

PROFILES OF SCIENTISTS IN EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

This profile is based on excerpts of an interview with Dr. Cherilynn Morrow, about her involvement in Education and Public Outreach (E/PO), specifically her work at Space Science Institute (SSI). Dr. Morrow designed the interview questionnaire and SSI's Preston Dyches edited the responses in June, 2003.



Current Professional position and background:

I am the Education and Public Outreach (E/PO) Manager at the Space Science Institute (SSI) in Boulder, Colorado. Before that I spent two years at NASA Headquarters and several years as a solar physicist doing helioseismology.

Description of Cheri's E/PO involvement:

One of my key roles is to develop and implement the education programs associated with SSI's traveling exhibits (e.g. MarsQuest or the Space Weather Center). These exhibits bring the excitement of current, ongoing space exploration to teachers, students, and the museum-going public. The education program offers public talks and workshops for museum and classroom educators at every host site (9 sites during a 3-year tour). Other components include providing innovative educational websites associated with exhibit content, and developing instructional materials such as Kinesthetic Astronomy and a Family Guide to the main topic featured in the exhibit (e.g., Family Guide to the Sun).

I also manage E/PO programs and opportunities that provide professional development workshops and resources for research scientists working in education, and professional development workshops and resources on space and earth science for educators. The educators we touch work in schools, museums, planetariums, and the wilderness. The earth and space scientists we touch want to make E/PO an integral part of their career contributions.

Cheri's time commitment:

Significantly greater than 40 hours per week, depending on the week. I love my work, but there is rather a lot of it, and I travel too much. All creative endeavors, whether scientific research or science education, require extended blocks of focused time. I find it increasingly difficult to find this kind of time.

How she got started in E/PO work:

When I was a graduate student at the High Altitude Observatory, I was offered an opportunity to be a tour guide for the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). I discovered a latent talent for communicating space and atmospheric science to diverse audiences. It took awhile longer to turn my career completely from scientific research and make E/PO my full-time profession.

Why she chose to make a transition from scientific research to a career in E/PO:

Two reasons. First, the opportunity presented itself. Secondly, I was looking for a career path that would integrate more of my personal talents and interests in music, movement, poetry and outdoor adventure.

After my post-doc in Cambridge, England I had the chance to teach undergraduates and do math and astronomy curriculum development at the University of Colorado. A subsequent position as a visiting scientist at NASA Headquarters led me to step further into the interface zone between research science and E/PO and to do some pioneering policy work in building bridges between astronomers and educators. After NASA, I had the option to return to research or to continue my evolution toward educational leadership and management. I chose science education and my current position at SSI.

The biggest challenges to her E/PO involvement:

The biggest challenge used to be lack of respect from scientific colleagues who thought less of me for "wasting" my Ph.D. in science on envisioning and managing educational programs. These days, this sentiment seems to be less prevalent, but it's still out there.

Her greatest positive impact through EP/O:

My core mission is to raise awareness of the astronomical and systemic perspectives of planet Earth. I hope that the programs and products I'm designing and implementing are doing just that with a creative vitality and infectious enthusiasm that stirs other educators and scientists to positive action in science education.

What she gets out of her participation:

In my current role I enjoy an amazing breadth of interactions with scientists and educators all over the country and beyond. But more importantly, I feel a deep personal satisfaction and a sense of meaningful contribution to the positive evolution of human minds.

Cheri's words of wisdom about E/PO:

Allow your heart to have influence on how your career unfolds.