

# Stanford researchers tapped to help make rules for commercial space travel

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Before business skyrockets to space, the FAA has to make sure it's safe to get there.

Space may be the final frontier, but it's going to get more crowded pretty soon. And Stanford researchers are working to make sure the new pioneers can get there safely and easily.

Commercial communication satellites and government-backed space missions have been under way for decades. But private companies like Virgin Galactic are on the verge of putting ordinary people into space as tourists. And with NASA's space shuttle program being phased out, it's likely that privately owned craft will ferry astronauts to the [International Space Station](#).

"When you start having launches not once every few months or once a month but maybe once a day, you have to figure out how to control the nation's airspace," said Scott Hubbard, a consulting professor of aeronautics and astronautics.

"You have to figure out what it means to take regular citizens into space," he said. "You've got to figure out how to take existing launch vehicles and prove they're safe for humans to use. The FAA has the responsibility to regulate all this, but they don't have the research background to say what are good policies."

That's where Stanford comes in. The [Federal Aviation Administration](#) on

Wednesday tapped the university and seven other schools to play a role in the newly created Center of Excellence for Commercial Space Transportation, which will help make the rules regulating [commercial space travel](#).

"We're experts in air traffic management and control for airplanes," said Hubbard, who is working on the FAA project with Stanford aeronautics and astronautics colleague Associate Professor Juan Alonso. "We plan to apply this expertise to the whole question of space traffic control. We need to figure out what kinds of systems will be necessary to tell flight controllers how to keep the space rockets out of the way of the flight from San Francisco to Washington."

Along with the aerospace experts who will develop policies for space launches, traffic management and human space flight, Stanford researchers at the Graduate School of Business will have a hand in examining and forecasting what business opportunities exist in space travel and exploration.

"This emerging new commercial [space](#) area could be a business of many billions of dollars a year," Hubbard said.

Provided by Stanford University

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