

PROFILES OF SCIENTISTS IN EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

This profile is based on excerpts of an interview with Dr. Claire Parkinson, about her involvement in Education and Public Outreach (E/PO), specifically her role in outreach efforts for the Aqua satellite mission at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. Dr. Cherilynn Morrow (Space Science Institute – SSI) designed the interview questionnaire. SSI's Preston Dyches edited the responses in May, 2003.



Dr. Parkinson with a group of school children at the Owens Science Center, Lanham, Maryland.

Current Professional position and background:

Aqua Project Scientist, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, MD. I have a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a masters and PhD in climatology. My research has centered on sea ice and its role in the climate system, especially as revealed through satellite data, although it also extends to climate change more generally. The Aqua mission aims at improved understandings of the climate system and especially the role of water in it, including atmospheric water vapor, clouds, ocean surface waters, soil moisture, and ice and snow.

Description of Claire's featured E/PO role:

For NASA's Aqua satellite mission, I have written a 41-page brochure, along with other outreach products like trading cards. I've given many talks about the mission and I was interviewed in seven live webcasts about the Aqua mission and for Aqua's "cool science" website. I've created several Aqua posters, and I've written much of the text for the mission website. I've also been heavily involved in an Aqua Engineering Competition for High School students – helping to formulate the problems to be solved, serving as a judge, providing a Mission briefing and participating in the awards ceremony.

Comments on her time commitment:

My time commitment to Aqua is about 25 hours a week, with generally about 10-15 of those hours committed to E/PO. Many weeks, E/PO takes 20 hours or more of my time.

How she balances E/PO efforts with other professional activities:

I manage it by working much longer than 40-hour weeks.

Challenges to her E/PO involvement:

The biggest challenge is how much time it takes.

The most important positive impact she's had:

I put a great deal of effort into trying to make things understandable; and from responses I've received I think I generally succeed in doing that. My most important impact might be getting students, teachers, and the general public to understand Earth science and satellite concepts better and to become excited by the science and related activities.

Being able to represent NASA is a gigantic bonus, whether it's in the classroom or at a public lecture or anywhere else. As a NASA representative, my potential impact greatly increases over what it would be otherwise.

What she gets out of her participation:

Personal satisfaction. It is often extremely satisfying to work on something and then have people indicate how pleased they are with what you provided (whether it's a talk or product) and how much they learned from it.

Claire's words of wisdom about E/PO:

Recognize that it will take time but that in most cases the time commitment will be well worth it. I will definitely continue, as I feel it is an important and rewarding aspect of the job.

Visit the Aqua website:

<http://aqua.nasa.gov>

Cool Science:

<http://aqua.nasa.gov/outreach/coolscience.html>