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News Release

For Immediate release: 07/02/12

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UTEP Students Prepare for Flight aboard NASA's "Weightless Wonder"

Five UTEP students will venture to NASA Johnson Space Center's Ellington Field in Houston to conduct experiments aboard the "Weightless Wonder" aircraft in June 2012.

The Reduced Gravity Education Flight Program (RGEFP) gives undergraduate students the opportunity to propose, build and fly experiments in reduced gravity. The teams will perform the experiments aboard a microgravity aircraft which produces periods of weightlessness for up to 25 seconds at a time by executing a series of approximately 30 roller coaster-like parabolas over the Gulf of Mexico. During the free falls, the students will to gather data in the unique environment that mimics space.

UTEP team's opportunity to participate is the result of the hard work and commitment of undergraduate students Alan Alvillar, Steven Ambriz, Sergio Guerrero, Jonel Ortiz, and Jonathan Torres, graduate students Armando Delgado and Jorge Frias, and faculty advisor Prof. Evgeny Shafirovich. The team was selected based on scientific merit and educational outreach potential from more than 60 proposals. They have put many hours into researching and building their experiment. They are also taking time to reach out to other students and the community to share their unique experiences and discoveries. For example, in March, they presented their work to students of Riverside High School, Austin High School, and Lady of the Valley Middle School.

"We are excited that our program provides once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for aspiring scientists and engineers to study and understand their craft. The students gain useful skills by participating in the program through collaborative planning and teamwork," said Doug Goforth, RGEFP Manager.

The UTEP student team will arrive at Ellington Field, where astronauts do their T-38 training, on June 7, 2012. They will then go through physiological training and fly their experiment during

the week of June 11. This experiment will investigate combustion of lunar regolith simulant mixed with magnesium, with the goal to develop a method for the production of construction materials on the Moon. Following their flight, the team will evaluate findings, draw conclusions and provide the results to NASA. The team's work is supported by UTEP's Center for Space Exploration Technology Research.

For more information about the Reduced Gravity Education Flight Program, visit:

<http://reducedgravity.jsc.nasa.gov/>

Or contact Rachel Kraft at NASA Johnson Space Center's Public Affairs Office, at 281-792-7690, or rachel.h.kraft@nasa.gov.