancy Kinner to collect information for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to improve oil spill remediation.

In addition to the work Nicola has done on campus, she has also traveled to Honduras with Global Brigades and Malawi for her senior capstone project, UNH Water for Zamkutu. In Honduras, Nicola and nine other students assessed the water system and designed a new one to distribute water to every house in Guayacan, El Paraiso. The team created and presented their work to the community in Spanish so they could gain the community’s approval of the proposed design.

Additionally, Nicola is working with two other undergraduate students as their senior project to design and build a sustainable spring box water filter for Zamkutu Village in Lilongwe, Malawi — there are plans to complete this project in the future and Nicola has traveled there once already to initiate the work.

Nicola cites her fellow UNH students as a source of her success. “Everything I have experienced, all the people I have talked to, and learning about how they have made their UNH experience [has positively influenced me].” Additionally, Nicola emphasizes the importance of mentorship from faculty like Dr. Anne Lightbody and Dr. Nancy Kinner. Nicola speaks highly of her advisor, Dr. Malley. He was the “most influential person on campus to me… I had so many pathways I wanted to go down — every advising meeting I had, I would come with a whole list of questions,” she said, chuckling.

Just like her undergraduate career, Nicola hopes her future will include investing her time and talents in a variety of places: joining the Peace Corps or working at a consulting firm or for a municipality. She also hopes to keep up with things she cares about outside of school and work, like cooking and baking. In the short term, Nicola will be pursuing a fully-funded graduate degree at UNH in civil and environmental engineering.