



## REACHING FOR THE COSMOS: SIDDHI RAUT HELPS CHART HUMANKIND'S FUTURE IN SPACE

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BY TRACY IDELL HAMILTON

For Siddhi Raut, studying the universe isn't just about stars and galaxies. It's about understanding our place in the grand sweep of history.

"With cosmology or astrophysics, it's really piecing together the history of our universe," she says. "We're trying to write what human history actually is and where we are going next."



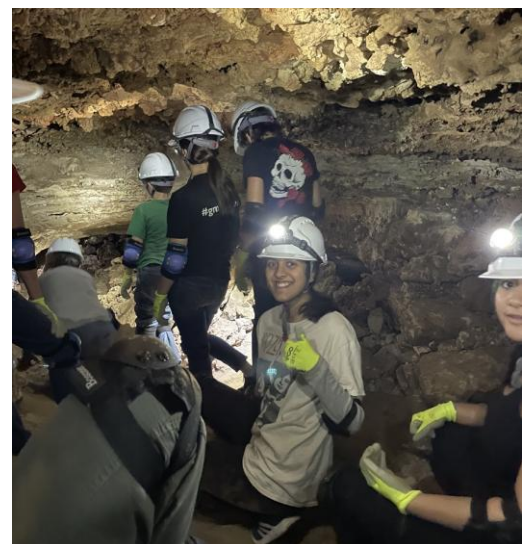
Now a second-year student at the University of Chicago studying physics and astrophysics, Siddhi is already contributing to that story. Last summer, she worked in the High Energy Physics Division at Argonne National Laboratory, contributing to the Mu2e experiment, which explores fundamental questions in particle physics. She's also an intern for the PBS digital series *Be Smart*, supporting research and scriptwriting that translate complex science into engaging, accessible content.

Her path into space science began just a few years earlier in her hometown of San Antonio.

Starting in middle school, Siddhi was part of the first cohort of the WEX Foundation's Lunar Caves Analog Test Sites program, known as LCATS. The immersive, multi-year experience, which receives substantial backing from the Port's Kelly Heritage Foundation, challenges students to design technologies for future lunar habitation.

Along the way, Siddhi and her peers engaged in an array of activities on the Port campus and across the region, from orchestrating high altitude weather balloon launches, engaging astronauts via a direct link with the International Space Station to using Texas caves to test model rovers like those that will be deployed to explore similar environments on the moon.

Beyond technical skills, LCATS provided something more foundational. The program is the brainchild of WEX founder Sam Ximenes, a renowned space architect who founded Astroport Space Technologies on the Port campus—a firm that is pioneering lunar construction technologies. As part of the LCATS program, Siddhi and her peers were introduced to Sam and other leading pioneers advancing space science.



Siddhi led a team of LCATS students in December 2023 as they ventured into a nearby cave system. Image credit: WEX Foundation.

“Students like Siddhi are exactly why we built LCATS,” says Ximenes. “When you give young people access to real-world challenges and surround them with mentors who treat their ideas seriously, they begin to see themselves not just as students of space — but as future leaders in it.”



Siddhi received an award from WEX Foundation founder Sam Ximenes prior to her graduation from the LCATS program in 2022 for her exemplary work as part of the space-themed initiative. Image credit: WEX Foundation.

That validation mattered. Being surrounded by mentors and peers who treated her ambitions seriously helped transform a passion into a trajectory, she says: “It gives you confidence ... to have influential people or adults say, ‘We believe in you.’”

In high school, Siddhi launched SpaceTourist, a youth-led initiative aimed at making space science more accessible. What began as a hub for educational resources evolved into global webinars, workshops and a podcast featuring leading voices in space science and other technologies.

“The really important thing about SpaceTourist and about the podcast is we just elevate the voices,” she says. “We just hand people the mic.”

That instinct — to ask questions and amplify others — now shapes her academic work and professional pursuits. At Argonne, she gained exposure to large-scale research collaboration. At PBS, she helps bridge the gap between discovery and public understanding. In both spaces, she reflects a belief that science should be inclusive and conversational.



Siddhi delivers a presentation while working in the High Energy Physics Division at Argonne National Laboratory in August 2025. Image credit: Siddhi Raut.

“I’ve always been really passionate about space science, about science communication and accessibility,” she says.

Her leadership and scholarship have earned recognition in San Antonio’s aerospace community, including being inducted into the San Antonio Aviation & Aerospace Hall of Fame by the Dee Howard Foundation in 2024.

Today, she remains focused on what lies ahead. Her advice to younger students is straightforward: “Ask a bunch of questions. Keep on learning. Really believe in yourself.”

From a middle school student engaged in project-based learning focused on space exploration to her role as a university researcher contributing to experiments at the frontiers of physics, Siddhi’s journey illustrates how early exposure to real-world STEM environments can accelerate extraordinary potential.

Programs like LCATS are designed to ignite curiosity. Students like Siddhi carry it forward — into research labs, classrooms and global conversations about the future of space exploration.

“I think this is a really exciting time for space science,” she says. “We’re really, truly going to uncover a lot.”



**Siddhi addresses the audience at the San Antonio Aviation and Aerospace Hall of Fame ceremony in 2024. Image credit: Port San Antonio.**

As Port San Antonio and partners like the WEX Foundation continue building pathways between industry, education and emerging technologies, stories like Siddhi's demonstrate what that investment makes possible: not just careers, but contributors to humanity's understanding of the universe and tapping into its infinite potential.