

Retired Astronaut Dr. Guy Bluford to Speak at SIUE

Arts & Issues Event

Segue • SIUE

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Southern Illinois University Edwardsville brings an eclectic blend of performers and speakers to campus through its Arts & Issues series. For over 32 years, the series has showcased some of the world's finest artists and thought-provoking speakers that inspire people of all ages and backgrounds.

The University community is pleased to welcome the series' next guest, Dr. Guion "Guy" Bluford, Jr. for his presentation, "The Future of the Space Program and International Space Station." His lecture will be at 7:30 p.m. in the Meridian Ballroom at the Morris University Center on campus.

In preparation for his visit, College of Arts and Science (CAS) Dean Greg Budzban, PhD, interviews the former astronaut, Air Force fighter pilot and aerospace engineer on this week's episode of Segue, which will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 11 on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

In 1983, the retired colonel in the United States Air Force became the first African American to fly in space. He was the first African American to be awarded NASA's coveted Astronaut Pin and the Air Force's Command Pilot Astronaut Wings. He was inducted into the International Space Hall of Fame in 1997 and the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame in 2010. He logged over 5,200 hours in high performance jet aircraft and has flown 688 hours in space on four Space Shuttle missions.

"I like to ask our guests what brought them into their particular careers," Budzban explains. "As a young boy, were you interested in space from the get-go, or was becoming an astronaut something that emerged later in life?"

"Astronauts were always like comic book characters to me," Bluford replies. "My interest in space generated from my interest in airplanes.

"Growing up in Philadelphia, I watched the transition from propeller-driven airplanes to jets. From there, I wanted to know everything about certain airplanes and how their jet engines worked."

Bluford's interest in jet engines led him to study at Pennsylvania State University, where he studied aeronautical engineering and specialized in engines.

"At the time, the university didn't offer a degree in aerospace, but the engineering department recognized the need for some specialization in space," Bluford says. "Over my four years there, they changed the curriculum to cover space activities, since the government realized they were behind in their space program. Penn State also had mandatory ROTC at the time, and I decided to advance, which ultimately got me into the Air Force.

"I initially wanted to be an engineer, but then I found out I could fly airplanes."

After graduating from Penn State in 1964, Bluford flew 144 combat missions in Southeast Asia as an F-4C fighter pilot, with 65 missions over North Vietnam.

After his deployment ended, Bluford had opportunity to return to school. In 1978, he received his doctoral degree in aerospace engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT).

Immediately following his graduation from AFIT, Bluford applied to NASA and was chosen from a pool of more than 8,000 applicants to become a mission specialist.

Bluford's first mission to space took place in 1983. Not only was he the first African American to fly in space, but he also was part of NASA's first mission that involved both a night launch and night landing.

"On my first mission, my responsibility was to deploy a satellite called the INSAT-1B, which was an Indian weather communication satellite, and place it into geosynchronous orbit over the Indian Ocean," Bluford explains.

"How did you do that? You couldn't have just kicked it out the door," Budzban jokes.

"Yes, we did!" Bluford shares. "The Space Shuttle was a lot like a truck, and it had a cargo bay. When we got up into orbit, about 160 to 180 miles above the earth, we opened our cargo bay doors and kicked the satellite out, literally!"

After this first venture into space, Bluford was part of three other missions. He returned to space in 1985 to conduct experiments on the German D-1 Spacelab mission. In 1991, he gathered aurora, Earth-limb, celestial and Space Shuttle environmental data aboard the orbiter *Discovery*. His fourth and final mission took place in 1992 and was classified by the U.S. government.

During the course of his Feb. 19 SIUE lecture, Bluford is set to outline his hopes for the space program and the International Space Station. In the last minutes of Budzban's Segue interview with the retired astronaut, which will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 11, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound, Bluford gives the dean an inkling of what his upcoming presentation might contain.

"We're going to continue exploring," Bluford says. "Hopefully, we will go back to the Moon and go to Mars. In the end, the trip to Mars would be a world effort, just as the International Space Station's efforts are among us and Russia, Japan, Canada and other nations.

"We'll work closely with other countries to make that effort possible, and I'm certain we'll solve the problems involved along the way."

Tickets for this event are still available and can be purchased online at artsandissues.com, by phone at 1-866-698-4253 or at the Morris University Center information desk.

By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing & Communications