A Pacific Teacher Enhancement Program - Toward Other Planetary Systems

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The NSF has funded a 5-year program of Teacher Enhancement based on the theme of “Toward Other Planetary Systems” to be held on the big island of Hawaii from 1999-2004. The purpose of the workshop is to help local and US-affiliated Pacific teachers acquire basic astronomy content and gain insight into exciting research activities in contemporary astronomy. Instructional skills will be strengthened by providing the teachers with new materials, evaluation techniques, resources and extensive follow-up. There will also be a vigorous student component to the program where students will be provided an exciting introduction to careers in astronomy, technology, and the sciences. Discussions of how astronomers are using the telescopes on Mauna Kea, around the world, and in space to search for evidence of planet formation in other solar systems - origins - and to search for life elsewhere will open up a new awareness of the forefront of astronomical research in Hawaii and around the world.

The first program will be held from June 13-July 1, 1999, and this talk will highlight the program activities. The program is unique in that it combines the modern astronomical exploration in searching for new worlds with an exploration of the ancient polynesian and Hawaiian techniques of astronomical navigation. Cultural astronomy in Hawaii is a relatively new discipline, with remarkable discoveries into the ancient polynesian navigational / astronomical system being made. This science has exceptional motivational potential for a large fraction of Hawaiian students.

This program is a collaboration between the AAVSO, the Montana State University NASA CERES project, the Bishop Museum, the Pacific Regional Educational Lab, the Hawaii Department of Education, the Institute for Astronomy, and the Hawaii Astronomical Association.