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News Release

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UTEP's Weightless Students Return to Earth

After testing their self-designed and constructed experiments on-board a gravity-defying aircraft, five students from University of Texas at El Paso are busy evaluating their data after experiencing weightlessness at NASA Johnson Space Center's Ellington Field in Houston.

Steven Ambriz, Alan Alvillar, Sergio Guerrero, Jonel Ortiz and Jonathan Torres participated in NASA's Reduced Gravity Education Flight Program (RGEFP), which gives teams of undergraduate students from across the nation the opportunity to propose, design, build, fly and evaluate a reduced gravity experiment. The team was supported by graduate students Armando Delgado and Jorge Frias, faculty advisor Dr. Evgeny Shafirovich, and UTEP's Center for Space Exploration Technology Research. The team was selected from over 60 proposals based on scientific merit and education outreach potential.

The team tested their experiment aboard NASA's "Weightless Wonder," a microgravity aircraft that can produce periods of weightlessness lasting 18 to 25 seconds at a time by flying a series of about 30 parabolas – a steep climb followed by a free fall – over the Gulf of Mexico.

"I am very grateful that our team from UTEP was given this extraordinary opportunity to participate in the Reduced Gravity Flights Program. Reduced gravity is an amazing feeling that I'll never forget, especially for my very first flight on an airplane ever," said Steven Ambriz, a mechanical engineering senior.

The student team flew their experiment, Combustion Mechanisms of Lunar Regolith/Magnesium Mixtures, at Ellington Field from June 08-16, 2012. This experiment accomplished the gathering of data on the combustion propagation in mixtures of lunar soil simulant with magnesium under reduced gravity conditions, a new process that could be used for the production of construction

materials on the Moon. The team will issue a final report to NASA two months after the flight analyzing the experiment's effectiveness, scientific findings, and the conclusions that were drawn from the results.

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

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

Or contact Rachel Kraft, NASA Johnson Space Center Public Affairs Office, at 281-792-7690.