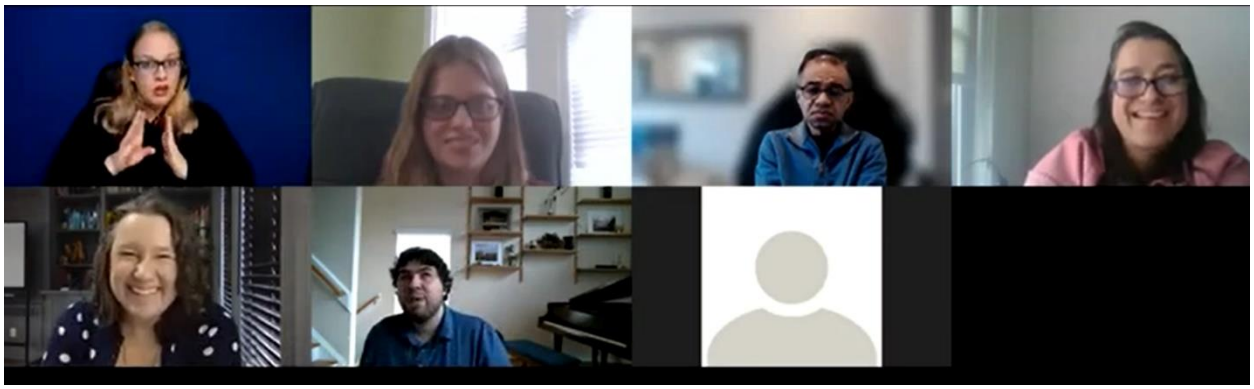
AIAA GHS January Professional Lecture: Astro Access

By Tracie Prater

AIAA GHS hosted a panel discussion on accessibility in human spaceflight with the nonprofit AstroAccess. AstroAccess recently launched a group of disabled scientists, veterans, students, athletes, and artists on a historic parabolic flight with the Zero Gravity Corporation. The organization is taking steps toward flying a more diverse range of people to space. The panel discussion can be was recorded and can be viewed at this link.



Panelists included:

Sina Bahram is the President and founder of Prime Access Consulting, Inc. (PAC). He also serves as an invited expert on working groups and standards bodies, including the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) working group. He mentors colleagues across multiple fields, and is a board member and project advisor on several initiatives. In 2012, Sina was recognized as a White House Champion of Change by President Barack Obama for his doctoral research work enabling users with disabilities to succeed in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. Sina believes that accessibility is sustainable when it is adopted as a culture, not just a tactic, and he is dedicated to shaping the next generation of digital accessibility standards and best practices.

Dana Bolles earned a BS in Mechanical Engineering, then began her work at NASA where she served as a payload safety engineer and was part of a program focused on minimizing mission risks

to human exploration of space. Today, she works at NASA Headquarters as a science communications program manager. In this role, she manages the day-to-day operations of a website focused on getting science out to the widest possible audience. Dana has learned that in almost any type of job, increasing numbers of people are realizing the importance of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. She lives her life outside of the status quo on almost every level, as a queer, disabled, woman of color, half asian and half latina. Although she has lots of intersectionalities, people respond most to her disability, making assumptions about what she can't do. She believes that being an AstroAccess Ambassador is a step forward for all in her community, highlighting the abilities of ALL for mission success! Dana currently serves as an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) IF/THEN Ambassador. This program brings together 125 women from a variety of STEM careers to serve as high-profile role models for middle school girls. By highlighting women in STEM who are contributing in all these fields, AAAS IF/THEN Ambassadors like Dana show girls the different career pathways they can pursue and how STEM impacts their lives every day.

Apurva Varia was inspired to become an aerospace engineer after seeing the space shuttle launch on TV while he was in the ninth grade. After that launch, he wrote a letter to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas asking if the space program would ever accept deaf astronauts. They responded saying that they would take that into consideration for the future. He proceeded to receive a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology and a Masters of Science in Aerospace Engineering at Syracuse University. He has served as Mission Director for Parker Solar Probe, Mission Director for the Interstellar Boundary Explorer (IBEX), and Deputy Mission Director for the Lunar Reconnaissance Mission (LRO) at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center Engineering and Technology Directorate.

Ann Kapusta is the Mission and Communications Director for Astro Access. Ann is also co-founder and managing director of ThinkSpace Consulting. Founded in 2015, ThinkSpace offers mission operations and innovation consulting to support cutting edge missions aboard the ISS and organizations with a mission to do good here on Earth. Ann is also technical and operations officer at People Love Art - an online community, platform for expression, and means of income for people with disabilities. Prior to full time entrepreneurship Ann led internal R&D, and external innovation strategy offerings for a digital and emerging technology think tank. Before the private sector Ann spent a decade in the aerospace industry on projects ranging from satellite technologies, space weather research, to human spaceflight. For her work as Operations Lead overseeing the largest biological experiments aboard the ISS, Ann was awarded the Silver Snoopy - NASA's highest award in support of human spaceflight, selected by the astronaut corps. These missions collected data for understanding muscular and ocular degeneration on Earth. Ann Earned her Bachelor's Degree in Astrophysics at Dartmouth College and attended the University of Michigan for her graduate work in Space Systems Engineering.