
Polar Science Weekend at the Pacific Science Center

Meena Selvakumar, Acting Vice President for Strategic Programs at Pacific Science Center: Polar Science Weekend is a four-day special event at the Pacific Science Center where our visitors meet polar scientists and learn first hand about the kind of work they do in the field.

Mike Steele: Hello there everybody... Are you ready to learn about extremely cold things today? Are you? Are you? Yes, I'm standing on ice that's floating on the Arctic Ocean.

Dennis Schatz, Senior Vice President for Strategic Programs at Pacific Science Center: A key element of all of our portals to the public activities like Polar Science Weekend is to have scientists interact one-on-one with the public. We think this is critical for a whole lot of reasons.

Steele: You will grow up to be an oceanographer and maybe you will help solve some of these mysteries. That'd be awesome.

Harry Stern: The scientists can actually engage with the visitors to tell them about their own research and tell them why they think it's exciting.

APL-UW scientist: We send them on missions to fly along survey paths where we want to measure the temperature or the salinity....

Stern: The goals are really to instill an appreciation for science and to make science fun and interesting – to present it in new and refreshing ways that people can understand easily.

APL-UW scientist: A lake forms and then it's going to get bigger and bigger...oh, my goodness! Where did all the water go?

Stern: And to impart a little bit of basic knowledge about the geography of the polar regions and what is happening currently in the Arctic and Antarctic in terms of climate change.

Selvakumar: The scientists themselves present hands-on activities based on their research.

Kristin Laidre: Narwhals are some of the deepest-diving whales. This is a picture of a narwhal that we've captured and we put a transmitter on its back about this big and it tracks their movements every single day.

Selvakumar: It's really a chance for our visitors to interact face-to-face with scientists who do the work.

APL-UW scientist: You see the dot and then you use trigonometry to figure out how high the dot is above the table top.

Schatz: The training that we do for scientists is at several levels. One of the most important things really is to give them an understanding of how people learn. There's also how to engage with people.



APL-UW scientists: You can't leave it on the surface of the ocean because the ice would destroy it.... When it hears the next 'chirp', the acoustic release is going to let go....

Selvakumar: Many of the scientists participate in the Science Center's Science Communication short course program facilitated by our professional staff.

APL-UW scientist: I think things that are visually attractive or audibly interesting or have a tactile interest point...

Selvakumar: Here the scientists learn how to communicate effectively with a public audience creating hands-on activities and our staff guide them in all of these processes. The visitors then benefit from, you know, easy-to-understand activities and the scientists go away with enhanced communications skills.

Ignatius Rigor: You could also change how the ice moves... the wind can help the ice move faster. I have some controls on this little demo here. They like tweaking the knobs and controlling ocean currents and winds and changing how the ice moves. The older kids, you know, we brought in some real instruments. We can talk at a higher level to them.

Schatz: That weekend was really the beginning of a long-term relationship – not only with APL-UW, but development of a portal-to-the-public effort that's much broader than just with APL-UW. It's become part of our strategic plans. It really was the kickoff to a major program that will not go away soon.

Julie McNally, Evaluation Manager at Pacific Science Center: Evaluation is research that we do to help us understand if our programs are meeting the goals that we've set for them. We have a partnership with the University of Washington's museology program, which is a graduate program for students to learn about the museum profession. The students in the museology program help us with data collection for the project.

APL-UW scientist: When they fight, they slam up against each other and rake down with those incisors....

McNally: We've learned that visitors really enjoy the opportunity to speak with a practicing scientist. They like the interaction that happens when they can speak with someone right there on the floor. They can have their questions answered right away. They don't know a whole lot about the work that NASA does and so this is an opportunity for them to be exposed to some of that work. The scientists enjoy the opportunity to share their work with the public. And they often realize that the public doesn't know about the current things that are going on so they like to have that opportunity. Families like that they can bring their children and that there are age-appropriate activities that help the kids to see what's going on – see what people's careers are – and what it'd be like to be a practicing scientist."

