

ALIENS IN THE CLASSROOM: ASTROBIOLOGY AS AN INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE. B. S. Maher¹, ¹Red Rocks Community College, 13300 W. Sixth Ave., Lakewood, CO 80228, Barbara.maher@rrcc.edu.

Abstract: A recently conducted student survey at Red Rocks Community College showed an overwhelming majority of respondents believe in extraterrestrial life. Aliens are prominent in all types of media and science fiction topics are popular with students. In an effort to attract more students to science courses, Red Rocks Community College has introduced the subject of astrobiology and the search for extraterrestrial life into several of our existing physics and astronomy courses through activities, papers and debates. However, such a high interest topic warranted more coverage in the curriculum. After a year in development, in 2013, *AST 150: Astrobiology* was approved as a guaranteed transfer science course for the Colorado Community College system. The course is designed as an introductory level lecture class, with no pre-requisites. Astrobiology is an excellent, interdisciplinary introduction to the process of scientific exploration and inquiry. *AST 150* develops foundational knowledge in astronomy, biology, geology and physics. It directly requires that students use critical thinking skills to analyze current theories and develop ideas through activities, presentations, discussions and article reviews, on topics such as extremophiles, development of life on earth, Mars exploration, Jovian moons, planet terraforming, exoplanets and UFO sightings. These high interest topics engage students in science and encourage them to take more science classes.