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Guest speaker from space

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Students speak with Reiter onboard the ISS

On 17 October 2006, physics students from the Munich University of Technology swapped their lecture theatre for the Columbus Control Centre, part of the German Aerospace Center's (DLR) space control centre at Oberpfaffenhofen. This is where scientists control the European experiments on board the ISS, as well as monitoring the activities of German ESA astronaut Thomas Reiter.

During their visit to 'Col-CC', the students experienced a physics lecture of a very different kind. They were the first students to have an opportunity to talk live with ESA astronaut Thomas Reiter about his physics experiments in space and observe actual research applications live.



Thomas Reiter onboard the ISS during the Live-Call with the students

Thomas Reiter, who has been onboard the ISS since July 2006, is currently performing experiments in plasma physics as part of the Astrolab mission, which is being supervised back on Earth by Professor Hubertus Thomas at the Munich University of Technology. Reiter is using the German-Russian experimental system PK-3 Plus to research plasma in zero gravity.

The would-be physicists gained an insight into how the scientific study is being carried out and listened to a lecture explaining the basic principles of plasma physics and the PK-3 experiment. Also present was former astronaut Professor Ulrich Walter, who now lectures at the university.

The highlight of the visit to Col-CC was a live discussion with Thomas Reiter in space. The German astronaut talked the students through the experiment, explaining exactly how it works in a weightless environment, the results he hopes to achieve and the findings obtained so far. He then answered students' questions. Students back on campus in Garching near Munich were able to follow the discussion live by video link. The call was also broadcast at four other universities which are collaborating as part of the European Master's degree in Aeronautics and Space Technology (EuMAS) - in Toulouse, Pisa, Madrid and Cranfield.



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