



VIRGINIA SPACE GRANT CONSORTIUM

Old Dominion University Peninsula Center, 600 Butler Farm Road, Suite 2200, Hampton, VA 23666 (757) 766-5210

NEWS RELEASE

New Award to Virginia Space Grant Consortium Supports Community College Partnerships to Develop the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Workforce in Virginia

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Contact: Mary Sandy, Director, msandy@odu.edu, 757-766-5210

Chris Carter, Deputy Director, cxcarter@odu.edu, 757-766-5210

The Virginia Space Grant Consortium (VSGC) is leading a statewide partnership to develop the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Workforce in Virginia by creating career pathways at Virginia's community colleges.

VSGC, Virginia Community College System (VCCS), Thomas Nelson Community College (Thomas Nelson), Mountain Empire Community College (Mountain Empire), and Virginia Tech are partnering on the Geospatial Technician Education-Unmanned Aircraft Systems (GeoTEd-UAS) project. GeoTEd-UAS will prepare students for success as UAS operations technicians who will plan and fly UAS missions and analyze geospatial data to solve problems and answer questions.

Explosive growth and innovation in UAS technology and integration will create new UAS jobs and a demand for a trained workforce in this emerging sector. Virginia's Community Colleges working with the VSGC and other partners are well-positioned to prepare the future UAS workforce thanks to a new award of \$899,847 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Advanced Technological Education (NSF-ATE) program.

The GeoTEd-UAS team is also partnering with private and public sector business and industry in the Commonwealth, including NASA, to support and advise the project. An assessment of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as a UAS operations technician will be among the first products of the project and will inform the future work of the team.

VSGC Director Mary Sandy notes, "We have assembled an experienced and dedicated team of faculty and partners to prepare the UAS workforce. VSGC has been active in UAS education and is keenly aware of the future demand for UAS operations technicians and the impact of this technology on Virginia's economy."

According to VCCS Chancellor Glenn DuBois, "The VCCS looks forward to partnering with VSGC and the GeoTEd-UAS team to prepare the UAS workforce. The faculty and leadership at Thomas Nelson and Mountain Empire are well poised to develop model

courses and academic pathways that will benefit all of the community colleges in the commonwealth."

Also known as drones, UAS can be used to collect data-on-demand and replace larger aircraft and other means that were previously used to collect data and imagery. UAS, especially small UAS (sUAS) which are under 55 lbs., can be a cost-effective means of collecting data to support analysis and decision making.

With a focus on sUAS, the GeoTEd-UAS project will build college and faculty capacity at Mountain Empire and Thomas Nelson and support these faculty to develop academic pathways in UAS to serve as models for other community colleges. GeoTEd-UAS will also provide professional development and mentoring to faculty from other colleges in Virginia through a UAS Faculty Institute hosted by Virginia Tech. Faculty will develop skills and competencies in the technologies of geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing that are crucial to analyzing and interpreting data.

The project will offer UAS-themed activities for precollege students in the service regions of the two partnering colleges to increase interest and grow the UAS workforce pipeline. Thomas Nelson and Mountain Empire will also receive funds to support scholarships for students taking classes toward completion of the UAS pathways.

Industry advisor Peter Bale, CEO of Sentinel Robotic Solutions, states, "The faculty professional development and mentoring provided by the GeoTEd-UAS project are vital to preparing the UAS workforce of the future. The project will provide employer-driven training that aligns with current industry needs, and then the team mentors and supports the faculty to ensure successful integration into the classroom. It is an exciting time to be working in UAS."

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