

# Weightless



Students from around the country took part in NASA's Microgravity University in Houston this past spring. Above, a group gets ready to board the April 3 morning flight at nearby Ellington Air Field.

## Chancellors Club Scholar experiences zero gravity.

To get accepted into the Microgravity University program at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, you have to come up with a big idea. Last spring, Lake Wooten and four fellow KU seniors carried out their team's big idea in a zero-gravity environment. They were among 20 teams from universities around the country.

The team built a robotic arm — made with a special metal called shape-memory alloy — and tested



KU seniors Lake Wooten and Jackie Paschang go weightless during their flight.

its movement during zero-gravity simulation flights. The arm could be used, for example, by astronauts to repair equipment during space walks.

The arm has no hinges or hydraulics. The shape-memory alloy allows the arm to bend without them. "The more parts, the more you have to maintain," Wooten said. "The advantage to NASA is that this is easy to maintain."

Students who participated in the program raised funds themselves to cover their expenses. The KU group had to raise about \$4,000 for food, lodging and materials. KU Endowment's Greater KU Fund provided \$500.

"Literally, we couldn't have made it without you guys," Wooten said, "because the \$500 paid for gas."

Wooten said the project caused him to shift his career interests. The Johnson Space Center specializes in manned space flights. During the project, the center's physicians made sure students were ready for the weightless simulations. Wooten, who majored in both engineering physics and aerospace engineering, was inspired to consider becoming a doctor who works with astronauts.

A National Merit Finalist, Wooten came to KU in 2004 as a Chancellors Club Scholar — an honor funded in part by the Greater KU Fund. After his first few months at KU, he said, "I now view the scholarship not as a reward for my past, but as an investment in my future."

After graduating this past May, he said the Chancellors Club scholarship was one of the reasons he chose KU because it showed the university was interested in him as an individual: "That meant more than the dollars I was getting. I'm more likely to be a Chancellors Club member myself, having been a scholar."

This fall, he'll go to Washington University in St. Louis to begin the Ph.D. program in biomedical engineering.

— Kirsten Bosnak



## GREATER KU FUND

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