

One to watch: JSC co-op named Rhodes Scholar

By Nicole Cloutier

Jennifer Gruber, a JSC co-op in the Flight Design and Dynamics Division, departs this month for England where she'll join the world's oldest international fellowship as a Rhodes Scholar.

Gruber, who is completing her fifth tour as a NASA co-op, will pursue a Ph.D. in engineering science at the legendary University of Oxford.

"I am really looking forward to the adventure of living in another country," said Gruber. "It will be my first time out of the country, except for a recent four-day trip to Budapest. I was one of a dozen Rhodes Scholars from my class joining the student delegation to the NATO workshop on political and military decision-making there earlier this year."

In fact, while on that trip, Gruber had a chance to meet Story Musgrave who was at the conference making a presentation on space exploration and experiences from his flights. Gruber plans to be an astronaut herself, so meeting Musgrave was a highlight of her trip.

"I would like to go to Mars," says Gruber, who was inspired to be an astronaut from a young age, when she saw *The Right Stuff*. "I saw those guys and thought, 'Wow! These guys get to go on these great adventures in space.' The combination of space and adventure was intriguing to me. Even when I was younger, I was always the type to push the envelope, and my mother's patience."

Gruber grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. The second of four children, Gruber's parents were a big inspiration. "My father is a bricklayer and my mother is a teacher. My mother was a really important role model. When I was 8 years old, she started college and got a degree in education. And to do that, while raising four children, was very impressive. She graduated *summa*, so that was my goal when I went to college. At graduation, it was really neat, to remember watching her graduate *summa*, and then for her to be able to watch me do it."

Gruber graduated in May from Boston University with both bachelor's and master's degrees in aerospace engineering. She plans to use that background for her ion propulsion research while at Oxford.

She originally joined JSC's co-op program back in 1996 with the Simulator Operations and Technology Division. Other co-op tours followed including one in Space Flight Training Division and three with the Flight Design and Dynamics Division.

"In DM, they believe in the 'it takes a division to raise a co-op' philosophy," said Gruber. "As a result, I've had a great variety of projects and mentors, and I've learned a lot about operations. I love the



JSC Photo S99-09554 by Robert Markowitz

Jennifer Gruber, NASA co-op, leaves for Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar this month.

focus on teamwork here. So many people are willing to answer questions and help with projects when they can. For example, my main project, the maneuver confirmation software, would not have been successful without the help and guidance of Charlie Barrett, Steve Stich, and Chris Edelen. I also enjoy feeling like part of the team, in that I have my own responsibilities and people count on me to do my part. DM is a great place to co-op!

"This is where I've really discovered my passion for exploration," said Gruber, of her NASA experience. "Human space exploration is so exciting to me." Gruber says she fully intends to return to NASA after her education at Oxford, and pursue a position in flight control and eventually astronaut candidacy.

"We are extremely proud of Jenny's selection as a Rhodes Scholar," said Steve Stich, Ascent Entry Flight Dynamics group lead. "She is a very talented, energetic, and practical young engineer with a bright NASA future ahead of her. Her talents will be missed while she is away studying at Oxford."

Many experienced co-workers also speak highly of Gruber. Lisa Shore, ascent flight dynamics officer, comments, "I have no doubt that Jenny will accomplish anything she sets her mind to. They might as well start measuring her for her astronaut suit now."

Gruber has received two Cooperative Education Special Achievement awards and one Cooperative Education Flag Award for her work at NASA. She helped develop the space shuttle maneuver confirmation software used by the flight dynamics officers in the MCC. She was a

research assistant working on a micro-electromechanical sensor device at Boston University. Gruber was a Dean Elsbeth Melville Scholar at Boston University and was the student speaker at BU's 1999 commencement ceremony.

"My advice to younger students is to keep working and persevere when you think you've failed because things have a funny way of working out," said Gruber. "Also, be ready to take any good opportunity that comes your way, even if you haven't planned for it. If you're able to roll with the punches, you have a greater chance of doing something really interesting and fun that you didn't know you could do before. I learned that when I decided to apply for the Rhodes, even though it wasn't part of my plan." ■

Vice President Gore praises NASA employee

Dan Clem, safety engineer, was presented with Vice President Al Gore's monthly "Plain Language" award recently for spearheading the rewrite of a NASA safety manual. Clem received the award at a presentation at the Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC, July 20.

Clem worked with Stacey Menard, safety engineer, and a team of 12 Hernandez Engineering Inc. Safety and Fire Protection Services contractors to revise the 600-plus-page Safety and Health Handbook into plain language.

"The project took us about four months," said Clem of the comprehensive task. "I was really happy to find out we had won. I had never seen a vice president in person before much less shaken hands with one, so it was very exciting."

Clem began the rewriting project in 1996 after JSC Director George Abbey initiated a movement toward making NASA documentation and regulations more "readable." Clem's team streamlined the original Safety and Health Handbook, which was laden with "legalese," and reorganized it in a user-friendly question and answer format. Each chapter begins with "Who must follow this chapter?" so employees can easily find the information they need.



Dan Clem receives award from Vice President Al Gore

"This is a great example of taking critical technical information and making it accessible to the reader," said Gore who issued a 1998 Executive Memorandum directing all executive agencies to move toward use of plain language in their requirements, documents and correspondence. "More importantly, the rewrite of this manual will help ensure a safer workplace for NASA's employees."

"Safety is our number one priority at NASA," said NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin. "I can't think of a better way to promote that goal than to communicate safe procedures to our employees in plain language. I'm very proud of the team at Johnson Space Center for this achievement and for the Vice President's recognition." ■



JSC Photo S99-09552 by Robert Markowitz

DM's team approach to co-op training has helped Jennifer Gruber get the most from her JSC experience and helped prepare her for her upcoming tour as a Rhodes Scholar. Team members include, from left, front: Richard Jones, Carson Sparks, Gruber, Lisa Shore and Charlie Baret; back: Steve Stich, Ed Gonzalez, Keith Fletcher, and Greg Oliver.