

*“I love SCF. The professors have been absolutely excellent.”*

The sky's not the limit for SCF student Jim Mohan. He's already had first-hand experience with the space program. Leading a team of six SCF students from his physics class, along with team advisor Dr. Karen Wetz, Mohan participated in NASA's Reduced Gravity Education Flight Program (RGEFP) at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. This gives teams of undergraduates the opportunity to propose, design, build, fly and evaluate a reduced gravity experiment. Mohan and his team were one of 14 college and university teams selected from more than 70 proposals based on scientific merit and education outreach potential. Previously, at the suggestion of a math professor, Mohan had attended the National Community College Aerospace Scholars. He won that competition, which paved the way for RGEFP.

“We chose something that fit in with what we were learning in physics at the time and something we'd do in Physics II,” said Mohan. Their experiment, “Magnetic Forces Between Dipoles in Microgravity,” measured the force between two magnets with dipoles opposed during the reduced gravity flights aboard NASA's “Weightless Wonder.” The microgravity aircraft produces periods of weightlessness lasting 18 to 25 seconds by flying a series of about 30 parabolas – a steep climb followed by a free fall – over the Gulf of Mexico.

The students, Jim Mohan, Joe Comer, Alexa La Motte, Brenan Flint, Harrison Brit, and Mario Osborn spent ten days at NASA's Johnson Space Center's Ellington Field in Houston. They are the first group of SCF students to take part in this program.

Mohan said that the experience exceeded expectations. However, “The results were not what we expected. We're still in the process of figuring out why and what caused the difference. There are a few variables that could be the cause.”

This is the beauty of scientific experiment. We learn important information even in the unexpected. “Just thinking that something is going to react one way doesn't make it true,” explains Mohan. “How many hundreds of years ago we thought the world was flat. Now we know it's round. You continually have to re-evaluate everything you think is true.”

Mohan has graduated from SCF, but he's still taking classes. “I love SCF. The professors have been absolutely excellent, and the staff at the school has been supportive.” In fact, the College and the SCF Foundation helped fund their trip and participation in the NASA program.

His next challenge is attending the University of South Florida, where he plans to earn a degree in IT and a future with robotics. Truly for this SCF student, even gravity won't keep him down.

Houston, we have lift off!

