



Academic Engagement

NASA Science Mission Design Schools

NASA Science Mission Design Schools FAQs

[> View program information and apply](#)

Participants who successfully complete the course and meet all the following requirements may receive a \$1,700 travel/lodging allowance disbursed on the final day of the course at JPL. Eligibility requirements are:

- **I am an undergraduate student. May I apply?**

No. SMDS participants need education and experience that enable them to feel equipped and confident to make contributions and to understand the material. We invite you to apply when you have met the eligibility requirements. In the meantime, you may want to consider other opportunities such as [JPL student internships](#) and the [Caltech Space Challenge](#).

- **Can Master's degree students apply?**

Applicants who have recently obtained their MS in engineering disciplines or who are nearing completion of their MS (within 6-9 months), may apply if they are not pursuing a Ph.D. Individuals whose highest degree is an MS/MA in science disciplines are not eligible, but can consider applying when they later meet the eligibility requirements.

- **How many foreign nationals do you admit, and why are the numbers limited?**

Security policies and practices require us to limit attendance in Planetary Science Summer School (PSSS) and Heliophysics Mission Design School (HDMS) sessions. A maximum of 2 to 3 Foreign Nationals for HDMS, and 4-5 Foreign Nationals for PSSS. Foreign Nationals participating in SMDS may not be citizens of [U.S. Department of State-designated countries](#).

The Astrophysics Mission Design School (AMDS), newly offered with an instrument point design focus, will be required to restrict foreign nationals from participating. This is due to the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) concerns that arise in the design of sensor systems. In contrast, spacecraft focused mission design schools like PSSS and HDMS have historically been able to allow a limited number of foreign nationals to participate in each mission design school.



Academic Engagement

NASA Science Mission Design Schools

NASA Science Mission Design Schools FAQs

- **Are individuals who are citizens of U.S. Department of State-designated countries and hold U.S. lawful permanent residency eligible to apply?**

Generally, yes. Please note that all selected participants will be processed through NASA/JPL Security processes and will be required to provide proof of identity and citizenship/residency status.

- **Can I send my Advisor's Letter of Support to you?**

No. Your application is not considered to be complete unless your advisor emails the Letter of Support directly to Joyce.E.Armijo@jpl.nasa.gov by the application deadline date.

- **How are Science Mission Design Schools different from a college course?**

SMDS are equivalent in workload to a rigorous 3-credit graduate course and require participant commitment for 3 months. There are 2 required webinars during the preparatory weeks and assigned tasks outside of the webinar time. SMDS is designed to be an immersive hands-on experience that is "beyond coursework", working on real-world problems and presenting concepts in context of mission designs and mission proposals to NASA. No grades are given; instead, success is based on the learning and teamwork of the participants as evidenced in their final presentation and work with their mentors.

- **How much time is required to participate?**

SMDS are equivalent in workload to a rigorous 3-credit graduate course and require participant commitment for 3 months. There are 2 required webinars during the preparatory weeks and assigned tasks outside of the webinar time. Participant surveys indicate most spend 10-12 hours on average per week, including attending webinars, working on assignments, and meeting with your team. The workload is lighter in the early weeks but ramps up overtime. The final culminating week requires full-time active participation.

- **How are participants selected?**

A Selection Committee of NASA and JPL experts reviews the applications from those who are eligible. They primarily consider the essay responses to questions under the "Statement of Interest and Applicability" section of the application. Their assessment helps determine those who are well positioned to succeed during the session, those who can benefit most from the experience, and contribute to a balanced mix of skills.



Academic Engagement

NASA Science Mission Design Schools

NASA Science Mission Design Schools FAQs

- **Is auditing allowed?**

Unfortunately, we are unable to grant requests to audit or observe the course or by listening-in by individuals other than the selected participants.

- **Will the session's Culminating Week be in-person?**

We are planning to gather participants and Team X members together for the Culminating Week in-person at JPL. At this time, no remote option is available for Culminating Week. JPL reserves the right to convert the culminating week to a virtual experience at JPL's sole discretion due to unforeseen circumstances, business necessity or public health restrictions. Please watch the [SMDS website](#) for updates.

- **Do you cover costs to travel to JPL for the in-person Culminating Week?**

Limited funds are available for partial travel/lodging allowance that can aid with expenses for the in-person Culminating Week at JPL. To be eligible to receive partial support, applicants must [meet the requirements](#) AND must request the stipend in their application.