



PRESS RELEASE

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Citrus College STEM Students Participate in Prestigious NASA Competitions

Glendora, CA—Two teams of Citrus College science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) students recently made institutional history when they participated in prestigious competitions organized by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

A team of eight Citrus College students known as the Rocket Owls joined groups from 47 other American colleges and universities in designing, constructing, and launching rockets as part of NASA's annual Student Launch project in April. While this is the fifth consecutive year that Citrus College has been represented at the competition, this is the best they have ever performed. The Rocket Owls completed the challenge in fourth place, finishing after first place Vanderbilt University, second place University of Louisville, and third place Cornell University.

"The Rocket Owls team was the only community college team to participate in the competition this year and their fourth place finish was outstanding," said Dr. Lucia Riderer, Citrus College physics instructor and team advisor. "This is an incredible accomplishment, especially considering the fact that Citrus placed higher than prestigious institutions such as the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, and Auburn University."

As part of the competition, the Citrus College team was required to design a rocket that could reach an altitude of one mile, deploy an automated parachute system, and safely land where it could be recovered. In addition to their successful launch, the Rocket Owls created a website documenting their projects; took three exams administered by NASA engineers; and raised awareness of STEM education in their communities through workshops and presentations at local schools. As a result of their outreach

efforts, the students also received the competition's Education Engagement Award for the second consecutive year.

The Rocket Owls' historic success came on the heels of another significant achievement by a group of Citrus College STEM students. Several days earlier, the team known as the Galactic Owls was the only group from California selected to participate in NASA's international Human Exploration Rover Challenge, or HERC. The five students from Citrus College travelled to Huntsville, Ala. to design, build, and race human-powered rovers April 7-9, 2016.

The Galactic Owls competed against college and university teams from throughout the United States, as well as teams from Russia, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and India. The Citrus College students successfully completed the mandatory rover obstacle race and the optional sample collection challenge.

"This event encourages students to take an active role in looking to the future of space exploration. As participants, they investigate and test technologies that could potentially be used in NASA missions," said Dr. Lucia Riderer, Citrus College physics instructor and advisor to the Galactic Owls. "This is the first time Citrus College has taken part in this prestigious rover challenge, and it is quite an accomplishment for our students."

Dr. Geraldine M. Perri, superintendent/president of Citrus College, said that the college community was thrilled to learn of these recent achievements.

"Citrus College is extremely proud of the Galactic Owls and Rocket Owls. These students are completing complex scientific work and consistently achieving impressive results," she said. "The success of these two teams underscores the fact that Citrus College has a remarkable STEM program that allows students to become involved in exciting research opportunities, and it also has outstanding instructors who provide guidance and inspiration."

Both the Rocket Owls and the Galactic Owls are part of a group of accomplished students known as the Research in Science and Engineering, or RISE, team. RISE also includes the Space Owls and CAPE (Citrus Automotive and Physics Eco-Marathon) Owls, who complete their own interdisciplinary STEM projects.

Team members enroll in upper-level science and math courses at Citrus College, preparing them for transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

“The science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields have become increasingly vital to the competitiveness and economic growth of the United States. The continued success of our students in these important areas bodes well for their individual futures, while also serving as an affirmation that Citrus College has a robust and effective STEM Program,” said Mrs. Susan M. Keith, president of the Citrus Community College District Board of Trustees. “On behalf of the entire Citrus College community, I extend my sincere congratulations to the Rocket Owls and Galactic Owls and thank them for advancing the institution’s reputation throughout the nation.”

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(From left to right) Logan Tomes, Justin Frias, Tabitha Bailey, and Rebecca Thomas are members of the 2016 Citrus College Rocket Owls, a team of Citrus College physics students who recently placed fourth in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Annual Student Launch Competition.