

SAGANet.org: Your Virtual Astrobiology Community. J. DeMarines^{1,2}, Z. Adam², B. Kaçar^{3,2}, H. I. Illang-koon², S. I. Walker^{4,5,2}, S. Som^{2,6}, J. H. Forrester^{2,7} ¹Department of Atmospheric & Planetary Sciences, Hampton University, 23 Tyler Street, Hampton, VA USA, ²Blue Marble Space Institute of Science, Seattle, WA USA, ³Harvard University Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology 26 Oxford St Cambridge MA, ⁴Beyond Center for Fundamental Concepts in Science, Arizona State University Tempe AZ USA; ⁵School of Earth and Space Exploration, Arizona State University, Tempe AZ USA, ⁶NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, CA USA, ⁷Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Wyoming, 1000 E University Ave, Laramie, WY

SAGANet.org: SAGANet.org (Social Action for a Grassroots Astrobiology Network) is the astrobiology social network. Launched in 2012 at AbSciCon, the website (www.saganet.org) is equipped with all the traditional social networking tools, but is more than just a social network. A central pillar of these efforts is an innovative virtual mentoring program, pairing early-career scientists from across the world with teachers, students, and entire families for virtual mentoring sessions. Participating scientists and student-scientists are trained by professionals in effective science communication and mentoring. SAGANet thus offers an all-inclusive platform for graduate students and professional scientists to conduct outreach, with the added benefit of training opportunities and a community of peers.

The concept of SAGANet.org was born from the early-career astrobiology community at the 2011 Astrobiology Graduate Conference (AbGradCon) in response to the ubiquitous need for a platform for collaboration and outreach that extends beyond physical meetings, workshops, and the typical “one-off” outreach event. Since its inception, SAGANet has grown significantly, now boasting over 1,200 members, 45 mentors, 12,400 facebook followers, and over 700 twitter followers. SAGANet has also matured in its internal structure to now include an internal and external evaluator, an executive board, and an advisory board to leverage experts in the field.

Solving the outreach problem: A significant barrier for most scientists to engage in outreach is lack of time [1][2][3]. Professional peer-driven negative impressions associated with outreach are often tied to the so-called “Sagan effect” where the quality of a scientist’s research is thought to be inversely proportional to the degree to which he or she engages in outreach activities [4]. Both peer and time pressures are compounded by inadequate access to information regarding the availability of outreach and mentoring activities. This drives many scientists to expend a considerable amount of effort to either create new opportunities or find existing ones [5][6]. With SAGANet, we strive to provide time effective and impactful outreach opportu-

nities done exclusively online to avoid time-consuming travel.

Existing programs: The SAGANet virtual mentorship programs has successfully completed four pilot programs and appointed a new director of mentoring operations in an effort to accredit the program by the International Mentoring Association. Early career scientists and teachers interested in mentoring are encouraged to get involved. Other activities include the monthly “Talk to an Astrobiologist” series where leading Astrobiologists interact with members of the public through an interactive Q&A. Arizona State University, University of Colorado, and Hampton University all stream seminars to the site as well. SAGANet users are encouraged to use the site’s flexibility to implement new programs!

References: Use the brief numbered style common in many [1][5] Andrews, E., Weaver, A., Hanley, D., Shamatha J., H., Melton G. (2004). Scientists and public outreach: participation, motivations, and impediments. *J. Geoscience Ed.* preprint. [2] Kim C, Fortner RW (2008). Great lakes scientists’ perspectives on K-12 education collaboration. *J. Great Lakes Res.* 34(1): 98–108. [3] Shanley P, Lopez C (2009) Out of the loop: why research rarely reaches policy makers and the public and what can be done. *Biotropica* 41(5): 535–544, . 540 p. [4] Shermer MB (2002) The view of science: Stephen Jay Gould as historian of science and scientific historian, popular scientist and scientific popularizer. *Social Studies of Science* 32: 489–524. [6] Mathews D.J.H., Kalfoglou A., Hudson K. (2005). Geneticists’ views on science policy formation and public outreach. *Am. J. Med. Genetics* 137A: 161–169.

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