**Students take the first steps to become certified drone pilots**

The University of Guam will soon have a pool of trained drone pilots as students of the UOG Drone Corps program begin their intensive lessons in flight.

The program, which started on July 26, aims to build a team of Federal Aviation Administration–certified drone pilots who can assist in capturing drone footage and data for local agencies. In addition to teaching the regulations of proper flying operations, the program allows students to complete 40-hours of hands-on flying experience and prepares them for the FAA remote pilot exam.

During the first week, the inaugural cohort of 27 members was introduced to FAA regulations and protocols for safe and lawful flight. Topics included acceptable flight times and locations, qualifications for drone operators, and airspace boundaries.

Mathematics major Maria Minas said she enrolled in the UOG Drone Corps to further explore her interest in STEM subjects and build on her research and skill applications.

“This program provides great opportunities for students like me to learn more about aviation, drones, and other advancements in technology,” Minas said. “Although I am an aspiring educator, this program will definitely open a new door of interests in STEM other than teaching.”

As the three-week program continues, students will dive into specific scenarios remote pilots face, such as weather conditions and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) mechanics. Art Dawley, an instructor for the UOG Drone Corps, said safe flight practices would be a recurring lesson throughout the program.

“Safety and planning for the reduction of risk in every aspect of all future drone operations should always remain the first priority. Thorough preparation before each operation, [you] will establish your professionalism, your credibility, and your reputation,” Dawley said.

In addition to capturing data for local agencies and organizations, the program seeks to bring unique research opportunities to the island by encouraging researchers to utilize drones within their fields.

“With this new cadre of UOG pilots, we can take full advantage of unmanned aircraft systems technology. It will allow us to safely collect airborne datasets on a regular basis, fully utilize our growing fleet of UAVs, and augment various disciplines of scientific research,” said Romina King, associate director of NASA Guam Space Grant and assistant project manager for NASA Guam EPSCoR. “I look forward to seeing these students succeed in their endeavors and assigning them to various missions.”

Upon completing the program and passing the FAA remote pilot exam, participants will receive their Part 107 certificate declaring them remote pilots for two years.

The UOG Drone Corps is facilitated through the combined efforts of [NASA Guam Space Grant](https://www.uog.edu/nasa-guam-space-grant/) and NASA Guam EPSCoR. The Drone Corps will soon be situated in a geographic information system laboratory at the university’s RFK Library.