- AUSTIN, Texas - GeoFORCE Texas, a summer program designed to inspire students to pursue the geosciences, has selected 40 outstanding Southwest Texas eighth graders for the 2006 GeoFORCE Texas summer academy.

The University of Texas at Austin - Jackson School of Geosciences, which manages the GeoFORCE Texas summer academies in partnership with Southwest Texas Junior College, received more than 100 applications from students at 15 school districts throughout Southwest Texas.

Sondee Splawn of Rocksprings Junior High and Jordan Michelle Hicks of Nueces Canyon Junior High, along with top students from Brackettville, Carrizo Springs, Cotulla, Crystal City, Del Rio, Dilley, Eagle Pass, Hondo, Leakey, Pearsall, Sabinal, Utopia and Uvalde, were named to the 2006 class.

“The response was terrific and we want to thank all of the students and teachers who took time to complete the application process,” said Blaine Bennett, dean of technology and institutional advancement at Southwest Texas Junior College.

GeoFORCE Texas encourages students with high aptitude in math and science to consider careers in the geosciences. The summer academies offer week-long seminars blending college preparatory coursework with hands-on field trips to sites of geological interest around the country, at no cost to the students.

Students selected for the program are committed to attend summer academies for four years throughout high school.

Qualified applicants not selected for the summer academy class, will be invited to participate in Young Geoscientists, a two-day program scheduled July 11-12 in Uvalde on the campus of SWTJC and at various geological sites of interest across Uvalde County.

Funding is provided by industry sponsors Shell, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, AT&T Foundation, Dominion, Halliburton, Marathon, Schlumberger and Swift Energy Company. The financial assistance supports the program - long-term goals of increasing the number of students - specifically minorities and females who enter into the geosciences and increasing awareness of the importance of Earth science in everyday life.

With this year - new recruits, total participation in GeoFORCE Texas now stands at 140 students. When fully operational, the summer programs will enroll more than 1,000 Southwest Texas students.

From July 15-22, members of the 2006 summer academy class will visit The University of Texas at Austin campus, stay in dorms and attend professor-led classes before flying to Washington, D.C., to meet professionals at the U.S. Geological Survey in Reston, VA. While in Washington, students will tour the Natural History Museum, the U.S. Capitol, and the Lincoln and Vietnam Memorials.

For more information about the program, contact Julie Spink, program coordinator at jspink.jsg.utexas.edu or visit the GeoFORCE Texas website at