

Saddleback robotics team competes in national Mars Rover challenge

SOCCCD Public Affairs

Each year, over a hundred colleges and universities compete in The Mars Society University Rover Challenge. Saddleback College's Robotics Team is the only team hailing from a community college that participates in this competition held annually in the desert of southern Utah. URC is the world's premier robotics competition for college students, challenging teams to design and build the next generation of Mars Rovers that will one day work alongside astronauts exploring the Red Planet.

In addition to Saddleback, competing teams hail from colleges and universities including Cornell, University of Michigan, and UC San Diego.

"Our primary goal is education. In other words, education comes first. We are educating students in project management and engineering, and we are throwing them in a room and telling them, 'You're going to build this.' It is immersive learning," said Mitch Haeri, professor and chair of the Saddleback physics and astronomy department and Robotics Team adviser.

Each participating college works



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The robotics team from Saddleback was the only group from a community college to compete in the Mars Society University Rover Challenge in southern Utah.

together to build a working Mars Rover, capable of being driven through the competition field by the students. Each

Rover must be able to perform service activities, such as collecting tools and delivering them to astronauts.

However, the primary goal is the collection and analysis of field samples for evidence of life on Mars, both living and fossils.

While building their Rover, the Saddleback team worked closely with professionals and adviser mentors. Participation in URC has allowed the Robotics Team to create unlikely collaborations across Saddleback, creating a sense of community. One such collaboration included the Automotive Technology Department, who assisted when help was needed to weld the rover chassis.

Saddleback student Christina von Urff, who was part of the team, said of her experience, "SC Robotics has greatly enhanced my Saddleback education because it urges its members to apply what we've learned in a classroom to real world situations — creating a mock Mars Rover. Additionally, being on the team has exposed me to more specialized areas of study, such as photonics, and expanded my technical STEM skills all while working alongside some of the most incredible people."

Saddleback College is not only the only community college to compete, but they also ranked 17th, placing them above some Ivy League schools and other prestigious universities.