On a Tuesday morning in January 2019, Parker Armstrong ’20 raced through Gatwick Airport in London with only one goal in mind — getting back to his flat in time to interview for the internship of his dreams. As a self-proclaimed “aviation and econ geek,” the opportunity to work for the economic consulting firm Compass Lexecon, who is currently working with airlines, was a perfect marriage of his passions for planes and big data. Ironically, a series of flight cancellations almost cost him the job. He eventually landed in London with just two hours to spare, arriving at his flat just in time to freshen up for the interview. At the end, they asked, “So, do you have any fun plane experiences?” Needless to say, the job was his.

It is the drive and determination illustrated above that is unmistakable in Parker, not only when he talks about his UNH journey, but in the years leading up to it. Parker has been an Irish dancer for most of his life, and his commitment to the sport is well-known: He is currently ranked third in the world. In high school, his school counselor encouraged him to apply to UNH so he could take advantage of the university’s research opportunities, but it was actually UNH’s Irish Dance Club, Fia Chait, that sealed the deal for him. Under his leadership, Fia Chait’s membership has increased from six members to 20, and now performs locally and internationally. Humbly, he credits not only his, but his friends’ leadership for Fia Chait’s success.

Parker is not only a gifted athlete, but he also thrives in the classroom. He entered college as a Paul Scholar, an elite scholarship program for “the most academically promising students [going into] Business, Economics, and Hospitality Management.” He was given the opportunity to move into the dorm early with his scholarship cohort, and he fondly remembers the group playing volleyball the night before all other undergraduate students moved in. He was secretly nervous about making new friends in college, but admits that night, he “found his people.”

Since that time, Parker has taken advantage of the numerous opportunities that have come his way. During his freshman year, where many students saw vacation when Spring Break arrived, Parker saw opportunity. He spent the first half of his break that year at Paul College’s Leadership Camp and the second half on the Paul College First-year Innovation and Research Experience (FIRE) Program’s Networking Trip in Washington, DC. Both would prove to be formative in Parker’s college career, inspiring his pursuit to attend the Washington Center after his sophomore year, and teaching him valuable lessons he still carries today. “Leadership Camp was my first experience in learning that other people had their own struggles, and they could put on a face and you would never know it,” Parker says of the immersive, weeklong experience that challenges students to create positive change on campus.

He would soon face struggles of his own while navigating the academic rigor of the London School of Economics, a one-year study abroad program. The classes were tougher than any he had ever taken and living in his sister’s flat in London, rather than with the other students, proved to be lonely. As in many stories of triumph, though, Parker found strength in perseverance, buckling down to improve his study habits to find success in the classroom. He left the program with a newfound respect for those who face adversity. “I don’t want to live a life where I am just protected. I want to know what it’s like to struggle and face hardship. You learn more from when you fail than when you succeed. It teaches you empathy.”

When he arrived back to the United States after studying abroad, he found a home with Compass Lexecon — so much that he pursued a full-time position with them post-graduation. Through that resolute determination so ingrained in his character, he secured the job over many applicants, some being Ivy League graduates. Although his original plan to pursue a PhD program in economics has been put on hold, Parker admits that the opportunity to work with big data and planes was just too perfect.

Parker credits his empathetic mindset for his successes outside of the classroom. Along with Fia Chait, he was also one of the youngest chief financial officers to be elected to the Student Activity Fee Committee, a feat he accomplished in his second semester of his freshman year. He is also a Paul College dean’s ambassador and a math tutor for the Athletics Department. The connections he’s made through these involvements, from Parker’s view, were really what influenced his UNH story. “The people that I met—they were the defining experience.”