National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Research Psychologist

Dr. Mary Kaiser
Research Psychologist

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I work on research programs looking at how humans interact with aerospace systems. I find ways to improve human performance and minimize error, and I look at how to design machines that are comfortable for people to use.

Areas of expertise:

- Human visual perception

How I first became interested in this profession:

I have always been interested in what makes people "tick," and how we learn to cope with and understand the world around us. I started out by studying developmental research, but when a college professor told me that NASA had human factors research, I decided to work here.

What helped prepare me for this job:

Understanding the right methods and tools needed to study human behavior helped me a lot.

My role models or inspirations:

When I was a kid, the astronauts were all heroes. Every launch was televised. It was a different era. My biggest inspirations, however, are the scientists and engineers, who work tirelessly to make the space program a success.

My education and training:

- B.A., Biology, University of Virginia
- B.A., English, University of Virginia
- Ph.D., Psychology, University of Virginia

My career path:

- Fifteen years as a research psychologist at NASA Ames

What I like about my job:

I like the people I work with as much as I like the work we do together solving problems as a team. NASA is very dedicated to exploring possibilities and meeting challenges, and is willing to lead by testing new and bold ideas. Long ago, Greek philosophers wanted to understand human perception. Today, we have the tools to make interesting discoveries, making these exciting times in which to be a research psychologist.

What I don't like about my job:

I have endless piles of paperwork to do! I need to document all the measurents and data, which takes up a lot of time.

My advice to anyone interested in this occupation:

There are many branches of psychology. It may take awhile to figure out what you're most interested in. A strong background in math opens up a lot of possibilities, so it is a good idea to take a lot of math classes. Talk to different people in this profession to find out what they do in their line of work.

Additional Resources:

- American Institute of Biological Sciences
  http://www.aibs.org
- American Physiological Society
  http://www.faseb.org/aps
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
  http://www.biophysics.org/biophys/society/biohome.htm
- American Society for Microbiology
  http://www.asmusa.org
- Astrobiology Summer Academy
  http://academy.arc.nasa.gov/
- Biotechnology Industry Organization
  http://www.bio.org/welcome.html
- Education Pays Calculator
  http://www.educationpays.org/calc.asp
- Graduate Student Researchers Program
  http://spacelink.nasa.gov/Instructional.Materials/NASA.Educational.Products/Graduate.Student.Researchers.Program.Brochure/.index.html
- MATHCOUNTS Competition
  http://mathcounts.org/
- Minority University Research and Education Programs
  http://mured.nasaprs.com/
- NASA Cooperative Education Program for college students
  http://spacelink.nasa.gov/Educational.Services/NASA.Education.Programs/Student.Support/NASA.Cooperative.Education.Program/.index.html
- NASA Jobs
  http://nasajobs.nasa.gov/
- NASA Office of Life and Microgravity Sciences and Applications
  http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/olmsa/
- NASA SHARP Internship Program for high-schoolers
  http://www.mtsibase.com/sharp/
- NASA Student Employment
  http://nasajobs.nasa.gov/stud_opps/employment/index.htm
- NASA Student Involvement Program student contests
  http://www.nsip.net/index.cfm
- Order NASA career videos such as "Engineers: Turning Ideas into Reality," "Careers: Aerospace Engineer" or "Reaching for the Stars" from NASA CORE.
  http://core.nasa.gov
- Student's Guide to Astrobiology
  http://www.astrobiology.com/student.html
- Tech-Interns.com
  http://www.tech-interns.com/

Please take a moment to evaluate this product at:
http://ehb2.gsfc.nasa.gov/edcats/educational_topic

Your evaluation and suggestions are vital to continually improving NASA educational materials.
Thank you.