

Enhancing Future Programming in Peterson Planetarium (a draft plan updated June, 2009)

Background

Past programming in Peterson Planetarium has served a number of off-campus clientele (patron groups) in addition to on-campus students in ESU classes. These include: (1) area K-12 school children, (2) membership from a variety of civic and community organizations ranging in age from Brownies and Cub Scouts to senior citizens groups, and (3) those from the general public in response to public program presentations. In recent years (since the late 1980s) fewer off-campus patrons have been served than prior to about the mid-1980s. This is documented by annual reports for Peterson Planetarium in recent years; reports have been prepared since the early 1970s when responsibility for Peterson Planetarium was transferred to the Physical Sciences from Mathematics.

This is the genesis of a plan for increasing programming directed at off-campus patrons, or what has often been referred to as "outreach." Outreach serves several objectives; principal among those are to (1) increase the public's scientific literacy in an informal, often "entertaining" educational sense, and (2) nurture an interest of young persons toward potential science, technology (or technical), engineering, and mathematics careers (i.e., STEM careers). The ultimate goal is greater public awareness of and support for the sciences, and an adequate supply of scientists, physical science educators and others in technical positions to maintain U.S. competitiveness in a global economy.

Current Developments

Peterson Planetarium was refurbished and rededicated in January, 1997, following the installation of a then state-of-the-art Spitz System 512 projector and auxiliaries. During the 2007 calendar year new carpet was installed, and the ATM-3 computer-based interface and accompanying software were upgraded by Spitz personnel to an ATM-4 automation system. The completion of that installation, the conversion of two automated programs to ATM-4 compatible code, and preventative maintenance agreement work by Spitz personnel in October, 2007 and June, 2009, provides a facility that is ready for greater utilization.

In addition to a "ready facility," a position announcement is soliciting applicants for a new hire in the Departments of Physical Sciences with responsibility for teaching courses for preservice elementary teaching candidates and introductory physics for allied science majors, and directing the operation of Peterson Planetarium when the current fiscal and other circumstances deem that appropriate. Those factors will provide the opportunity for enhanced programming and outreach. That is the expectation.

Elements of a Plan

The following are considered steps to achieve the expectation of enhanced programming in the near future. They are considered tentative so that a new director

has an opportunity to provide leadership for a plan to be “finalized” during the first year of an appointment.

- Sustain current use by on-campus general education (e.g., ES 110/111 and PS 115) and space science/astronomy course students;
- Increase the number of automated programs beyond the current two (“More Than Meets the Eye” and “Through the Eyes of Hubble”) for various groups (K-12 school groups, and civic/community patron groups);
- Plan, develop, and execute programs for the general public; these may be automated, e.g., programs such as the Christmas “star,” or live programs, e.g., a program for a season, or for the current sky (i.e., one featuring prominent celestial objects in the evening of a given date);
- Develop and deliver planetarium-based courses for inservice teachers, either during the academic year or the summer session.

Other initiatives are also welcome for consideration.

Epilogue

Annual reports and other historical documents related to Peterson Planetarium can provide additional context, and inform the discussion concerning future plans.

This embryonic, draft plan will also be shared with candidates interviewed for the position that will include the Peterson Planetarium responsibility.

This plan can also serve as a template for a plan refined by the successful candidate during the first-year of appointment, and tempered by feedback from others.

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Prepared initially in June 2007, and updated annually thereafter