



NewsRelease

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VIRGINIA BEACH STUDENTS ATTEND SUMMER ACADEMY AT NASA

HAMPTON, Va. – Five students from Ocean Lakes High School in Virginia Beach, Va., spent last week planning a mission to Mars as part of the Virginia Aerospace Science and Technology Scholars (VASTS) academy at NASA Langley Research Center.

Matthew Pagnotti, Frances Othersen, Zachary Garcia, Alexander Ray and William Clement were five of 41 rising high school seniors across the Commonwealth selected to take part in the VASTS academy July 11-17 hosted by NASA Langley in a partnership with the Virginia Space Grant Consortium.

Prior to the academy, the students completed a six-month interactive distance-learning program on aerospace exploration that prepared them for their intensive week at NASA Langley.

During the academy, students built, programmed and tested robots, toured NASA labs and facilities, talked with NASA researchers, scientists and astronaut Dr. Roger Crouch, as well as gained solid workforce experience and college credit.

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Students worked on four collaborating teams to plan a mission to Mars. Ray and Garcia worked with teammates to form a plan on how to get to Mars, while Clement decided how astronauts would live once arriving. Othersen and Pagnotti managed other teams and made sure everything was plausible as part of the Mission Integration team.

The high-intensity program pushed scholars to their limits. "The program taught me about my personal limits and how to be a team player," said Pagnotti.

Ray added, "I learned more about teamwork and how to work in a team of 'leaders'."

The VASTS program gave students insight into future career plans. "I have gained the confidence to complete research papers and other difficult assignments in my future," said Garcia.

"The program has given me more knowledge about how the space systems work and how NASA operates," Clement said. "It has been incredible preparation for an actual job."

"The experience has confirmed my desire to work for NASA," Othersen added. "I walked out of this experience a totally different person."

VASTS is a competitive program that allows high school juniors the opportunity to engage in an on-line NASA-based course that uses a space exploration theme to teach a broad range of math, science, engineering and technology skills. The program will expand its offerings next year, allowing more students to take advantage of the course. Applications for the 2009-2010 program will be available August 21 and will be due by Nov. 6, 2009. Selections will be made and coursework initiated in early December. Visit www.vasts.spacegrant.org for an application and more information.

To learn more about the VASTS program, visit:

<http://www.vasts.spacegrant.org/>

For more information about NASA research and exploration, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov>

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