

Distance learning with HDS alumna Julianna Scheiman

Dina Shtull, special to the WJN

Hello Julianna! We are very excited about learning with you.” Thus began a conversation on Wikispaces between Hebrew Day School fifth grade students and HDS alumna Julianna Scheiman. (Wikispaces is a computer hosting service that provides free online space to educators and students.) Scheiman, a student at Dartmouth College, is teaching the HDS class about her experience at National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) where

Fifth graders asked Scheiman: “We read your HDS yearbook page, and you said you wanted to be a movie star. What made you decide to become an astronaut?”

“I no longer want to become a movie star,” answered Scheiman. “But the ability to speak in front of a large crowd is an important skill for an astronaut who visits many schools after a mission. Astronauts also have to keep their cool in high stress situations so that they can effectively complete a task.”

In response to a question on when her interest in space began, Scheiman told the fifth graders, “I have always loved science. It has the amazing ability to answer the question ‘Why?’ If scientists don’t know the answer, they encourage students like you and me to create experiments to answer the question.”

“In the photo you sent us, are you really in a space craft?” one student asked.



she served as an intern. Scheiman interned at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, where astronauts are trained, and at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, where the rocketry is developed.

“I am a huge fan of NASA,” wrote fifth grader, Zachary Bernstein, to Scheiman, “so I’m very excited that you are coming!” Following the dialogue on wikispaces, Scheiman appeared on a large SMART Board video screen in the classroom via Skype, (a software application that allows users to make phone calls over the internet, and view the speaker). “Let’s test your NASA knowledge,” Scheiman began. “What does NASA stand for? How many astronauts can live on the International Space Station (ISS)? How do astronauts train for weightlessness?” The students did well on the first question. Their answers varied on the others.

“Up to six astronauts can live for a prolonged period on the ISS,” explained Scheiman. “When a shuttle flight picks up astronauts and drops off cargo, there can be significantly more than six astronauts on board,” she continued. “To train astronauts for weightlessness, NASA uses the KC-135, an aircraft which is maneuvered to create a weightless environment for up to 45 seconds. Astronauts also use a Neutral Buoyancy Lab (NBL), which is the world’s biggest swimming pool. They go scuba diving in their space suites and practice their space walks in a life size model of the ISS.”

Julianna Scheiman is studying math, physics and engineering, and preparing herself for astronaut training. She graduated from HDS in 2000 and went on to study at Clague Middle School and Huron High School.



“In the picture, I’m in the shuttle motion-based simulator. It’s a lot like a ride at Disney World in that it simulates take-off and landing by moving the capsule. It’s quite realistic; during launch the simulator actually puts you perpendicular to the floor and vibrates to simulate the types of vibrations an astronaut experiences. It has all of the exact same controls as the real shuttle and is used to train astronauts for launch and landing.”

The exchange between the fifth graders and Scheiman continued with another question: “After you go into space, do you think you could come and visit our school?” asks Mira Kaufman.

“Of course,” answers Scheiman! “I’ll be sure to let you know if I get selected for the astronaut corp! Basic training for those selected is two years, and an additional year if you are selected to go on a mission. I’ll let you know if I get to go into outer space.”

What are the topics of upcoming lessons? Scheiman will review the types of training necessary to get ready for a mission as well as the types of technologies that are needed to prepare for space entry. On a lighter note, she will also talk about the food that astronauts eat in space.

For more information about Hebrew Day School and its graduates, contact 971-4633 or visit www.hdsaa.org. ■