Chang-Díaz, Franklin Encyclopedia Article

Chang-Díaz, Franklin

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Chang-Díaz, Franklin

Franklin Chang-Díaz was instrumental in the formation of the Astronaut Science Colloquium Program and the Astronaut Science Support Group.

American Astronaut 1950-

Born in San José, Costa Rica, on April 5, 1950, Franklin R. Chang-Díaz immigrated to the United States at the age of eighteen with the goal of someday becoming an astronaut. After learning English as a senior high school student in Hartford, Connecticut, he earned a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Connecticut in 1973, and a doctoral degree in applied plasma physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1977. Chang-Díaz then became an astronaut for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1981, and flew on six space shuttle missions.

Chang-Díaz's missions have included the launch of the Galileo spacecraft to Jupiter in 1989 and the final shuttle visit to the Russian Mir space station in 1998. The recipient of numerous medals and awards, Chang-Díaz directs the NASA Advanced Space Propulsion Laboratory at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. His research team (which includes graduate students at several universities) is developing the Variable Specific Impulse Magnetoplasma Rocket (VASIMR). VASIMR is expected to greatly increase the speed with which humans can travel in space. In addition to his research, Chang-Díaz is organizing more direct involvement in space activities by the countries of Latin America.

See Also

Astronauts, Types of (Volume 3);; Ion Propulsion (Volume 4);; Jupiter (Volume 2).

Internet Resources

"Career Astronaut Biographies." 2001. *NASA: Johnson Space Center.* <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/as trobio.html>.