ABSTRACT: The NICMOS camera 2 coronagraph provides a unique instrumental resource for exploring circumstellar environments. The NICMOS Environments of Nearby Stars (EONS) programs recently commenced following the completion of the commissioning of the coronagraph in February, 1998. Under those programs we are conducting systematic surveys of nearby, and young stars searching for companion brown dwarfs and giant planets, and protoplanetary disks around main-sequence stars. We present the status of these and related programs along with a summary of preliminary results.

UPDATE: Due to a now recognized, and understood, deficiency in the augmented target acquisition process the anticipated performance levels of the coronagraph, which were demonstrated in SMOV, have been somewhat compromised. As a result the limiting sensitivities, and ultimate detection limits for observations in the first three months of the EONS programs have fallen short of their performance goals due to locally increased backgrounds of two stellar magnitudes or more in a spatially dependent fashion. Corrective action for subsequent observations has now been taken in the form of an operational workaround by STScI (effective May 25), and by a flight software upgrade which is being readied by GSFC Code 512 for installation in HST. A strategy for recovery of these early coronagraphic data has been devised by the NICMOS IDT.