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Space & NASA, the Places Where Career Opportunities Abound for STEM Students and Others

BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

Who can forget the opening line of the TV show *Star Trek*? “Space, the final frontier,” spoken by the character Captain Kirk. No words could be more prophetic, even today. Space is a place of infinite possibilities and universal appeal. As president of Kingsborough Community College, I’m proud KCC is one of six cohorts chosen nationally to advance our commitment to diversity and science education with the launch of the “Here 2 Observe” — or H2O — cohort program.

Funded by a \$375,000 grant from NASA, the five-year program brings together partners focused on space exploration paired with the NASA Dragonfly spacecraft mission to Titan, Saturn’s largest moon scheduled to launch in June 2027. A collaborative effort between KCC, Stony Brook University, the American Museum of Natural History and NASA, H2O will create an authentic STEM learning experience as well as empower underrepresented students, providing them with opportunities to learn more about careers in planetary science, and connecting them with a network of mentors and institutions.

It also recognizes the vital role of community colleges in nurturing diverse students with unique backgrounds and experiences, all of which are invaluable to our future workforce and scientific community.

KCC is one of the few community colleges in the United States with a strong emphasis on planetary and space sciences. The KCC Department of Physical Sciences provides students with hands-on experience through laboratory components in courses related to planetary science and astronomy. Dedicated faculty members lead the program with expertise in planetary science, including Dr. Steven J. Jaret, Dr. Kieren Howard, Dr. Michael K. Weisberg and Dr. Jisun Park, whose passion for science education and mentorship enhances the learning experience. I also want to mention Dr. Harold C. Connolly Jr., who help start up our Earth and Planetary Science (EPS) program. He has since moved on to found the geology program at Rowan University. He and the above-mentioned EPS faculty are research associates at the American Museum of Natural History.



From left are professor Dr. Steven Jaret, students James Velinskje, Jamal Tabidi, and Molly Einhorn, and professor Dr. Jisun Park. They are Kingsborough Community College’s instructors and student participants in the Here 2 Observe program, a five-year program bringing together partners focused on space exploration paired with the NASA Dragonfly spacecraft mission to Saturn’s largest moon Titan.

Photo credit: Kingsborough Community College

Connolly is a co-investigator and mission sample scientist for NASA’s OSIRIS-REx asteroid mission. As such, he’s one of a handful of scientists who get to examine samples from the Bennu asteroid that date back to the birth of the solar system. The mission will give critical insight into the formation of our planet and help support theories about how water may have arrived on Earth.

Students in the Here 2 Observe

program can participate in various activities, including monthly meetings, seminars, and field trips to institutions like the American Museum of Natural History, Stony Brook University and the Lunar and Planetary Science Conference. They’ll also have the opportunity to go to the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory and see where the spacecraft is being built.

By the way, this isn’t the first grant we’ve gotten from NASA --

which shows the strength of the KCC Department of Physical Sciences. In addition, KCC is also part of the museum’s Research Experience for Undergraduates Program in Physical Sciences, which is funded by the National Science Foundation and operates in collaboration with CUNY. Students selected for the program get to work on mentored research projects.

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader is the president of Kingsborough Community College, which was founded in 1963 as part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Kingsborough stands steadfast in its mission of providing both liberal arts and career education, promoting student learning and development, as well as strengthening and serving its diverse community. Situated on a 70-acre campus in the Manhattan Beach community, its tranquil seaside location is a perfect setting for reflective academic pursuits, yet the College’s active engagement in the community provides students with exciting opportunities to become productive participants in a growing and vital borough. To learn more about Kingsborough, visit its website www.kbcc.cuny.edu.