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MARCH 1, 2022 | 021-22

Laurier and InkSmith partner for Mission on the Moon program, supported by Canadian Space Agency

WATERLOO – As Canada prepares to launch a robotic lunar rover in the next five years, the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) is investing in research and educational initiatives related to space science and technology. With funding from CSA, Wilfrid Laurier University's Faculty of Education and InkSmith are partnering to design and develop Mission on the Moon: An Educational Program for Canadian Youth, which will provide inquiry-based coding and robotics activities for students in Grades 6 through 9.

"Mission on the Moon will inspire Canadian youth to develop innovation mindsets and make a positive impact in an evolving world" said Maria Cantalini-Williams, dean of the Faculty of Education and co-investigator on the project. "This set of interactive, challenging educational modules will be developed in collaboration with our community of students, instructors, associate teachers and researchers. We are grateful to the Canadian Space Agency for their support."

The Mission on the Moon project is a continuation of an ongoing partnership between the Faculty of Education and InkSmith, a Waterloo-based education technology company founded by Laurier alumnus Jeremy Hedges. Over the past five years, InkSmith has worked with Laurier faculty members on a variety of projects aimed at strengthening coding and robotics competencies for Bachelor and Master of Education students. For Mission on the Moon, InkSmith will oversee the design and development of the learning resources, educational content and online curriculum platform.

"Our team is proud to work with Laurier on this project, which aims to better equip educators across Canada with free STEM content that not only builds knowledge, skills and awareness of the lunar rover and its mission on the Moon, but will develop future-ready learners who are actively engaged in critical, creative and self-directed learning," said Michelle Valtas, senior manager of strategic partnerships and sales at InkSmith.

Laurier B.Ed. and M.Ed. students will play a critical role in curriculum design and measuring the impact of the Mission on the Moon program, and their research findings will be shared broadly in order to inform future efforts to embed STEM competencies in teacher preparation and Master of Education graduate courses.

"STEM concepts, skills and perspectives have become a foundational domain of kindergarten to Grade 12 education, and research that examines effective learning and assessment in STEM will ensure that we are addressing this current and crucial component of education," said Julie Mueller, principal investigator and professor of Education at Laurier. "The development and implementation of digital technologies in education and industry have advanced at an increasingly rapid pace, and the collaborative partnerships between those who design and build these technologies and those who use them are critical to Canada's success."

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Mission on the Moon/Page 2

Development of the project is now underway and will be completed by March 2024. Mission on the Moon is projected to engage nearly 300,000 Canadian youth, 60 per cent of whom are currently underrepresented in STEM. A particular emphasis will be placed on reaching Indigenous and BIPOC students, as well as those who identify as girls or women. The program will also engage 14,000 practicing and student teachers from partnering school boards, and eventually thousands more across Canada.

"Mission on the Moon offers opportunities to learn coding, robotics, computational and design-thinking skills to address real-life problems and create innovative solutions, and it emphasizes the student and their active role in the process of learning and discovering new knowledge," said Marcos Ganzert, head of academic operations at InkSmith. "It will lead us, as educators, to nurture the next generation of leaders."

- 30 -

ABOUT WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Wilfrid Laurier University is committed to academic excellence. Laurier's holistic approach to learning integrates innovative programming with hands-on experience outside the classroom to ensure Laurier graduates are not only ready for the future but are inspired to leave their mark on the world. Community is at the heart of all we do. Laurier inspires students to engage in campus life and the broader community, leading to high levels of student satisfaction and engaged alumni who carry the Laurier legacy throughout the world. As a community of researchers, leaders and educators, Laurier builds knowledge that serves society and creates connections that have a lasting impact.

Learn more about Laurier's 20,000+ students in nine faculties and federated university college throughout Waterloo, Brantford, Kitchener and Toronto at wlu.ca.

ABOUT INKSMITH

InkSmith is an education technology company at the forefront of 21st-century learning and digital innovation in the EdTech space. InkSmith's mission is to provide educators with the technology and resources they need to teach the next generation of makers, coders, and problem-solvers. Their ultimate goal is to prepare students for the future by empowering them with the skills they'll need to thrive and be successful in our rapidly changing world. Learn more at inksmith.ca.