

PROFILES OF SCIENTISTS IN EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

This profile is based on an interview of Dr. Steve Lee about his involvement in the traveling science exhibition called MarsQuest. The interview was conducted by Dr. Cherlynn Morrow at the Space Science Institute of Boulder, CO in October, 2000.



Dr. Steve Lee (hands raised) leads a walk-through of the MarsQuest exhibit for museum staff at the McWane Center in Birmingham, Alabama where the exhibit premiered on 30 September 2000.

Current professional position:

I'm a research associate at the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado. My research deals primarily with surface-atmosphere interactions on Mars.

Description of E/PO role :

I serve as the main science content advisor for a national traveling museum exhibition called *MarsQuest*. I've helped come up with the concepts of what it is we want to tell people about each of the areas that we've chosen, and selected most of the graphics and the images used in the exhibit. I've also done a lot of the image processing on the images that are included. On a day to day basis, I've worked closely with the text writer and the designers of the exhibit. Additionally, I've been involved with the education program associated with the exhibit. My role, principally, is to give local educators an hour-long presentation on the background of the exhibit and some basic facts about Mars and Mars exploration. I also help orient museum staff to the exhibit so that they are better prepared to generate additional educational programming related to the exhibit.

Comments on his time commitment

Over the last four years, since I've been involved with *MarsQuest*, I've been spending between one-third and one quarter of my time doing E/PO and public outreach activities. *MarsQuest* has provided between a third and a quarter of my funding for each of those years. It helps that I'm funded - I certainly wouldn't be able to spend a quarter of my time doing this sort of thing without the funding. Since I'm a soft-money researcher, I have to support myself. It was essential that the resources were available to free up my time that was necessary to do this on a day -to-day basis.

His most valuable impact on MarsQuest:

As I observe people interact with the exhibit I think that my most positive contribution has been my access to current images of Mars and my capabilities in image processing. The most exciting thing for me is watching people when they see some of these beautiful pictures of Mars. When they see our huge murals of the Martian surface, they just come up and say "Wow!". That's a nice feeling! As the Mars research community, we're very familiar with these pictures and take them for granted. But the public at large has not seen these images. Just the fact that we've been able to bring some of these stunning photographs, and some of the amazing features of Mars to the public - and people really are amazed and excited by it - that's a tremendous reward. I think we're hitting home - *MarsQuest* is hitting the target.

Steve's words of wisdom about E/PO:

I would say it's important to be part of a team. I certainly would not have been able to do this by myself. I wouldn't have the tools, or the time, or the expertise. Teaming with people who know how to design a museum exhibit is very important. Teaming with people who really know how to do the education program is very important. There's a really distinct role for scientists - we're the ones who have the facts, and we need to communicate those to the people that know how to communicate with the public. To do a really excellent job of E/PO requires all of those different aspects.