
LAST NAME

FIRST NAME

STUDENT NUMBER

Homework #5: Due in class Tuesday May 2nd

Question: Should NASA's priority be manned space flight or astronomical research?

Background: NASA is currently planning to develop and launch several major missions devoted to basic astronomical research – including the James Webb Space Telescope (the successor to Hubble, which aims to detect the light from the first stars and galaxies to form after the Big Bang); Constellation-X (an X-ray telescope intended to probe the environments close to black holes); and LISA (a space-based observatory to detect gravitational waves from merging black holes). These missions are expensive – the development cost of the Webb Space Telescope through to launch in 2013 is projected at \$3.5 billion – and they compete for funding within NASA with the Agency's Exploration initiatives (which include completion of the International Space Station, development of a successor to the Space Shuttle, and manned flights to the moon). How NASA should balance these competing priorities is an open and hotly debated question, which I'd like you to think and write about for this final assignment.

Instructions: I am looking for a brief (2 pages, typewritten) non-technical article or essay similar to what one might find in the editorial section of a major newspaper. This is a policy issue that is not covered in the textbook – however you will find abundant useful resources on the web (the class web page links to NASA's Strategic Plan and 2007 budget request, which are good places to start). Please cite any web sites or other references you use. Attach this sheet as a cover page to your essay.

Grading: Clear, well-reasoned essays will all score 100%. There is no 'correct' answer to this question, of course, and I won't take it personally if you argue that all funding for research should be eliminated completely!! You should use normal care in writing – please make use of the spell checker – but I won't deduct points for stylistic or grammatical mistakes as long as the essay is readable.