The UAH ARISS Program, Promoting STEM By Practicing Amateur Radio With Astronauts

Mark Becnel, Aerospace Engineering
The University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, AL

Summary
Student amateur radio operators at the University of Alabama in Huntsville shared the experience of amateur radio and the love of space to 120 8th graders in March of 2013. The UAH Space Hardware Club hosted a series of educational courses at four middle schools that engaged four local classrooms in amateur radio, allowing each student to get hands on experiences with radio equipment. The UAH team then hosted a live, direct uplink to NASA Astronaut Tom Marshburn onboard the International Space Station using amateur radio, where the students were able to have a 10 minute conversation with the Astronaut. The program, sponsored by NASA and the Amateur Radio Relay League, is called Amateur Radio on the International Space Station.

Developing a Curriculum - 4 Classroom Visits
To prepare students for the ARISS activity day, SHC members designed four classroom visits to teach and practice skills:
Day 1 – Radio Waves and Amateur Radio
Day 2 – How to be an Astronaut and the Simulated ISS
Day 3 – Tracking Satellites and Doppler Shift
Day 4 – Event Day Training

Teaching the Students
With a set curriculum and four classrooms onboard, the four visits were performed with each of the classrooms. SHC members, USLI members, and other volunteers helped in each of the visits. Each student provided a question to be asked of the astronaut, and the four questions chosen for each classroom were asked by their authors.

The Talk with the Astronaut
March 21, 2013
Each of the classrooms were brought to the UAH Space Communications Lab for the event. Students toured this lab, the ChargerSat Cleanroom, and a space history area. With all preparations complete, and predictions that the ISS was within range, students began announcing on the radio for the astronauts: “This is K4UAH, Station can you hear us?” Soon, Astronaut Tom Marshburn replied loud and clear. All 16 questions were asked during the 10 minute flyover.

1. This is Debreiona. What is your greatest challenge on the Space Station?
2. This is Jordan. Is it fun to be an astronaut?
3. This is Carmen. How long is your training before you go to space?
4. This is Ada. How do you stay entertained in space?
5. This is Micah. Are astronaut suits comfortable?
6. This is Malaya. Do the stars look bigger in space than they do on Earth?
7. This is Garrett. What does Earth look like from space?
8. This is Patrick. How is life in microgravity?
9. This is Shondarius. Is it fun to be in space, and is it scary?
10. This is Alex. Does floating in space make you nauseous?
11. This is Amelia. What do you miss most about Earth?
12. This is Morgan. What is your inspiration to choose this career?
13. This is Rachel. What do you do while in space?
14. This is Aubrie. How do you stay entertained in space?
15. This is Cassie. What do you do while in space?
16. This is Joseph. Are there any TVs or internet to use for entertainment?

Curriculum Design
June – December 2012
Classroom Activities
February - March 2013
Event Day
March 21, 2013

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Evaluating Impact
Every student and volunteer involved had a different experience. The 8th graders each had hands on experience with amateur radio. Each performed all the training activities in the classroom visits. Through interviews and surveys, it was clear that students felt introduced and welcomed into the science community. Some commented on this being a door opened to a new set of opportunities previously thought unreachable. The UAH volunteers commented that they each felt a direct impact on the future of the students involved. The in depth, multiple visit instruction seemed to increase the program effectiveness significantly.