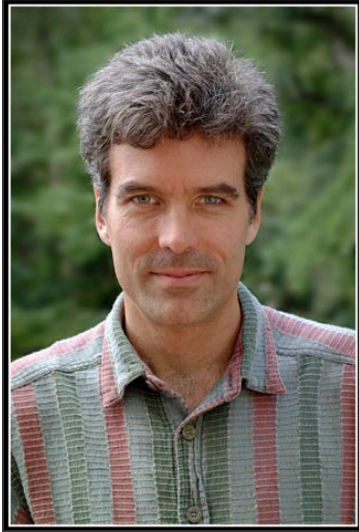


## PROFILES OF SCIENTISTS IN EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

*This profile is based on excerpts of an interview with Dr. Mark Voit about his involvement in Education and Public Outreach (E/PO), specifically his participation in the traveling exhibition Hubble Space Telescope: New Views of the Universe. The profile was jointly created by Dr. Cherilynn Morrow of the Space Science Institute (SSI), Wendy Pollock of the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), Christy Edwards of SSI, and Mark Voit, STScI.*



### **Current Professional position:**

I am an Associate Astronomer and Lead Outreach Scientist at NASA's Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore, Maryland. I came to STScI six and a half years ago, after a two-year appointment as a Hubble Fellow at Johns Hopkins University.

### **Description of Mark's featured E/PO role:**

Beginning in 1998, I helped to develop *Hubble Space Telescope: New Views of the Universe*, a traveling exhibition produced jointly by STScI and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES). Two versions of the exhibition—one totaling 5,000 square feet and the other, 2,000 square feet—began their tours at the Adler Planetarium in June 2000. I have also made public appearances and been a guest on radio programs, talking about the importance of the Hubble mission.

### **How he got involved with this program:**

Actually my involvement with SITES started when I attended an early concept development meeting in place of another scientist who couldn't make it. The people who were at that meeting responded very positively to some of my suggestions and requested that I stay involved with the project.

### **How he balances E/PO with research activities:**

Here at STScI, I'm privileged to have a position that allows me to spend half my time on outreach and the other half on my own research. Our Office of Public Outreach believes that it's very important to involve active scientists in the creation of outreach materials.

### **Challenges to his E/PO involvement:**

There's so much great content in astronomy that I want people to appreciate. Sometimes it's difficult not to overwhelm people with too much information. Paring down the content we're trying to deliver to the essentials needed to communicate a fundamental understanding can sometimes be painful, but it's all the more rewarding when people really get the message and respond with heightened curiosity.

### **What he got out of his participation:**

It was great fun to see many hours of hard work take physical and permanent form. Attending the opening with my kids was a particular treat, because they were truly excited by the exhibition. In the long run, though, I think the most lasting rewards came from the opportunity to re-experience the excitement of learning astronomy through the exhibit development team. They never let me get away with a shoddy explanation and forced me to rethink how I go about sharing astronomy with others. The hours I spent in exhibit development have paid off in all my other outreach endeavors.

### **Mark's words of wisdom about E/PO:**

I have discovered two things in my work that may help others. The first is about the need to adjust scientific content for different audiences. I think a scientist's natural inclination is to present material that is intellectually challenging and cutting edge. That's the stuff we find most interesting, and we want to share our excitement with others. We need to recognize, however, that some people are approaching this material with little or no background.

The second is about learning to listen. I realized that there were many more aspects to designing an exhibition than I had previously perceived. It was very rewarding to see the skills of museum professionals in action. Things went most smoothly when team members took the time to understand each other's point of view before offering criticism. A little respect goes a long way.

### **Information on the exhibition *Hubble Space Telescope: New Views of the Universe*:**

<http://hstexhibit.stsci.edu>