NASA/HEAT Rice U Status Report – February 2021

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- ***URM: Reach for the Stars April 17 planning***

Our "Reach for the Stars" Festival, to reach middle school girls (which are typically 60% URM), was postponed from fall 2020 because of COVID. It appears that April 17 will be an available date. We have asked the Rice Administration for permission to use the four special; COVID-safe tents (which each have 50 socially-distancted seats) for the event. That means that we will be able to host a maximum of 200 girls. We are now contacting presenters, exhibitors, and keynote speakers. We are also contacting additional sponsors. For the last few years, Cheniere Energy was a prime sponsor. This NASA grant is only paying for travel for heliosphere speakers to come speak to the girls.

Image: Rice University has built temporary COVID-safe tents to use as large classrooms. We will use each tent to hold 50 student participants. We will organize them by "track" (Space, Physics, Earth Science and Medicine) and keep the girls in each track together to minimize covid exposure. We will use outside areas for the exhibits and the keynote speech.

- ***Education: ASTR530 class continues; MST teacher projects approved***

We presently have 4 teachers and one undergraduate enrolled in ASTR 530 (Teaching Astronomy Laboratory), with two additional auditors. Three of the teachers (one hispanic) have their tuition partially supported by the NASA grant. The course emphasizes learning techniques

to teach astronomy. For heliosphere, they are learning how to operate white-light solar telescopes (with filters) and H-alpha telescopes, plus sunspotters. These techniques will be utiilized as they will help with the equinox event at HMNS next month (March 20).

In addition, three other teachers are finishing up their Master of Science Teaching degree this spring and are working on the capstone project. Their initial drafts were approved and they are now finishing up the work. Jakarda Varnado (African-American) is doing chemistry activities to go along with NASA missions (she is paid by NASA/JSC). Christine Fendley Boldt is writing a full astronomy curriculum, and Mary Ann Quintana is writing a full after school elementary level science camp curriculum.