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Maui Prep students present research at American Astronomical Society conference

January 17, 2013
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NAPILI - Last week Wednesday marked the end of a yearlong process of study and research for two Maui Preparatory Academy students.

While classmates were preparing to return to school, students Davyana San Miguel and Sydney Gilbert were in Long Beach, California preparing to share their yearlong research with the scientific community.

On Jan. 9 at the 221st meeting of the American Astronomical Society, these two students and faculty member Chris Border presented a research poster on "Classification of Compact Submillimeter Sources in the Planck Archive."

Article Photos



From left, Maui Preparatory Academy students Sydney Gil...

Working with students from around the country, Sydney and Davyana worked to use archived data from cutting-edge space-based telescopes to locate and identify a variety of astronomical objects, including distant dusty galaxies, super massive black holes and nebula.

The students spent the day presenting their results to the 3,000-plus astronomers at the 2013 meeting. They also attended several talks and workshops on current research in various areas of astronomy.

Border and the two students were part of the 2012 team working with Dr. Ranga-Ram Chary of the Planck Data Center.

Currently, students as young as seventh-graders are juggling soccer, dances and homework with conducting NASA research.

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The NASA/Infrared Processing and Analysis Center Teacher Archive Research Program (NITARP) welcomes teachers of middle school, high school and college, as well as museum educators to participate in the program. Students they teach can assist in conducting the research.

NITARP teachers use astronomical data from optical telescopes and data from the ultraviolet, submillimeter and infrared wavelengths to discover new stars and galaxy clusters and study nearby active galaxies and stellar variability, among other projects.

The program partners professional scientists with educators to carry out original research projects and present the results at the semiannual meeting of the American Astronomical Society, the professional organization for astronomers in the United States.

NITARP has grown every year since its start in 2005. A total of 81 educators in 31 states - including Border at Maui Prep - have been selected as participants.

"While there are many fabulous programs getting astronomy data into classrooms all over the world, NITARP is still relatively unique in that, among other things, we have very high expectations for our participants," said Luisa Rebull, staff scientist at IPAC, a facility funded by NASA at the California Institute of Technology.

"They are doing real research with real data, getting real results, all in only 13 months. Our educator participants involve students throughout their experience, from writing a proposal to writing up and presenting their results. This program never fails to energize me! I get very excited about all the fabulous, and diverse, work that these teams are doing."

Teachers and students have conducted research on new young stars, quasars and planetary nebula, among other subjects.

For information on NITARP, visit nitarp.ipac.caltech.edu.

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