

Lessons from out of this world

By Shelby Perea / Journal Staff Writer

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NASA Astronaut Christina Koch goes airborne while demonstrating the way she sleeps on the International Space Station to a group of students during a live chat organized by UNM and the Children's Hour. Photographed on Tuesday December 10, 2019. Adolphe Pierre-Louis/Journal

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — “Hello to the University of New Mexico. The International Space Station has you loud and clear.”



That message inspired an eruption of cheers at UNM on Tuesday ahead of a live chat with one of the station's current residents, Christina Koch.

chat

Roughly 600 people gathered at the university, while others watched the live stream, to hear about life on the station and even to learn how Koch gets her burger fix in space. Students read pre-submitted questions from across New Mexico.

“What’s the best way to describe microgravity? Is it as fun as we imagine?” asked Lucas Griego, a fifth grade student at Coronado Elementary School.

Koch can confirm that it is really fun – except when you lose your keys.

“I think the best way to describe it is that what it means is that you and all your surroundings are in free fall,” she said on the video cast, while demonstrating some flips and midair somersaults.

Her typical day is similar to those on the ground: Eat breakfast, get ready, work throughout the day, with a break for lunch, and then some free time. But her commute is less of a headache.

“We just basically get to float on over to the next module over, and then suddenly we’re already at our jobs,” Koch told the crowd.

After her 12-hour workday, there isn’t a lot of free time, but she likes to take photos (out of a window that looks down on Earth), read a book or call her family.

Koch was recently involved in a NASA milestone after she was part of the first spacewalk conducted entirely by women.

Jennifer Urban, mother of 11-year-old Uma, said she hopes the talk with Koch teaches her daughter “that anything is possible.”



A large crowd watches as NASA Astronaut Christina Koch describes life on the International Space Station to a group of students during a live chat organized by UNM and the Children's Hour. Photographed on Tuesday December 10, 2019 . Adolphe Pierre-Louis/Journal

Thaniel Lentz, a sixth grader at the Public Academy for Performing Arts, and Eli Willey, a fifth grader at Alvarado Elementary School, asked about the food: Does it taste like food on earth? How is it different?

For the most part, Koch said, the food tastes the same. But it looks a little different, either dehydrated or put through a process that extends its shelf life.

"My favorite one to show people is the dehydrated space hamburger. Yes, we have burgers in space," she said, holding up a skinny patty sealed in a pouch.

Tiara Dominguez, a fifth grade teacher at Bandelier Elementary School, said more than 100 kids from the school attended. She said it was a good fit for the science curriculum. She said she was impressed by the presentation and hoped it was inspiring for her students.

Aurelia Fulgendi, 11, called it "pretty awesome" and was particularly dazzled by the microgravity tricks.

Harrison Reynolds, 11, said it was "incredible" to learn about the research on the space station.

"It was an amazing experience," she said.

UNM and The Children's Hour hosted the live chat. David Hanson, a professor of biology at UNM, said the university was chosen for the call after a proposal-submission process.

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