

**EXPLORING COLLABORATION AS COMMUNITY-MAKING PRACTICE.** Dana Burton, George Washington University (2110 G St. NW Washington, DC 20052, [diburton@gwu.edu](mailto:diburton@gwu.edu)).

**Introduction:** There is power in community. Particularly, the ways in which communities collaborate is significant for advancing efforts of inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and justice. Communities—whether in our work, academic, or social lives—are lively spaces, in which thoughts, practices, and debates may arise. How communities allow for, encourage, foreclose, or reinforce modes or levels of experiential, pedagogical/academic, and practical informational exchanges has an effect on the kind of community that forms and the potential for that community to change.

In this presentation, I reflect on my experiences doing research amidst various astrobiology communities. In so doing, I offer a few preliminary conclusions and many evocative questions about community-making as an emergent process that can allow for openness, inclusivity, and transformation. Briefly, my dissertation fieldwork investigates how scientists at NASA grapple with the difficult challenge of searching for evidence of life in outer space. As an anthropologist, I am interested in the methodological strategies and everyday practices scientists turn to in order to ask scientifically pertinent questions, design experiments, organize missions, and negotiate with technologists, engineers, modelers, and proposal reviewers. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork at Ames Research Center, as well as with cross-facility groups such as Network for Life Detection and Prebiotic Chemistry and Early Earth Environments Consortium, I had the opportunity to sit in on meetings, workshops, and conferences that involved the coming together of members of the astrobiology community. As a social scientist in a scientific space, I learned through observation and collaboration the varying degrees these

spaces allowed for or encouraged interdisciplinary discussion, cross-career level engagement, disagreement or conflict resolution, and speculative or creative efforts. Each group—each community— offered a different lens into the practices of community-making as a part of astrobiological scientific practice. Observing scientists as they collaborated, and participating myself in their work, forms the underlying foundation for this presentation's focus on community-making processes.



*Atacama Desert, Chile: Site of Fieldwork, 2020*

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