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UNH Undergraduate Researchers Win Summer Internships At NASA Academy

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DURHAM, N.H. -- When NASA’s twin STEREO spacecraft roared into space last October from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, college seniors and would-be astronauts Jay Carroll and Catherine Walker were on hand with others from the University of New Hampshire to celebrate contributions they had made to the mission that will study the Sun.

The rocket launch was but a small step in the students’ shared goal of becoming future mission specialists as NASA sets its sights on manned missions to the Moon and Mars. The two moved even closer to that goal by recently winning spots in the space agency’s internship program known as the NASA Academy.

From a field of 1,500 applicants nationwide, Carroll and Walker were among the 50 undergraduates chosen to spend 10 weeks working with NASA scientists on projects and traveling to various NASA and aerospace technology facilities around the country.

After graduating from college this May, Carroll and Walker will spend their summers, respectively, working at NASA’s Ames Research Center in California on a lunar lander simulation project and the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland on an instrument for a Mars lander. NASA operates two other academy sites at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama and the Glenn Research Center in Ohio.

Carroll, a UNH senior physics major from Chichester, and Walker, a senior astrophysics major at Mount Holyoke College and resident of Wells, Me., both worked for on the STEREO mission at the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space (EOS) where the PLAsma and Supra-Thermal Ion Composition or PLASTIC instrument was designed and built.

Walker spent last summer at EOS working on the STEREO mission as an intern in the UNH Research & Discover program – a joint UNH-NASA program that allows undergraduates to conduct research in collaboration with university and NASA scientists. She has continued working part-time on the STEREO mission during her senior year at Mount Holyoke.

Both students attribute the work they’ve done on the STEREO mission and PLASTIC instrument as the key to their acceptance to the NASA Academy.

Walker, who applied unsuccessfully to the Academy last year notes, “The fact that I had done something on an actual NASA mission that’s been launched –that’s the biggest addition to my resume since last year. And the project I got assigned to at Goddard also has to do instrumentation.”

Says Carroll, “Without a doubt the work I did with STEREO-PLASTIC speaks more for me than anything on my resume. The experience has been invaluable. You can’t compare anything to actually having worked on a mission.”
The New Hampshire Space Grant Consortium will provide Carroll with a stipend for his summer as a NASA research associate at the Ames Research Center. One of 50 state-based, NASA-funded Space Grant consortia, NHSGC brings together New Hampshire’s education and scientific communities to foster public interest in science education, scholarship, and research.

Says David Bartlett, director of NHSGC and associate director of EOS, “Space Grant, like our Research & Discover program and work on NASA missions, provides students with a pipeline of opportunities, and these two outstanding student researchers being selected for the NASA Academy speaks to that.”


Photo available to download: http://unh.edu/news/img/IMG_6593_2.JPG

Photo caption: College seniors Jason Carroll and Catherine Walker worked on a NASA satellite mission at the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space and both were awarded internships at the NASA Academy for this summer.