

Developing Nontraditional Partnerships to Disseminate the Space Science Story

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NASA Space Science Days (NSSD) was established in 2004 to bring the story of the Mars Exploration Rovers (MER) to a community far removed from areas NASA traditionally serves. The original NSSD invited 400 5th and 8th graders from the Texas Rio Grande Valley area to the University of Texas Brownsville campus to participate in a one day Saturday event filled with information about MER with related hands on activities. Currently the program has grown to over 700 5th and 8th grade participants who are mentored by trained university students from several Texas universities and community colleges and growing to include universities from throughout the U.S. A collaboration between three major institutions:

The NASA Johnson Space Center (JSC) Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science Directorate (ARES), the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers/Advancing Hispanic Excellence in Technology Engineering, Math, and Science, (SHPE/AHETEMS), and the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) has been established to enable the dissemination of Solar System related educational materials throughout the U.S. Already in its 8th year, UTB has developed and tested a NSSD model that has successfully disseminated space science materials to students throughout South Texas Rio Grande Valley. With this newly formed collaboration this model's expansion will allow trained SHPE students and professionals to conduct events throughout its established nation-wide delivery systems.

Each year a new NSSD site will be established through an application process solicited from SHPE student and professional chapters. Once a chapter is awarded, upper-level high school and university students will travel to NASA- JSC for a two day workshop where students learn about the current year's theme and are trained to present hands-on activities related to the theme. Additional training by ARES and UTB occurs one month before the new event in their own communities. Both local middle school teachers and mentors are trained locally. This allows the teachers time to prepare their students with the background material for NSSD and give the mentors time to decide which activity they feel comfortable with to lead. Several events using this process have already been successful and an increase in interest from SHPE chapters wanting to establish their NSSD event is growing.