NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts: Dr. Chris Brown, 919/513-2457 or cbrown@ncsu.edu
Dr. Fred DeJarnette, 919/515-5243 or dejar@ncsu.edu
Mick Kulikowski, News Services, 919/515-3470 or
mick_kulikowski@ncsu.edu

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NC Space Grant Consortium Gets Funding Boost from NASA, State

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The NC Space Grant, a consortium of eight North Carolina universities united to assist the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in inspiring students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, is one of seven space grant consortia across the nation to receive enhanced funding from NASA to advance its programs in education, research and public service.

NC Space Grant will receive an increase of $353,000, bringing its recurring annual funding level from NASA to $550,000. This award came on the heels of $200,000 in funding approved by the N.C. General Assembly in August.

With a tripling of its funds, NC Space Grant, which operates its main office at North Carolina State University, will be even better equipped to help NASA and the state prepare a work force ready for NASA-related careers, says Dr. Christopher Brown, associate director of NC Space Grant who is also a research professor of botany at NC State and director of space programs for the Kenan Institute of Engineering, Technology & Science.

"One of the major issues facing NASA, and in fact the entire nation, is the "graying" of its skilled workforce. NC Space Grant programs will help train the future work force to be competent in science, technology, engineering and math, known as STEM," Brown says. He goes on to point out that this fits well with the Coalition for America's High Tech Future, recently joined by NC State University Chancellor James L. Oblinger, which seeks to double the number of STEM graduates over the next 10 years.

Brown points out that the consortium plans to bring more North Carolina colleges and universities into the consortium, as well as substantially increase the amount of money for scholarships and fellowships for deserving students. NC Space Grant has supported more than 200 graduate and undergraduate students across the state since its inception in 1991. Three

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undergraduate students partially supported by NC Space Grant were involved in the detection of the most distant explosion yet, a gamma-ray burst from the edge of the visible universe. Working with faculty at NC Space Grant member University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, these students helped to detect the gamma-ray burst using NASA's Swift satellite and the Southern Observatory for Astrophysical Research (SOAR) telescope in Chile. The newly detected powerful burst comes from an era soon after stars and galaxies first formed, about 500 million to 1 billion years after the Big Bang, and is about 13 billion light years from Earth.

NC Space Grant has also provided 30 students with summer internship opportunities at NASA centers and aerospace companies.

In addition to more money for scholarships, NC Space Grant is poised to offer professional development opportunities for teachers as well as seed money for researchers to move into new realms of research, says Dr. Fred DeJarnette, director of NC Space Grant and professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at NC State. NC Space Grant has already provided support for more than 75 research seed projects to university faculty.

One of the interesting seed projects originally supported by NC Space Grant is the Mars Tumbleweed Project in NC State's mechanical and aerospace engineering department, in which students and faculty designed a special type of rover for Mars exploration. Propelled by the wind and less expensive than wheeled rovers, NC State's tumbling Tumbleweed would roll across Mars, taking measurements of the environment to identify sites for future missions.

NC Space Grant also has a strong outreach component and is particularly active in promoting science, engineering and technology in the K-12 classroom.

U.S. Rep. Brad Miller, member of the House Space and Aeronautics sub-committee, offered his praise of the Space Grant Program.

"The program helps to promote strong science, mathematics and technology education from elementary school through graduate school," Miller said. "It is a key tool for NASA to attract and train its next generation of scientists and I am very pleased that they will learn those skills here in North Carolina."

Mandated by Congress in 1987, Space Grant is a national program to promote partnerships among universities, aerospace industries, federal, state and local governments. Besides NC State, participating universities in North Carolina include NC A&T State, Duke, NC Central University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Pembroke, and Winston-Salem State University.

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