University and high school students lead one of the most important international events for NASA [1]

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San Juan, Puerto Rico - March 15, 2023. Today the stars align to undertake a challenge without limits. Caribbean University and the Puerto Rico Department of Education, together with the international organization Virtual Educa, have agreed to be part of the Mars 2030 Challenge. This is a competition in which university students must prepare proposals aimed at maintaining human life on Planet Mars. Universities around the world have a special challenge in these times. They are in search of viable alternatives to conquer new frontiers, explore and create feasible living environments outside planet Earth. On this occasion, five university institutions representing the countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Peru, and Puerto Rico, have accepted to be part of the Mars 2030 Challenge. The objective of the challenge is to create Ibero-American human capital with an aerospace vocation in all branches of knowledge in Higher Education (

www.virtualeduca.org/aerospace2030 [3]).

Caribbean University is the only institution in Puerto Rico that was selected by the International Virtual Educa organization to be part of this important competition. This organization's mission is to promote social transformation and sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean through the Aerospace Education Program, better known as Aerospace Education. "At Caribbean University, as an institution at the forefront of science and technology, we are honored to serve as coordinators and bring to Puerto Rico the headquarters of this great Ibero-American event that is intended to contribute to the development of all university careers and areas of knowledge related to the field of aerospace science and technology," said Dr. Ana E. Cucurella, president of Caribbean University. Cucurella, president of Caribbean University. Caribbean University undergraduate students, along with selected students from the Department of Education's high schools, will create proposals of all kinds aimed at maintaining human life on the planet Mars.

Eliezer Ramos Parés, Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Education, said, "We welcome this invitation for our high school students to join university students in this Mars 2030 Challenge. It is undoubtedly a great opportunity and unique experience for those interested in the world of Science, Technology, STEM, science and mathematics. At the same time, the interaction with young university students can stimulate them to that future life that they are about to start when they graduate from fourth year. I invite you to get involved in this great effort."

The students' Mars 2030 Challenge consists of designing a strategy that will contribute to the survival of six astronauts during the four years they will be away from Earth. The strategy will be designed according to the selected institutional theme. The Puerto Rico team will have 16 professors from Caribbean University, an equal number of teachers from the Department of Education and a total of 120 students. The winning team will begin training in May to present at the "Virtual Educa International Meeting," to be held in Ecuador in October 2023, where the Ibero-American winning team will be chosen to travel to NASA.

The executive director of Virtual Educa, Adelino Sousa, expressed the importance of the event: "At Virtual Educa we are convinced that universities must lead the development of talent and human capital for space. In this sense, Latin America and Puerto Rico must gain more representative spaces in the aerospace industry because the potential of the region is enormous. The example of Joseph Acabá, a Puerto Rican who was recently named NASA's chief astronaut, is an inspiration to us. Puerto Rico has always been a bastion of talent and impressive skills. This is why we are so excited that Caribbean University has joined the Mars 2030 Challenge. It will undoubtedly be a great opportunity for the island's students to put their skills to the test and contribute their experience in the search for innovative solutions.

According to Dr. Cucurella, President of the institution, "this event will promote the development of aerospace human capital in all branches of knowledge of higher education in Puerto Rico. A relevant fact is that at NASA, out of 17,960 direct employees, only 47 are active astronauts. The rest are engineers, programmers, designers, biologists, doctors, mechanics, sociologists, accountants, physicists, nutritionists, architects, and communicators, among others. This information is important to understand how hubs and the aerospace industry are constituted. For this, it is necessary that universities lead the development of talent and human capital for these

purposes. This is an industry in full development in Puerto Rico and, for example, at Caribbean University we offer careers in this field," said the president of Caribbean University.

The ambassador of the Mars 2030 Challenge at Caribbean University, and who will lead the group of participating professors and students, is Dr. Gloria M. Isidro Villamizar, professor of mathematics at the institution and researcher of Planet Mars. Joining her as scientific advisors for this great event will be Dr. Orlando Figueroa, engineer and former director of Nasa's Solar Systems Division and Mars Exploration Project, and Dr. Carmen A. Pantojas, president of the American Association of Physics Teachers - Puerto Rico Chapter. "It is an honor to be part of this historic event and to serve as an ambassador of Reto Marte 2023 at Caribbean University. We seek to awaken in students, curiosity and interest in Aerospace education. We invite all our students to participate in RETO MARTE 2030. The activities we will be doing will allow them to develop skills to survive in extreme situations, such as living in a high mountain, in a desert, survive in an atmospheric disaster and why not say it, live the experience of leaving the Earth to Space. If you are excited and passionate about Aerospace, you meet the requirements!!!," said Dr. Gloria Isidro, ambassador of Reto Marte 2030. Mars Challenge 2030 will be held for three consecutive years at Caribbean University, it was reported.

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