

Survey of IAU Members' Outreach Activities and Save the Date for CAP2020

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Under the umbrella of the IAU Commission C2 working group, Science Communication Research in Astronomy, a study of outreach activities has been published in the journal *Nature Astronomy*¹. The study presents results from a survey of 2587 IAU members, and the results show that astronomers have a remarkable drive for public engagement.

The Science Communication Research in Astronomy working group was established in 2015 to address the need for more science and research around science communication². The working group's triennium report articulated its purpose in the following words:

Science communication has long existed as a field of practice, but the academic field

of science communication is rather young. Yet, one of the biggest challenges facing science communication is the polarization between practice and scholarly. Empirical evidence in astronomy communication is scarce, nonetheless necessary to improve public engagement with science. This WG emerged in this context and as an attempt to contribute to this ambitious goal. The IAU membership and its dynamic community in research and outreach represent a unique opportunity to make this a reality. The mission of the WG is then to create a space for reflection and discussion about the needs in astronomy public communication, to produce empirical evidence on astronomy communication, and to serve as a platform to strengthen the boundaries between the fields of science communication research and practice. As a delivera-

ble by the WG, a global study of the outreach practices of the IAU membership was accomplished (Entradas, 2015).

The IAU issued a press release³, reporting that the study, which surveyed a record-breaking 2587 professional astronomers in early 2016, found that as many as 87% participated in scientific outreach activities, both by taking part in events and by engaging with representatives of the media. Those astronomers who reported participating in outreach activities had participated in an average of eighteen activities in the preceding year. Because of the ubiquitous nature of its questions and the stunning insights into the nature of the Universe, astronomy has often been thought of as the natural science with the most far-reaching popular appeal. The study has shown that professional astronomers may be engaging with the public more than scientists in any other field.

The study also showed high activity by astronomers working in less developed regions. The vast majority of astronomers prefer to interact with the public in traditional ways, through lectures and school talks, and fewer than 20% use social media and digital platforms for outreach activities. Most engagements with news reporters are conducted by senior astronomers, while junior scientists prefer face-to-face interactions. The outreach activities in which IAU astronomers participate tended to be self-organised. Despite 86% astronomers being in contact with communication experts at their institutions, only 43% of those use the available outreach structures. The rest prefer instead to organise their own activities.

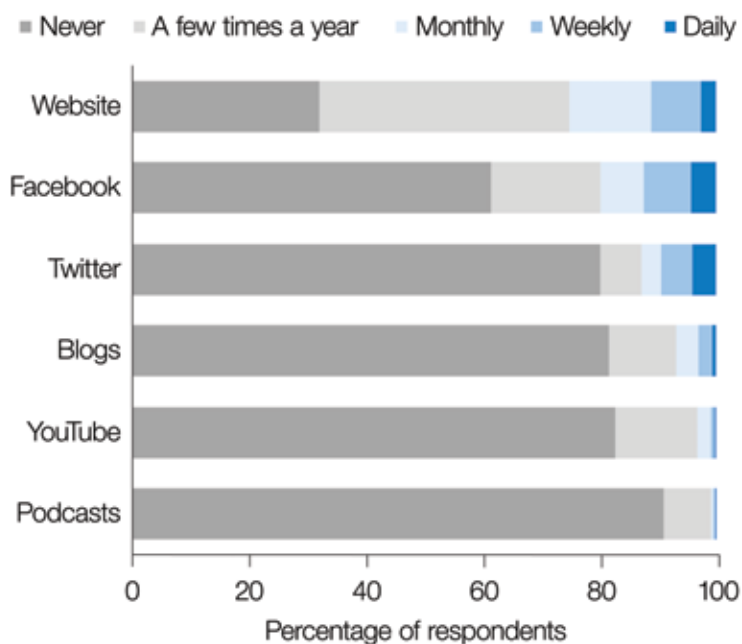


Figure 1. The frequency of participation in different online channels among the 2587 astronomers who responded to the survey. Credit: NATURE/M. Entradas (LSE, ISCTE-IUL).

Save the date for CAP2020

The IAU Commission C2 working group Communicating Astronomy with the Public

Conference has received fourteen applications from six continents to host the CAP 2020 conference. The working group has shortlisted five proposals for a second-round evaluation, following which the proposal to host CAP 2020 was awarded to Sydney, Australia.

CAP 2020 will take place 21 - 25 September 2020. Please save the date and more details will be published soon on the Commission C2 website². We look forward to seeing you there.

Notes

¹ Research paper: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41550-018-0633-7>

² Commission C2 website: <https://www.communicatingastronomy.org>

³ IAU Press Release: <https://www.iau.org/news/pressreleases/detail/iau1813/>

Reference

Entradas, M. et. al. 'IAU Commission C2 Science Communication Research in Astronomy WG triennium report' [online report] (2015-2018), http://www.iau.org/static/science/scientific_bodies/working_groups/261/wg-triennial-report-2015-2018-science-comm-research.pdf

Biographies

Richard Fienberg is the President of the Commission C2 Communicating Astronomy with the Public.

Oana Saudu is the Vice President of the Commission C2 Communicating Astronomy with the Public, and the chair of the CAP conference WG.

Sze-leung Cheung is the IAU International Outreach Coordinator and the former co-chair of the CAP conference WG.

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