NCAS: New Names, Same Mission

NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars adopts new naming conventions as the activity flourishes. NCAS has expanded its outreach, and as a result, the agency-wide team assigned new names to reflect the activity’s goals.

NCAS has two distinct branches to serve the nation’s community college students. NCAS on Campus (formally named NASA on Campus) forms a partnership with select community colleges to implement the NCAS model for students at their campus. NCAS Expedition (previously named NCAS Legacy) reaches out to non-partner Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to ask their students to apply.

Accepted applicants from both branches are invited to Mission 1: Discover-NCAS Online (previously named “online course”). Mission 1 allows students to discover NASA’s research and missions through a guided online experience. Top-performing Mission 1 participants receive an invitation to Mission 2.

NCAS on Campus participants, whose college elects to meet face to face are invited to Mission 2: Engage-NCAS on Campus (previously named NASA on Campus). While NCAS on Campus participants whose college elects to meet virtually will be invited to Mission 2: Engage-NCAS Campus NASA Career Simulation. NCAS Expedition students will be invited to Mission 2: Engage-NCAS Virtual (previously known as onsite or VNCAS).

Mission 2: Engage-NCAS on Campus has students form teams and compete in a robotics engineering design challenge. The NASA Career Simulation has students work in a virtual environment as new NASA employees to create a mission to the Moon with an A-PUFFER style rover. NCAS Virtual assigns students to teams to design a mission to the Moon or Mars. All Mission 2 activities have students engage with a diverse STEM work force, take tours of unique STEM facilities, empower students to apply for NASA internships, and present their final product to a group of STEM professionals.

Starting in spring/summer 2022, students who complete a Mission 2 experience become eligible to apply for Mission 3: Explore-NCAS at NASA. Here select students will be invited to a NASA center (if conditions allow) and directly engage with NASA’s missions. Mission 3 is currently under development, more information available in future NCAS Snapshots.

Although NCAS has experienced a name change, the mission remains the same. NCAS works to engage the nation in NASA’s mission by helping students make the connection between a STEM degree and career opportunities, while also motivating students to participate in other competitive NASA projects, programs, and internships.
What’s happening now?

NCAS Expedition

One hundred twenty-two students from 79 community colleges and 19 states were invited to Mission 2: Engage-NCAS Virtual Sept. 13 – 23, 2021. Students worked in NASA mentor-led teams to design a mission to the Moon or Mars. The event culminated in a presentation given to NASA scientists and engineers about their mission.

Students were impressed with the virtual experience, “Although this experience was different from my initial assumptions, it still soared higher than what I would’ve expected. There were wonderful speakers that moved me, this project was great not only to practice leadership and cooperation but also to make new friends. Everyone was so friendly, and this program really gave me some fun in my life ever since COVID hit,” Jack Tian stated.

While Leslie Garcia was inspired to apply for her next NASA adventure. She said, “I did not know that there were so many internship opportunities happening throughout the year. Virtual NCAS helped me grasp a lot of information not only for internships but learning lessons about dreams actually coming true by giving it your all even if you fail because failing is part of succeeding.”

The NASA journey for these students is just beginning. The NCAS team looks forward to their future success.

NCAS Campus

The second successful iteration of Mission 2: Engage-NCAS Campus NASA Career Simulation ran September 27-October 1, 2021, engaging 74 students from seven minority serving institutions and five states. During the NASA Career Simulation students assume the role of a newly hired NASA employee. They join a team of new hires to design a proof-of-concept mission preparing the way for human exploration of the Moon.

NASA Career Simulation capitalizes on NCAS’s partnership with campuses by including talks from NASA subject matter experts as well as local industry professionals. The simulation inspired many students including Candice De Anda from Cypress College who said, “It’s tough, exhausting and a lot crammed into a few days, but it was an amazing experience. I learned so much, had a lot of fun and gained a lot of useful experience with teamwork that I feel I’ve never had before.”

NCAS on Campus starts accepting applications March 1, 2022.
What’s happening next?

NCAS Expedition

Mission 1: Discover-NCAS Online next cohort will take place October 27-December 1, 2021. During NCAS Online students learn about NASA’s missions and history via interactive online content. Students engage with NASA’s diverse workforce through a three-part subject matter expert lecture series. Eligible students receive invitations to for the spring 2022 NCAS Mission 2: Engage – Virtual NCAS.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Austin Lake, a spring 2021 NCAS alum, is a current intern at Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) a part of the Student Independent Research Internship program. As a Software Engineer Intern, Lake develops deep learning and AI algorithms to assist first responders.

“JPL’s amazing feature of sending the Perseverance rover to Mars, motivated me. It was through NCAS I found my passion and I can’t wait for what the future holds for me,” Lake stated.

Lake is currently pursuing his Computer Science and Physics degree at Irvine Valley College.

NCAS has inspired me to stay focused and keep my end goal in mind. It has also exposed me to like-minded peers and great networking opportunities.

See What NCAS Scholars are Saying: Click here

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NASA’s Minority University Research and Education Project (MUREP) engages underrepresented populations through a wide variety of initiatives. Multiyear grants are awarded to assist Minority Institution faculty and students in research of pertinent missions.

For more information about NCAS, contact the NCAS Team at JSC-NCAS@mail.nasa.gov