Jon Rask

Class of 1991

Jon Rask is a NASA scientist whose research interests span the fields of astrobiology and space biology and focuses on the search for life on other planets and moons. Jon's interests in space exploration were sparked by observations he made as a child at the family farm southwest of Mandan, that centered on life's ability to survive the extreme conditions of drought and winter we experience in North Dakota. Jon's role as a high school science teacher in Bismarck offered the opportunity to share his enthusiasm for space science and motivated him to live the dream of seeing the space frontier with his own eyes. During his time at NASA, Jon has led desert, hydrothermal, and polar field expeditions that resulted in scientific discoveries at remote analog environments on six different continents. Jon has also characterized the toxicity of Apollo lunar dust and developed biological experiments that flew aboard the Space Shuttle and International Space Station. He has experienced microgravity during parabolic flight and been a test subject in human centrifuge studies. Rask has also carried out investigations in Antarctica, where he has tested prototype space suit technologies developed at the University of North Dakota and operated the food growth chamber at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station.

Throughout his career, Jon has championed the importance of training the next generation, preserving native ecosystems, learning from our rural communities, and emphasizing the critical role that food production plays in space exploration. Rask has received numerous NASA honor awards and is the recipient of the United States Antarctica Service Medal for his courage, sacrifice, and devotion to scientific and exploratory efforts in Antarctica. His work has been featured by TEDx, museums, radio, and television, and is published in the proceedings of international conferences and scientific journals. To this day, Jon continues the stewardship of his family's farmland, and he lives with his partner and daughter in Silicon Valley.