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Georgia Southern University Among Recipients of One Million Dollar NASA Grant

JUNE 3, 2009



Experts at Georgia Southern University will be among those who transform the way public school students in Georgia are taught astronomy thanks to a one-million dollar grant from NASA.

Georgia Southern University, the Georgia Department of Education and Columbus State University partnered to form the 'Georgians Experience Astronomy Research in Schools' (GEARS) project. The NASA grant will fund the development of a curriculum that will completely change the way astronomy is taught in Georgia's public high schools.

'This grant will revolutionize the way students learn astronomy because it will allow us to create a brand new curriculum,' said Georgia Southern University physics Professor Sarah Higdon. 'We'll create courses that will allow students to mine the NASA databases to make their own discoveries. This will be a rigorous course that will reach thousands of students in rural, urban and suburban areas of our state and may possibly lead some of them into a career in physics or astronomy.'

At least one of the astronomy courses will be taught on-line. Students will work through a series of authentic NASA simulations using actual data from NASA archives.

In addition to developing the new curriculum, Georgia Southern University will also play a key role in arming teachers with the skills and information they will need to teach the new material.

To prepare teachers for this incredible opportunity, Georgia Southern University will offer them workshops in the Physics Planetarium as well as on-line courses. 'We even plan to develop a network of Georgia Astronomy Resource Teachers by providing scholarships that will allow them to take the Georgia Southern University online Space Science for Teachers course that we offer,' said Higdon. 'We want to do everything possible to ensure that this is an extraordinary educational experience for students and teachers.'

Further details about the GEARS project are available at <http://cheller.phy.georgiasouthern.edu/~shigdon/GEARS/GEARS.html>.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers 115 degree programs serving nearly 18,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia's largest, is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu.