

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
Interactive Presentations - IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (IPB)

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TEACHING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSE TO A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AUDIENCE: SOCIAL  
STUDIES OF OUTER SPACE AT THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY

**Abstract**

In this session we reflect on our experience designing and teaching “Social Studies of Outer Space,” an undergraduate seminar at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Offered in the fall of 2021 by the ARIES (Anthropological Research into the Imaginaries and Exploration of Space) team, this course examined outer space and contemporary space exploration from various social scientific perspectives. In this paper, we explain the goals and content of the course; how it was received by students; and why educating about and engaging with space through an interdisciplinary lens is crucial.

The course was held weekly fifteen times for 90-minutes. According to the syllabus, the course aimed to “Examine developments in space exploration and their impact across different sites and communities. Students will have an opportunity to discuss and engage in a critical and multidisciplinary analysis of some of the most pressing questions facing space exploration as well as its relation to social, environmental and political processes and mechanisms that have structured the contemporary world. . .”

Students were offered readings on a space-related theme each week—topics included scientific knowledge-making; environmental sustainability; issues of colonialism and justice; and the economics of New Space, among others. To maximise engagement and discussion, each class began with a student presentation and many sessions featured interactive elements such as collaboratively designing speculative research projects. It is important to note that not all students engaged equally with the required literature. Improving this through different incentives would increase the effectiveness of the course. Another significant challenge was meeting the diverse educational backgrounds of our students—this required tailoring the course to students with a strong foundation in social sciences while also reaching those with STEM-oriented backgrounds. At times, we saw a clear differentiation in our students’ attitude to certain topics between those who have attended anthropological classes before, and for those for whom it was a novel perspective. Overall, the success of the course is seen in the students’ final papers and evaluations. Students crafted informed, critical, and surprising essays and many credited the course for enriching their understanding of space and the various ways it intersects with life on Earth. This first-time class at the Jagiellonian University was a good starting point to explore how to engage students in Social Studies of Outer Space. We see a significant opportunity for improvement for new iterations of this course as well as other ‘fringe’ academic engagements with outer space.