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Atmospheric Sciences Student Shelby Ingram Awarded NASA Develop Internship

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Atmospheric sciences student Shelby Ingram hasn't graduated yet—that happens this May—but she's already got NASA on her resume.

Ingram spends her mornings before classes at the Veach-Baley Federal Building in downtown Asheville, thanks to an internship with NASA Develop, which addresses environmental and public policy issues through interdisciplinary research projects.

Ingram is working on a project looking at disasters in North and South Carolina, particularly disasters caused by hurricanes. "We're focused on extreme precipitation," Ingram explained. "We're looking at three satellites... We're analyzing the performance rate and accuracy of the satellites in comparison to the ground-based data, and trying to figure out the usefulness of those three satellites, and then working on a way to provide that information to coastal management."

For Ingram, this work boils down to "a lot of coding and a lot of meetings," she said. "I have mainly been focused on producing bias graphs and charts, accumulation charts, and correlation between the gauges

and the ground-based data.”

For example, rain gauges can often stop working during the heavy rains and flooding hurricanes can cause, making their data unreliable at times. A better understanding of data collected through satellites can make a big difference when predicting and preparing for the next extreme precipitation event.

“What can we integrate into our tools to help our communities be prepared for these extreme floods?” Ingram said. “Hopefully with the understanding of how the satellites work, they can integrate it into, ‘this what we saw at this event, and this is the output that we can expect in this same situation, based on the satellites.’”

The chance to engage in this research project from the ground up has been an exciting opportunity, Ingram said. The internship has also offered the chance to hear from experts in the field during “brown bag” lectures, and the chance to meet and network with professionals.

“My life goal is to work for either NOAA or NASA, so getting to meet people that are currently in the positions that I may one day want to have, or work for the agencies that I want to, is pretty cool,” Ingram said.

Ingram hopes to continue her NASA Develop internship next semester after she graduates, before heading on to graduate school.

“Just working in that office with so many brilliant minds, and then knowing that I am actually working with them, has been really rewarding,” Ingram said. “It’s given me a lot of confidence in being able to be in atmospheric sciences.”

Ingram and her NASA Develop colleagues will present their project at the NASA Develop Southeast Regional Closeout event at the Collider at 1 Haywood Street in downtown Asheville from 12:30 – 5 p.m. on Friday, May 23.