

SIUE CosmoQuest team views space launch, contributes to NASA mission

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EDWARDSVILLE - A group of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville undergraduate and graduate students experienced a historic moment first-hand when they viewed the launch of the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Thursday, Sept. 8.

The students are contributing to a NASA mission through their work with [CosmoQuest](#), an innovative virtual research facility headquartered in the SIUE STEM Center, and under the direction of Assistant Research Professor Pamela Gay, PhD.

“We are writing software that will be used as part of a multi-platform approach to finding the rock the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft will pick up and bring back to Earth,” Dr. Gay said. “Our software will be used by team members, and the public to quickly and effectively map potential sample sites, and identify hazards.”

Members of the CosmoQuest team who traveled to the launch included Dr. Gay, Cory Lehan, Susie Murph, SIUE junior Ryan Owens and SIUE graduate students James Iwayemi, Grigori Burlea and Anna Glushko.

Iwayemi is pursuing a master’s in computer management information systems (CMIS) with a specialization in business analytics. He works as the project manager for CosmoQuest and is overseeing the completion of their contributions to this NASA mission.

“Being on board with a project of this magnitude is a great experience,” Iwayemi said. “Seeing the dedication and perseverance it took to execute a launch as successful as this emphasized the importance of drive and discipline. It provided an opportunity to grow as an individual and a leader.”

Computer science graduate student Grigori Burlea photographed the incredible trip and was inspired to learn more about space exploration.

“My primary responsibility with CosmoQuest is to capture in mind all the unique things about space and translate them into user experience elements,” Burlea explained. “This experience opened new horizons toward great opportunities that I can aim for after completing my degree.”

According to NASA, the OSIRIS-REx is scheduled to reach a near-Earth asteroid called Bennu in 2018, and return a sample to Earth in 2023.

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville [Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach](#) comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math

(STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. Center staff develop and teach hands-on STEM programming as well as online citizen science and astronomy initiatives. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit stemideas.org or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at [\(618\) 650-3065](tel:6186503065) or stemcenter@siue.edu.