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ASU scientists give state profile a needed boost

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As NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter circles the moon, it's worth pausing to consider what a monumental accomplishment this represents.

It also is worth celebrating the continued prominence of [Arizona State University](#) in space exploration.

Today's tough budget times should not dull Arizona's appreciation of what its research universities achieve. ASU's role in the moon mission is key to making sure future astronauts arrive on well-mapped lunar landscapes.

ASU Professor Mark Robinson is the lead scientist in charge of three cameras on NASA's orbiter. Two are high-resolution, black-and-white cameras, the third offers a wide-angle view that can record ultraviolet and visible bands of light.

The maps created by these cameras will provide critical information about the lunar surface. It will help NASA safely return astronauts to the moon by 2020.

The technology will also map mineral distribution on the moon. According to Robinson, this can help locate deposits that will be mined and refined to provide substances for use by visiting lunar explorers and those who will one day live and work on the moon.

Let's face it, the facts of today's space exploration are far more interesting than any [science fiction](#).

ASU's contribution keeps Arizona upfront and relevant in this fascinating field. The school has been involved with the Hubble Space Telescope, as well as missions to Mars, Mercury and Jupiter.

This represents a valuable contribution to Arizona's standing in the world and enhances our state's ability to attract talent, investment and economic development in competitive high-tech fields.

Opportunities for students and the public are also impressive.

Scientists from around the country, including the University of Arizona and [Northern Arizona University](#), are involved in ASU's lunar effort. So are undergraduate- to doctoral-level students. A visitors center will allow the public to see the lunar images, which are expected to start arriving in early July.

These sorts of far-reaching benefits from Arizona's quality research-based universities are so engrained in Arizona's identity that it is easy to take them for granted. But like flying to the moon, the accomplishments of the [state's universities](#) should inspire excitement that transcends temporary budget problems.

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