

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)

Ignition - Primary Space Education (1)

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THE PULSE OF THE NEXT GENERATION; WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT SPACE
EXPLORATION VIA THE WEWANTOURFUTURE INITIATIVE

Abstract

For the past three years, the We Want Our Future initiative has been motivating students to think critically about the future of space exploration. Through an interactive classroom activity, students are asked to envision how their future can be shaped by space technology, and to record their ideas in a postcard form. This contains both an illustrative perspective and a short description that reflects their desires in the future of space exploration. To date, the initiative has collected over two-thousand postcards from a variety of countries representing a diverse population around the globe. Founded in 2009 by students, the initiative now features materials in English, Dutch, French and Spanish, with efforts to expand to Italian, Egyptian, and Chinese. The initiative has experienced rapid growth over the past year, in part due to the international exposure gained at the 2011 International Astronautical Congress in Cape Town, South Africa.

The initiative finds that regardless of the influence of a local space economy, students are unilaterally interested in pursuing space exploration and expect all of their native countries to play a role in a robust effort to pursue the next frontier. In addition, it was found that most students hold a remarkable knowledge of existing space technologies and the common problems facing the industry today such as: in-situ resource utilization, on-orbit fuel storage, entry decent landing challenges on Mars and human safety. After completing the postcard activity, many participants have used the initiative's online database to search for their postcard online, and to explore the dreams of other youth from around the world. Educators have used these postcards to create classroom murals and artwork, and the initiative hopes to expand this practice through the use of an interactive postcard map. Students will be able to click upon any country or region in the world, and find postcards from students in that region. Regardless of geographic location, the student voices almost unanimously expect space exploration to contain a culture that is invariant of gender or race, often highlighting modern social achievements. The initiative has received numerous postcards in the theme of, "*I hope to be the first woman to land on the moon.*" Collectively,

these illustrations provide insight into the mentality and the expectations of the next generation, and help to inspire many of them work to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math.