

Science Journeys



Caltech Public Programming has launched its second season of a community outreach program that aims to foster a greater understanding of current areas of research and to inspire the next generation of scientists. The Science Journeys series challenges Caltech grad students to prepare 20-minute talks in which they weave together their personal stories with an explanation of their research and why it matters to the world. The talks are geared toward middle and high school students in order to make them accessible to a wide audience.

These Science Journeys, part of the Caltech Signature Lectures Series, are an outgrowth of a program that began in 2005, which included Reel Science and Science Saturdays events. That effort brought more than 50,000 young people to campus to watch an educational film and speak with graduate students about their research and love of science.

Above: Katelyn Radford, a PhD student in biochemistry and molecular biophysics, records a Science Journeys presentation for the 2022 season.

While the new format reflects a need for virtual events during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers also wanted to craft a program that offers a deeper dive into the personal stories of Caltech's diverse group of student presenters to show that scientists come from all walks of life.

For example, included among the new slate of 2022 Science Journeys set to premiere soon is Benjamin Idini (MS '19), a PhD student in planetary science, who will present his May talk in both English and Spanish, and include a discussion of how he found his way to Caltech to study Jupiter after growing up on a remote island off the coast of Patagonia in southern Chile. Other research topics covered this year will include structural biology, energy storage, and 3-D-printed nanomaterials.

Although the presentations are prerecorded, viewers can watch the videos live as they premiere on YouTube and submit questions for the speaker, who answers them via live chat. Afterward, the videos remain available for viewing by audiences around the world.

The Public Programming department promotes the events at public

and private schools; among home-schooled students, libraries, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other organizations that work with adolescents; and at senior and assisted-living facilities. Staff from the Caltech Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach (CTLO) and faculty members recommend the graduate student speakers, who can then avail themselves of the Academic Media Technologies team for audio/visual assistance, while Theater Arts at Caltech director Brian Brophy and Robyn Javier, STEM communication specialist and lecturer in the Division of Engineering and Applied Science (EAS), provide advice on public speaking and presentation skills.

"It's a two-way connection," says Mary Herrera, program coordinator with Caltech Public Programming. "Our team brings the community and young students in to be inspired, and we give the grad students an opportunity to speak to an audience and to learn how to craft a public presentation and communicate their work. It's an education for everyone."

Watch past lectures and learn more about the Science Journeys series at events.caltech.edu/series/science-journeys