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UH Mānoa launches new Space program

Plans to put small satellite into orbit from Kauai

The University of Hawai'i is becoming the first university in the world with the capability to design, build, launch, and control its own satellites. The Mānoa campus this month established the Hawai'i Space Flight Laboratory (HSFL) – combining researchers from the College of Engineering and the School of Ocean and Earth Sciences and Technology (SOEST) – with the goal of launching its first space mission by Fall 2009.

“Hawai'i is located in a unique position to become a low-cost gateway to space, and to place UH as the only university in the world to have both satellite fabrication capabilities and unique, direct access to orbital space. This will enable many experiments that study the Earth's oceans and continents, as well as test numerous engineering experiments in the hostile environment of space,” said Peter Mouginis-Mark, Interim Director of the Hawai'i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology (SOEST).

The project is getting off the ground with a \$4 million appropriation authored by U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye for the LEONIDAS (Low Earth Orbit Nanosat Integrated Defense Autonomous System) program. The federal funds, estimated to eventually grow to approximately \$40 million, will cover two launches and two spacecraft, with the first mission slated for the 2009 fiscal year.

UH participants will design, build, launch and operate 40-kilogram small satellites that can be configured for a variety of science and educational tasks. Several new faculty are also being hired to support this initiative, including Dr. Trevor Sorensen, who was mission manager for the Clementine mission to the Moon in the early 1990s. Dr. Sorensen joins the College of Engineering in July 2007.

Mānoa Interim Chancellor Denise Konan said, “This provides a wonderful opportunity for our UH Manoa students to gain hands-on training in everything from spacecraft design to launching and operating an orbiting satellite. It's a terrific incentive for young people in Hawai'i to explore high-tech careers in engineering, physics, and geoscience.”

The HSFL expands the Small-Satellite Program begun five years ago at the College of Engineering, which has attracted international attention. The HSFL will be headed by Director Luke Flynn, Hawai'i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology (SOEST), and Co-Director Wayne Shiroma, College of Engineering.

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