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Flying High

06.16.2011 | Engineering, Students A team of University of Dayton students are flying high today without even leaving the ground.

Engineering students Brian Cranston and John Puttman tied for first place with Swansea University in the Merlin Flight Simulation Group's international IT FLIES Aircraft Design and Handling Competition held June 16 at Coventry University in the United Kingdom.

The first-place teams split £1,000, or about \$1,600.

The competition judged nine teams of students on the design of their aircraft and whether it can fly. Students tested their aircraft on one of only 15 Merlin flight simulators in the world. The University of Dayton has the only one in the U.S. Dave MacKay, chief test pilot for Virgin Galactic, was a judge.

Another University of Dayton team of engineering students — Brian Walsh, Andrew McClinton, Eric Fuerst and James Agans — finished second. They took home £500.

The University acquired its simulator earlier this year and hosted Merlin's inaugural IT FLIES U.S.A. competition in April.

The Merlin flight simulator is an engineering tool rather than a training device. It's specifically designed for academic settings and focuses on teaching students about flight instead of teaching them to fly, according to Merlin managing director Christopher Neal.

"Students can look at aircraft handling the way a test pilot does" without the risk of actually flying a plane, Neal added. He said the system is similar to what Boeing and Airbus use in evaluating aircraft design.

"Ten minutes in the simulator is worth hours in the classroom," said Andrew Self, a professor at England's Kingston University.

George Done of London's City University touts Merlin's system as the "only means of demonstrating the effects of design faults safely."

Aaron Altman, University of Dayton mechanical and aerospace associate professor and director of the graduate program in aerospace engineering, uses the simulator in his introduction to flight, graduate aerospace design and undergraduate capstone aerospace design courses.

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