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THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE SCIENCE COMMUNITY IN NASA'S SPACE SCIENCE PROGRAM

Abstract

The history of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is often told in a top-down fashion, favoring the actions of key leaders or decision-makers. This paper will highlight the role of consensus-building within the scientific community in the history of NASA's science endeavors, and demonstrate how such efforts are often initiated by individuals or groups not associated with NASA's organizational or government leadership.

The scientific community whose work depends on the activities of NASA has influenced the strategic and programmatic direction of NASA's space science program throughout its 50-year history. Two organizations represent the voice of the scientific community to NASA leadership and lawmakers: The National Academies' National Research Council and the NASA Advisory Council.

This paper will show that the science community's influence on NASA's space science program has measurably increased in recent decades, while also highlighting the struggle for authority over NASA's space science efforts between the Executive and Legislative branches of the Federal government.

Through the use of documents from the NASA Historical Reference Collection, The National Academies Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration, and interviews with key participants, this paper will show how the roles of the NRC and NAC have changed over time and evaluate the effectiveness of each organization in shaping NASA's goals and policies for scientific study in space. The paper will also discuss the role of international partners and professional and advocacy organizations in the history of planetary science at NASA, and address how factions within NASA react to external pressures. This paper is based on new research not presented at any previous meeting.