

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Structures for Space Education (2)

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LEEM: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE SPANISH SPACE NETWORK

Abstract

LEEM – Laboratory for Space and Microgravity Research - is a Spanish non-profit association founded in 2006 by university students who had participated on space-related educational activities, created with the aim of offering new opportunities for students to complement their academic formation and to prepare their future entrance on the space professional community.

The LEEM Network brings together students, young professionals and space enthusiasts from different cities, universities, careers and backgrounds, giving its members the opportunity of working on an international and multidisciplinary team even before leaving university. The skills and lessons learnt from this experience constitute an added value for the professional career and personal curriculum of its members.

The major event organized by LEEM is the annual congress “Spanish Space Students”, where students from all over the country can meet other students, companies and institutions to share their ideas and kick-off new interdisciplinary projects. On the 2008 edition held in Saragossa, more than 250 students attended 27 high level presentations from the different agents of the Spanish space sector. This congress has become the major forum for the space industry to address opportunities to students, as well as the biggest annual meeting for space students in Spain.

During its first two years of existence, LEEM has organized different competitions to motivate students towards the space sector: the International CanSat Competition offers the opportunity of approaching for the first time a real hands-on engineering project; the Drop Tower Competition brings scientific microgravity experimentation closer to university students and the payload contest for LEEMSat-I, the first student satellite of the association, intends to promote the development of real space payloads on different universities.

Nowadays LEEM involves more than 200 students and professionals from 11 Spanish universities, with local offices in six major Spanish cities, and collaborates with students from three continents, working together on a daily basis through an Internet platform. It has demonstrated to be a fully-fledged interdisciplinary space network with many benefits to be offered both to society and industry.

This paper will analyse how the network was created and established, and how it remains entirely managed by students, focusing on the lessons learnt that may be helpful for similar initiatives in other countries. It will also analyse the benefits that space networking can offer to students, industry and society.