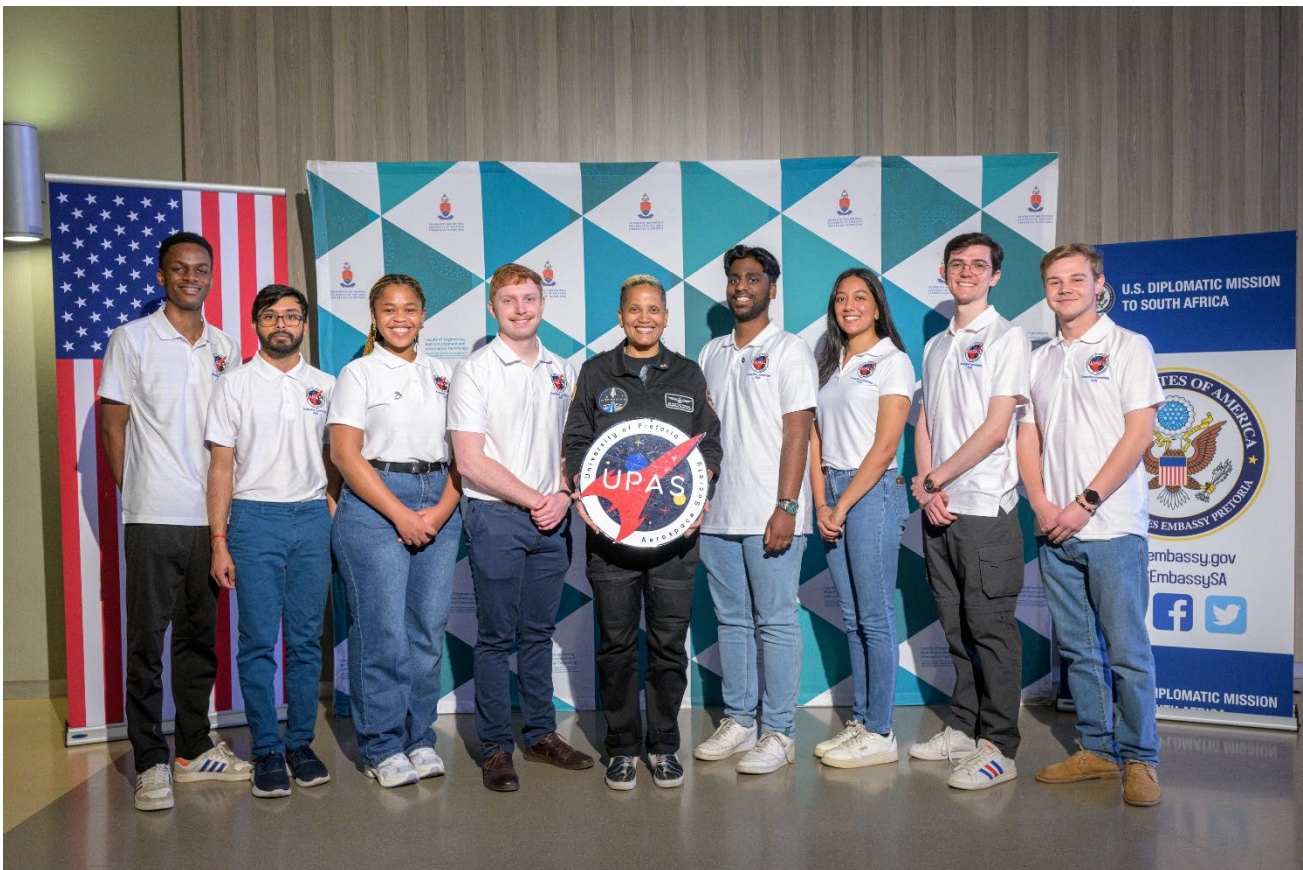




NEWS RELEASE

US space explorer inspires students to change the world for all humanity



Dr Sian Proctor with students from the UP Aerospace Society

PRETORIA - The University of Pretoria (UP)'s Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology, in collaboration with the US Embassy, hosted Dr Sian Proctor, mission pilot of the first all-civilian orbital mission, SpaceX Inspiration4, on the University's Hatfield Campus. She shared her experience with an enthusiastic audience fascinated by space travel. The event was organised by the UP Aerospace Society. It launched the Faculty's Women's Month activities.

Dr Proctor is the first African American woman to pilot a spacecraft, and the first African American commercial astronaut. She is a geoscientist, who is a full-time professor at the South Mountain Community College (SMCC) in Phoenix, Arizona, where she teaches geology, sustainability and planetary science. Her academic qualifications include a BSc in Environmental Science, an MSc in Geology and a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction: Science Communication. She is also one of The Explorer's Club 50: Fifty people changing the world.

She sought to encourage the members of the audience to dream that anything is possible, and not to be discouraged when they do not succeed at their first attempt. She explained that travelling in space had been a childhood dream, and despite being shortlisted in the final round of applications in NASA's selection process

to travel to space in 2009, she did not make the final cut. However, she explains that she would never have known how far she could have gone if she had not applied.

Taking what she could learn about herself from this experience, she continued to express her passion for exploration through her work as a science communicator. She articulated her belief that education is the roadmap to opportunity. “You need to understand the value you can bring to a situation by being dedicated to continually developing your knowledge and skills.” She explained that one needs to be a perpetual explorer. “It’s all about discovering something new about yourself through lifelong learning.”

A second opportunity to explore space presented itself when she was recognised for her talents as an artist and a poet. She became one of only four civilian crew members to be selected to orbit the earth for three days in the SpaceX Inspiration4 space capsule in September 2021. This spaceflight formed part of a charitable effort on behalf of the St Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

Each of the crew members represented one of the mission’s four pillars of hope, prosperity, leadership and generosity. Dr Proctor was awarded the prosperity seat on the basis of her submission of a poem, “Space to Inspire”, which she had penned during the COVID-19 pandemic to inspire people to change the world for all humanity.

Her presentation, titled “Packing for Space”, focused on ensuring a just, equitable, diverse and inclusive space. She emphasised the fact that when we solve for space, we also solve issues on earth. Asking the audience what they would “pack” for a trip in a spacecraft, she explained that one’s mental resources are often just as important – if not more so – than the physical items one would pack; whether it is for a metaphorical life journey or an actual space flight.

She continued to elaborate on the six characteristics one should strive to develop to prepare oneself for future success: persistence, determination, creativity, inspiration, teamwork and responsibility. In the process, she encouraged the members of the audience to believe in their ability to do amazing things to make a difference to life on earth by finding sustainable solutions to the challenges facing mankind.

Her message reinforced the vision of the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology: Innovating our tomorrow, and the members of the audience left the auditorium inspired by what they can achieve if they let their “earthlight” shine.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its

administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za