

## From space to Boca Raton: an FAU astronaut's story

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"Space," according to U.S.S. Enterprise Captain James T. Kirk, is "the final frontier."

But actor William Shatner has never actually been there. Shuttle Astronaut Stephen Swanson, a 1986 graduate of Florida Atlantic University, has. And he's back on earth telling people what it was like – and explaining the nuts and bolts of the nation's space program.

Swanson, who visited the "final frontier" on the Space Shuttle Atlantis earlier this year, came to FAU's Boca campus recently to speak to students and to attend commencement exercises, where he received an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters.

While there, he presented President Frank Brogan with an FAU banner that he had taken into space with him.

### **Mission Duties**

While on stage at an appearance the day before graduation, Swanson showed a 19-minute video of his space experience. The reason for the mission, he said, was change some of the parts of the International Space Station. The FAU grad said he is scheduled to go up again in the near future for a similar mission.

He told the audience being in a space vehicle is not as easy as it looks. He said it takes tremendous upper body strength to move about. He did joke about how space travelers enjoy eating food "that floats" in the air.

The space traveler said it is also difficult to return to earth and deal with gravity after spending several days weightless.

Swanson is a NASA astronaut and mission specialist. During his visit to FAU, he presented a lecture called "Discover Space." Swanson spoke to high-achieving high school students from Palm Beach and Broward county schools and to FAU engineering students about his experiences in the space program and the value of an education.

"We are very excited and honored to have Steve Swanson return to FAU to be recognized as our distinguished alumnus and to speak to students interested in engineering," said Karl K. Stevens, dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science. "Steve Swanson serves as an inspiration to students to show them what they can accomplish with an engineering degree."

### **Mayor's Honors**

Following his presentation, Swanson received a key to the city from Boca Raton Mayor Steven Abrams.

Swanson graduated from Steamboat Springs High School in Colorado in 1979. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering physics from the University of Colorado in 1983, a master of applied science in computer systems from FAU in 1986, and a doctorate in computer science from Texas A&M University in 1998.

Prior to joining NASA, Swanson worked for General Telephone and Electronics in Phoenix as a software engineer, working on the real-time software of telephone system multiplexer/demultiplexers. Earlier this year, Swanson flew on Atlantis for mission STS-117, logging 336 hours in space, including almost 14 space walk hours, that is, hours outside of the orbiter's crew cabin.

He is currently assigned as a mission specialist on the STS-119 mission, targeted for launch in the fall of 2008. The flight will deliver the final pair of power-generating solar array wings and truss element to the International Space Station.

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