

Student to share exploits on 'Mars' N.C. executions jumped in 2003

Event at 7 p.m. in planetarium

BY JACQUELINE BRILL
STAFF WRITER

UNC junior Kate Harris is no stranger to travel. At 21, she has been to Honduras, Borneo and Mongolia. But it was a recent trip to Utah that took her further mentally than she ever had been.

Harris, a Morehead Scholar majoring in biology from Georgetown, Ontario, in Canada, lived and worked in the Mars Desert Research Station in the Utah desert for two weeks last January.

Tonight, everyone can hear her story.

At the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, Harris will give a lecture about her time in the Mars simulator. The event will be held at 7 p.m. in the North Gallery Theater.

"I'm basically just going to give an overview of my experiences there and why Mars is so interesting in general," Harris said.

She plans to speak for about 45 minutes, show a short video of footage she shot in the simulator and open up the floor to questions from the audience.

The lecture is part of a free public lecture series organized jointly by the planetarium and SpaceTalk, a student group focused on promoting manned space exploration. The group, which Harris founded

and leads, frequently visits the planetarium and brings various speakers to UNC.

Because of the Jan. 3 landing of Spirit — one of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's two Mars rovers — and the publicity it has attracted, Harris was asked to give a speech about her time in Utah.

"With all the recent Mars hype, (the Morehead Planetarium) came to me to give a talk about my experiences," Harris said.

Harris has been interested in space and space travel for as long as she can remember, and the trip to Utah was another way for her to supplement her avid interest and involvement in SpaceTalk.

She set her eyes on the project as soon as it was announced by its creator, the Mars Society, an international group whose goal is to privately research and support future travel to the red planet. Harris was active with the society prior to her stay in the simulator.

While in Utah, Harris was a member of the station's biology team. Her duties included maintaining the project's greenhouse and taking samples of the local microorganisms.

To exit the station, researchers had to treat the outside environment like that of Mars — they entered and exited through an air lock and always wore gear suited to space exploration.

"I spent a lot of time wearing a space suit and taking extravehicular trips outside of the station to



DTH/ASHLIE WHITE

UNC junior Kate Harris will give a lecture tonight at 7 p.m. about the time she spent living and working in the Mars Desert Research Station.

investigate the local microbial fauna," Harris said.

Eventually, Harris said, she would like to resume studying the types of organisms she saw in Utah, and she said she hopes to make a career out of such research after she graduates.

"One day I would really like to go into astrobiology and study extreme life forms like those found in deserts," Harris said.

She stays busy studying and planning future adventures. Harris aims to visit Alaska this summer to participate in a glaciology field course and intends to take the fall

2004 semester to assist scientists in Antarctica.

With science and technology moving forward at a quick pace, Harris is eager to get involved with the latest advancements. The recent landing of Spirit has Harris particularly excited, and she said she hopes to share her enthusiasm with others.

"You can log on to your computer and see things no one has ever seen before," she said. "It's fantastic."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

Glitches, costs delay N.C. schools network

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — A computer network for all North Carolina public school teachers targeted for completion this year will take two more years and probably end up costing more than \$150 million.

Only six of the state's 117 school districts are online as part of a trial of the system, which is called NC WISE. Many teachers using it say it is difficult to access the network, much less complete basic tasks. Some call it "NC STUPID."

State education officials say the rising costs and delays are related to the scope of building a system with a dozen or more applications that can be used by 80,000 teachers.

"This project has turned out to be harder, more complex and more expensive than anyone thought," said Bob Bellamy, associate superintendent for accountability and technology for the Department of Public Instruction.

NC WISE is intended to replace

a network known as SIMS, or Student Information Management System, that the schools have used since the 1980s. SIMS took attendance and traced students and their courses, Bellamy said. He said NC WISE is expected to allow teachers to review easily a student's record, from physical or learning difficulties to test scores and discipline issues.

NC WISE also will allow more accurate reporting of graduation statistics and improve the state's capacity to meet the reporting requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, he said.

The project began in 1999 with a \$54 million contract between the state and the consulting division of PricewaterhouseCoopers. In 2002, IBM bought the consulting arm of the accounting giant and took over.

DPI renegotiated a \$78 million deal with IBM late last year to complete the project by 2009. Added to the \$35 million already spent, that makes the cost more

than \$110 million. Anticipated costs outside the contract are likely to push the overall bill to \$150 million or more, Bellamy said.

State schools Superintendent Mike Ward blamed PricewaterhouseCoopers for some of the added costs and delays. But Bellamy acknowledged that the DPI expanded the scope of the project, largely in response to requests from school districts, and asked for additional applications

as work has progressed. The local school districts also face start-up costs connected with the program.

One problem has been a lack of wiring capacity to handle the traffic. The cost of providing enough wiring to handle the load will be borne mostly by the districts.

State administrators said they now feel confident that 40 to 50 more districts can be connected the 2004-05 academic year. The rest would be added the next year.

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Activists pushing for moratorium

BY KAVITA PILLAI
STAFF WRITER

North Carolina's number of executions jumped to seven in 2003, an increase of five from the previous year and the result of an accumulation of death penalty convictions during the past decade, experts say.

Despite the push for a moratorium on the death penalty by some North Carolinians, seven inmates were executed last year after exhausting their appeals.

Mildred Spearman, public affairs officer for the N.C. Department of Corrections, said the higher number was not indicative of a trend but was "just a matter of when their appeals have been exhausted."

Mark Kleinschmidt, member of the Chapel Hill Town Council and staff attorney for the Center for Death Penalty Litigation, cited a large number of death penalty convictions ten years ago as a reason for the higher-than-usual number of executions.

"About 10 years ago, we were in a very bad place in North Carolina," he said. "We were putting people on death row at a very high rate, and it takes about 10 years to go through the appeals process."

Kleinschmidt said the number for 2003 was the highest since the 1940s, and he expects several more executions in the next few months.

"Last Friday marked the eighth execution in the past six months," he said. "From August to August, it's going to be a terrible year for North Carolina. We'll probably execute another four or five in the next two months."

Jennifer Lutz, co-coordinator for the UNC School of Law's Death Penalty Project said many judges were awaiting a decision in the case of Henry Hunt, who was executed last year, before ruling on the last stage of the appeals process for several inmates.

"The decision came in early July," she said. "After that, a lot of judges were denying the last appeals and setting execution dates."

Kleinschmidt said trial mistakes and inadequate lawyers contributed to the large number of death penalty sentences in the 1990s. "Due to poor lawyering, our justice system had really become an injustice system," he said. "I hope we're moving away from that."

He also noted that Gov. Mike Easley has granted clemency only twice. "Before (the death penalty) became such a political issue, granting clemency was a matter of course," he said.

Nevertheless, both Lutz and Kleinschmidt believe the climate is changing in North Carolina with respect to capital punishment.

"(North Carolina) has the strongest moratorium movement in the country," Kleinschmidt said. "More (N.C.) businesses, towns and congregations have passed resolutions calling for a moratorium than in any other state in the country."

Kleinschmidt also said the seven or eight death penalty sentences handed down last year show a significant drop from the high numbers of the '90s.

"Our best hope for the future is that we are less quick to hand out the death penalty," he said. "That tells us that people have serious questions about the death penalty."

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