

Students Study Earth Science through the Lens of NASA Research

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High school students from across the state are gathered this week at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, to tackle planning for future missions to answer critical science questions around climate.

Part of the Virginia Space Grant Consortium's (VSGC) new Virginia Earth Systems Science Scholars (VESSS) program, the students have completed an online course that earned them three college credits through Thomas Nelson Community College. The course used data and research from NASA missions to help students understand the Earth as a dynamic system of systems in which small changes can have profound impacts.

Students who performed well in the course were invited to participate in the one-week residential summer academy at NASA Langley. Scholars work under the mentorship of NASA scientists to examine state of the art knowledge on issues such as tracking global pollution and sources, monitoring drought conditions, studying sea level changes and analyzing atmospheric impacts of volcanic eruptions.

The students work in teams to design concepts for new missions that are based on scientific needs determined by the National Research Council. The program culminates in a Mission Design Review at which students present their mission concepts to a panel of experts who provide feedback. Summer Academy Scholars earn one college credit for their work.

"We are excited to offer this program to help students better understand their home planet through knowledge gleaned from NASA and other research," said Mary Sandy, director of the VSGC.

Seventy three students participated in one of the two academies offered this summer. Virginia Earth System Science Scholars is a partnership among the VSGC, NASA Langley's Science Directorate and the Hampton University Center for Atmospheric Research and Education and is offered at no cost to qualifying students.

"NASA has the responsibility to use our spaceflight expertise to study and understand how our planet is changing. " said Dave Young, director of NASA Langley's Science Directorate. "Seeing young people engaging with us on this important mission is truly inspiring. It has been a pleasure to offer this program to these exceptional students in partnership with the Virginia Space Grant Consortium and Hampton University."

The program will open for course applications in late September 2016, with the next course starting in December 2016 and ending in May 2017. VSGC expects to offer at least one summer academy at NASA in 2017.

The Virginia Space Grant Consortium is a coalition of Virginia universities, NASA centers, state agencies and other organizations with an interest in aerospace and STEM-related education, workforce development and research. The Consortium is part of NASA's national Space Grant program. Learn more at <http://www.vsgc.odu.edu>.

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Note to Media: Media are invited to visit the Summer Academy at NASA Langley and to interact with the Scholars. Please contact Joe Atkinson at joseph.s.atkinson@nasa.gov/757-864-5644 to make arrangements.