

DACC & Virgin Galactic team up to explore virtual reality

LAS CRUCES — This spring DACC students will take a space flight and learn aerospace fundamentals in a Virtual Reality environment.

Doña Ana Community College and Aerospace innovators Virgin Galactic have announced an exciting collaborative education and outreach research project. The core idea will be to work and learn together, exploring the newest technologies and possible uses of VR in research, education, business, and career technical education.

“Our students and instructors are pleased and honored to work with Virgin Galactic on this exciting initiative,” said Matt Byrnes, DACC Creative Media Technology Director. “Thanks to Dr. Kevin Boberg, Vice President of Economic Development for the New Mexico State University Arrowhead Business and Research Park and Wayne Savage of Arrowhead Center for helping this collaboration take place.”

The program will start with a VR simulation that explains core concepts of aerospace fundamentals and gives students, particularly at the Las Cruces Public Schools Challenger Center, an immersive virtual spaceflight experience.

“Many people are familiar with the term ‘virtual reality’ but are unsure about the uses of this technology,” Byrnes said. “Gaming is an obvious virtual reality application, but there are many different uses, some you might expect and others not so much.”

- Imagine architects having clients or builders walk through a designed

space and make comments, design changes or red flag problem areas.

- Doctors could practice dissection skills or see and learn about the inner workings of cell biology.
- Tourists, historians and students could walk through historical, and cultural sites.
- Scientists could actually see and predict how an experimental drug reacts at the molecular level.

“Irrespective of the use, virtual reality produces a set of data which could then be used to develop new models, training methods, communication and interaction,” said Mark Butler of Virgin Galactic. “In many ways the possibilities are endless.”

In September, 2016 DACC became one of only 24 VR First partner institutions worldwide, sponsored by the German game engine development firm Crytek and was awarded several thousand dollars of the newest hardware and software giving DACC students access to the latest VR development tools.

According to Byrnes, “This kind of collaboration between the private and public sectors and between technology companies and the creative media arts is central to efforts to develop the larger Creative Campus efforts at Arrowhead Park and build a larger toolset to positively impact not only Aerospace but Healthcare, Agricultural Technology and other industries growing in our community.”