

## CSM Talons earn spot at world championship

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La Plata, MD - The College of Southern Maryland (CSM) Talons, the college's competitive robotics team, are packing their bags – and robots – and traveling for the sixth consecutive year to compete in the 2019 VEX U World Championship in Louisville, KY. Returning as the tournament's 2018 Innovative Award winner, the Talons are one of only two community colleges competing in 2019 against nearly 80 other qualifying university teams from all around the world, April 25-27.

The VEX U competition is part of the VEX Robotics World Championship, presented by the Northrop Grumman Foundation that is aimed at bringing together top robotics teams under one roof to celebrate their accomplishments and participate in autonomous and driven skill competitions.

"Year after year, the CSM students on the Talons competitive robotics team raise the bar on ingenuity and engineering," said CSM Business, Technology and Public Service Division Chair and Professor Bernice Brezina. "They are our future scientists and engineers and prove over and over again that our future is bright."

Brezina noted that CSM's coursework is a constant that contributes to the Talons' results. "Our engineering and computer science classes and faculty prepare these students with the knowledge that they are applying when they build their robots," she said. "As CSM students, they are extending their learning beyond the classroom into the robotics lab."

The Talons have spent the last two semesters constantly tweaking their robots to compete in a series of challenges at VEX U that involve "getting caps, shooting flags and racing to climb up a platform," explained Julia Czecha, a new apprentice on the Talons' team. "Each year, VEX U sets different fields requiring new tasks and requirements of which we must adapt."

Talon's Team Captain Michael Balazs said he first learned about the Talons two years ago during his first semester at CSM and thought, "I'm in."

"At first, my involvement was strictly as a hobby, but now I realize we are getting real world experience," Balazs shared. "As a team, we are collaborating, learning time management, applying what we learn in class, making mistakes and making improvements. It is an invaluable experience."

The non-profit Robotics Education & Competition (REC) Foundation, which sponsors the VEX competitions, echoes Balazs.

"Student participation in VEX programs leads to higher levels of student achievement, by helping to develop critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork and leadership skills," the REC Foundation reported. It also helps to "improve technical writing skills, apply classroom knowledge through program participation and gain experience in a growing industry."

During the 2019 VEX-U World competition, the 80 teams will be split into two groups that compete over three days to make the top 16 in each division. From there, 30 teams level up through an elimination competition until there is one winner.

CSM Alumnus and former Talons Team Captain George Jenkins is going to Kentucky with the Talons for a third time, even though he is a full-time University of Maryland student. The University of Maryland doesn't have a robotics team so the La Plata resident is allowed to maintain an active role with CSM.

"We learn a lot when we are at the competition," Jenkins said, explaining that university teams come from China, Mexico, Lebanon, Columbia, Spain and the U.K – to name a few. "It is great being on a world stage and seeing all the different robotic designs for each year's game."

Alex Johnson, a recent Westlake High School graduate came to CSM to study electrical engineering in order to pursue a career with energy/power plants. "I didn't even know I could do stuff like this," Johnson said of joining the Talons and building a competitive robot. "Beyond the team, we have become good friends."

"We're all excited to return to VEX-U and compete against the best, young engineers in the world," said CSM Associate Math Professor and Talons' Faculty Advisor Jim Cleary. "This experience is what will set these students ahead of the rest for the rest of their careers."

The CSM Talons and Robotics Club promotes the study of STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) including robot design and programming, competing at several VEX competitions, and volunteering at the competitions that CSM hosts for elementary, middle, and high school teams. For information on the CSM Talons and Robotic Team, visit their [web site](#).

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