



Cassini Scientist for a Day: an international contest in Greece

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The Cassini Outreach Team of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory is being organizing a brilliant school contest in Astronomy focusing in the Saturnian system. This essay contest provides school students all around the worlds with the opportunity to get involved in astronomy and astrophysics and planetary sciences in particular. From 2010 the 'Cassini Scientist for a Day' contest has being one of the most successful as well as important outreach activities of ESA and NASA in Greece with hundreds of participants all over Greece. The number of participants is growing rapidly every year. This type of school competition in Greece is particularly important since Astronomy and Astrophysics and Space Sciences, although very popular, are not included in the school curricula and thus students rarely have the opportunity to experience and participate actively in these subjects. For the years 2010 and 2011, the Space Physics Group of the Astronomy, Astrophysics and Mechanics section of the University of Athens in association with external colleagues has been selected as the co-ordinator of NASA for the competition in Greece. Under the guidance of Cassini Outreach team, the members of the Space Physics Group have informed, explained and spread the rules of the competition at primary, secondary and high schools all over Greece. In general, the students have the option to choose Cassini monitoring between three targets of the Saturnian system, which the participants show that will bring the best scientific result. Their arguments should be summarized in an essay of 500 words more or less. They also have the option to do team work through groups of maximum three students. The participation in the contest for 2010 was unexpectedly high and thoroughly satisfied. The winners awarded through a ceremony which was held in the largest amphitheater at the central building of the University of Athens, that was fully packed. The following year 2011 the participation increased up to 300% while this year's version received almost 75% more essays than last year. A large number of the participants of the 2010 and 2011 contests are either participating in the new contest of 2013 or –since some of them have graduated- are still in touch with the members of our group for study guidance. The running contest is already showing higher numbers of participation and interest, indicating the progress of this competition and its future involvements in school interests. Our members kept open communication with students, teachers and parents throughout the holding of the competition for questions and guidance. This year we are planning again a similar ceremony, with lectures on the topic by specialists as well as some lectures by the pupil and many other events in schools. One very important aspect of the activity is that schools and pupil feel very close to the University and Science and the Cassini Scientist for a day acts a good attractor of children to science.