UWF engineering team wins NASA Hybrid Motor Rocket Competition

Pensacola, Fla. **– April 5, 2016 –** A team of engineering students from the University of West Florida participated in the NASA Hybrid Motor Rocket Competition, sponsored by the NASA Florida Grant Consortium and North East Florida Association of Rocketry, in Bunnell, Florida, on March 12, 2016.

Working under the supervision of Dr. Bhuvana Ramachandran, Abdul Huuda and Thena Elayaperumal placed **first** in both categories – "Maximum Altitude" and "Closest to 2000 Feet."

“This is the third year in a row that a UWF engineering team has placed or won at this competition, beating teams from much larger engineering programs at other Florida universities,” said Dr. Mohamed Khabou, UWF engineering department chair. “The team worked very hard to accomplish what they did. This win is yet another evidence of the quality of engineering graduates at UWF.”

Huuda attributes the win to the mental discipline and critical thinking acquired from coursework at UWF, which he says will continue to drive him upon graduation.

“In the real world, the problem statements might not be obvious and the solutions might not be straightforward,” Huuda said. “It will be up to us to apply everything we have learned to get the job done.”

Having participated in the competition for several years, he says UWF’s work was always different from other schools – among them University of Florida, Florida Institute of Technology, University of Miami and others – because of the Argonaut’s ability to think outside the box.

Once the underdog, UWF kept the momentum going and never looked back.

“This win in the NASA hybrid rocket competition is another example of the high quality engineering students in the UWF engineering programs,” said Dr. Michael Huggins, dean of the Hal Marcus College of Science and Engineering. “It is always great to see UWF at the top of the leaderboard in these competitions.”

The small team with limited resources made a big impression. Elayaperumal credits the success to team dynamics and dedication, as well as the support of the UWF engineering department.

“We were on the central time zone, far away from rocketry clubs, far away from rocketry resources, with no aeronautical program available at our university or a good place to work on the rocket,” she said. “However, we had great professors who are willing to share any knowledge they have and help in any way possible. We used our limited resources wisely, and it feels so proud to think that we were able to prove ourselves – as a team, department and university.”

It isn’t rocket science to figure out what the win means to the team.

“First place is a great way to finish our senior year,” Huuda said. “It was an amazing experience, and UWF has given me great memories and opportunities,” Elayaperumal adds.

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See attached photo of Dr. Bhuvana Ramachandran, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering, with UWF senior Abdul Huuda. Ramachandran serves as a mentor to Huuda and other students on the Hybrid Rocket Team.

About the University of West Florida: Founded in 1963, the University of West Florida is a vibrant, distinctive institution of higher learning with undergraduate, graduate and targeted research programs. With multiple locations in Northwest Florida, the University serves a student population of more than 12,000. Dedicated to helping students realize their full potential, UWF favors small class sizes with quality teacher-scholars who deliver personalized, innovative, hands-on learning and leadership opportunities.