Boeing Encourages Future in Space Industry for Student Hopefuls

For 20-year old Aisha Hunte, working for the country's top aerospace company and being involved with the International Space Station (ISS) program is more than just a dream come true. For this Texas Southern University (TSU) junior, it's been her passport to a new frontier and a possible future in an industry that has been traditionally under-represented by women and other minorities.

Hunte, a computer science major, will complete her six-month participation in a cooperative program at Boeing [NYSE: BA] in June and walk a way with experiences that few people can imagine.

"The most interesting part of my job is learning more about our country's space program, especially the experiments that are being conducted aboard the International Space Station," she says. "This co-op experience has exposed me to different software programming tools, technical documentation, payload software subsets, and practical implementation of the information I learn in school."

Hunte works full time supporting the ISS payload integration team while attending evening classes as a full-time student at TSU. The payload integration team is responsible for executing and coordinating ISS payload engineering, analytical integration, operations, planning and safety. Among her duties are editing software documents that ensure payloads communicate properly on the ISS and debugging software tools.

"What I like about computer science is that it combines math, science and critical thinking skills. It allows me to appreciate computer programming more because you can write software that automates tasks or extremely reduces the time that it takes to complete them," Hunte adds.

The co-op program is a new venture between Boeing, subcontractor Geo Control Systems, NASA and TSU. It is designed as an avenue for introducing college graduates to the aerospace industry and a method for Boeing to cultivate qualified candidates for permanent positions within the company. The co-op program, unlike most internships, allows participants to receive college credit while gaining valuable work experience.

"Texas Southern University prides itself in opening doors to new learning opportunities for students beyond the classroom and welcomes the advanced aerospace education, training and employment prospects presented by this partnership," says Dr. Priscilla D. Slade, TSU president. "We are confident that successful participants like Aisha will lead to more students receiving similar opportunities and build a mutually beneficial, lasting relationship with Geo Control and Boeing."

The co-op is coordinated by Geo Control, which matches qualified students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to specific work packages within Boeing that are complementary with the schools education curriculum.

"We continually try to improve our support to historically black colleges and small disadvantaged businesses," explains Dr. Joe Mills, Boeing vice president and program manager, International Space Station. "Through this partnership with Geo Control, we're successfully achieving both these goals."

As a regular supporter of HBCUs, minority institutions and minority-owned businesses across the country, Boeing offers numerous business, employment and professional growth opportunities to various establishments. Career Communications Group, publisher of U.S. Black Engineer & Information Technology magazine, recently ranked Boeing first among corporations and U.S. government agencies in its support of historically black engineering schools in the United States.

Geo Control, an engineering services company, is one of 8 small and small minority-owned businesses providing engineering and technical support services to Boeing's payload integration team. It is working with TSU to place more student interns.

The Boeing NASA Systems organization, headquartered in Houston, is committed to being the leading global supplier of reusable and human space systems and services. The organization employs about 5,000 people, mostly in Texas, California, Florida and Alabama.

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For further information:
Tanya E. Deason-Sharp
Boeing NASA Systems
(281) 226-6070
Ed Memi
Boeing NASA Systems
(281) 226-4029