ASTROPHYSICS/
SPACE PHYSICS
SEMINAR

Wednesday, Sept. 18th, 2019
3:30 p.m. | 309 VAN

SPEAKER

Associate Professor Cornelia Lang
Department of Physics & Astronomy
The University of Iowa

TITLE

“Big Impact, Big Ideas: Interdisciplinary General
Education Courses at University of Iowa”

ABSTRACT

In this talk I will describe the “Big Ideas” courses that have recently been successfully piloted at the University of Iowa. These are undergraduate courses aimed at first and second year students. These courses fulfill a variety of the general education requirements and each are centered around one theme or current issue. With a team of faculty from astronomy, geology, biology and anthropology, I have designed two courses entitled, “Big Ideas: Origins of the Universe, Earth and Life” and “Big Ideas: Evolution and Search for Life in the Universe.” The courses center around Big Questions such as “What is the origin of the universe?”, “What is the origin of the Solar System?” “What is the origin of humanity?” “How do we search for life in the universe?” All faculty contribute to the curriculum, which is developed together and features inquiry-guided activities taught in active-learning classrooms. Students report a high level of engagement with the course, strong satisfaction and an appreciation for the role science plays in society. Based on our course model, five other courses have been developed by five other interdisciplinary teams. The seven Big Ideas courses offered at U Iowa fulfill different general education requirements. With funding from the Office of the Provost, we are planning to expand the Big Ideas offerings over the next few years so that more students on campus can fulfill their general education requirements in this way.

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