

## News Note

# UCLA AstroBiology Society: The First Student-Run Astrobiology Organization

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**UCLA AstroBiology Society** officers (right to left: Dan Fingal, Jason Finley, Evan Cholfin, Lila Farrington, Laurel Methot, Geoff Robertson, Sabrina Mayerberger, Dorel Ibarra, and Cynthia Aguilar) with Former NAI Director, Dr. Baruch Blumberg (center), at the NAI Science Conference at Moffett Field in April of 2002.

**T**HE UCLA ASTROBIOLOGY SOCIETY (ABS) was founded in 1999 as the first student organization devoted exclusively to astrobiology. Our group is co-sponsored by the UCLA branch of the

NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI) and the Center for the Study of Evolution and the Origin of Life.

ABS endeavors to unify undergraduates, grad-

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uate students, and faculty of astrobiology-related fields through events and discussions. General meetings are held four times per academic quarter; each meeting typically features a presentation on some facet of astrobiology given by faculty or a guest speaker, followed by interactive discussion. Presentations are non-technical in nature to encourage attendance and participation of individuals from all fields of study. We have been successful in recruiting the interest of individuals from majors and departments as diverse as astrophysics, political science, communication studies, anthropology, microbiology, ecology, and the geological sciences. Also, while our efforts are directed toward students and faculty, our meetings are never closed to the public, and many of our events encourage public participation. One such event was our *First AstroBiology Symposium at UCLA*, on June 1st, 2003, co-hosted by The Planetary Society and featuring keynote speakers Bill Nye "The Science Guy" and SETI's Dr. Jill Tartar (see our website for information).

Aside from meetings, ABS also offers field trips and other activities to pique and feed member interest by providing opportunities to become directly involved with astrobiology. Previous excursions include exploring the tide pools in Long Beach, visiting the Mars Polar Lander facility in Westwood, and fossil-hunting in the Mojave Desert.

ABS has broad education and outreach goals, and is currently establishing new committees to address these goals. For example, our newsletter committee produces a bimonthly publication entitled "Life, the Universe, and Everything" (with permission of the late Douglas Adams), and keeps members informed of upcoming events and astrobiology news, as well as providing orig-

inal content such as articles, editorials, and interviews with astrobiologists.

Our outreach committee, or Pathfinder group, is actively involved in contributing information for a current NAI Education & Public Outreach project called the "Astrobiology Pathfinder," a Web-based tool for students of all ages offering information on how to pursue a career as an astrobiologist.

To promote astrobiology in the UCLA academic community, we also have a committee devoted to developing and running the AstroBiology Student Research Program, which will provide undergraduates with the opportunity to work in the labs of NAI-affiliated researchers at UCLA.

In addition to promoting awareness of and involvement in astrobiology, another one of our primary goals is to network with other organizations, allowing for integrative collaboration and increased opportunities for our members. ABS aims to seed astrobiology societies at other universities, especially at the NAI lead team universities. The ultimate goal is to form an "Astrobiology Network" of student organizations collectively working to create a forum for astrobiology education and provide opportunities and guidance for future astrobiologists.

For more information, please see: [www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/abs](http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/abs).

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