

## Harding students participate in rocket design competition

A team of nine Harding University students and two faculty members took one of the first big steps last weekend toward success at the NASA-sponsored University Student Launch Program competition to be held in Huntsville, Ala., in April.

Harding officials chemistry professor Dr. Ed Wilson and physics professor Dr. James Mackey sent four team members — Paul Elliott, Erin Fulks, Brett Keller and Pablo Oropin — to Memphis, Tenn., Oct. 14, where Keller participated in a rocket launch that will allow him to become level-2 certified by the National Association of Rocketry. Wilson accompanied them on the trip. At least one member of each team that participates in the USLP must receive the certification before they are permitted to launch the type of rockets specified for the competition.

The team is working on drafting a rocket design to submit to NASA for approval before they can begin building. This is the first year that a USLP contest has taken place and the first time Harding has sponsored a team effort to launch rockets competitively. The project is a learning process for all involved.

Wilson learned about the contest through research he has been conducting for NASA on rocket exhaust fumes.

Keller, a Searcy resident who has had significant prior experience launching rockets, has been level-1 certified since September and must still pass a written exam before obtaining the new certification. His main concerns for the competition involve getting the go ahead from NASA.

The competition features rigorous criteria. The students must go through the same steps that a NASA engineer would complete in creating, operating and writing a report about a level-2 rocket. They must successfully launch their rocket with its payload — instruments to take scientific measurements — exactly one mile into the air and be able to recover it. The team will be judged on every aspect of the process, from a team Web site to community outreach, which Harding's team plans to carry out by visiting a local middle school and launching bottle rockets with the students.

The team will compete against 13 to 20 other collegiate rocketry teams at the Huntsville competition in April. Their final report must be submitted by May 11.

The NASA USLP is slated to be a three-year program with teams from many of the same schools competing each year.

Harding University is the largest private university in Arkansas, with more than 6,100 students from 49 states and 53 countries.