OpenOrbiter Small Spacecraft Development Program Educational Benefits

Jeremy Straub

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Jeremy Straub
Department of Computer Science, University of North Dakota

Overview

The OpenOrbiter program [1] is developing a low-cost framework for the creation of spacecraft by researchers and educators worldwide [8]. In line with the objective of enabling future educational use by others, educational assessment [2, 3] has been a key focus. Several areas were assessed: student spacecraft [4] and developers were asked what types of benefits they sought from their participation [5], attainment of these and other educational benefits is ongoing. Work on the development of a set of designs that can be used to build a spacecraft with a cost of under $5,000 [13] using primarily COTS parts also continues.

How Do Students Participate

Students participate in the OpenOrbiter program in several ways:

• Extracurricular activity
• Class project
• Academic capstone / design project
• Independent study course
• CSCI 297—Software Project Management through Experiential Learning course
• Paid work

Students design, develop, manage, test and troubleshoot under all participation types, gaining valuable experience. Most participate in an area related to their major; some choose to gain experience in an alternate area.

What Has Been Determined?

A more detailed discussion of assessment activities can be found in [2, 3, 5]; however several key points are illustrated by the figures shown herein.

• Significant benefit is shown in several categories of performance (see Figures 5 and 6).
• Benefits attainment is attributed to participation (see Figure 7), with leads being shown to gain benefit in more (3 versus 2) areas
• Areas where students believe that they can receive benefit from participation are numerous and varied (see Figure 1).

Developing and Prototyping

We have created a simulation platform, called the ROOFSAT [24], the parts for which are shown in Figure 10, to facilitate spacecraft software development and testing concurrently with the spacecraft design and development. This allows students to gain the valuable hands-on experience in working with hardware that is sought by many private- and public-sector employers prior to hardware completion. The ROOFSAT costs under $2,000.

Scholarly Activities

The OpenOrbiter Program has been the subject of:

• six peer-reviewed journal articles [2-7]
• ten conference papers [1, 8-16]
• six oral / poster presentations at national conferences [17-22]
• over forty local and regional oral / poster presentations [23-66]

The topics covered have ranged from technical presentations, discussion and analysis of the structure, software and other spacecraft elements, to papers evaluating the educational benefits of the program and participation in it.