

NASA and the Navajo Nation

Sq' Baa Hane' – Story of the Stars Educator Workshop
Window Rock, AZ January 28-29, 2010



*Leroy Nelson and Scott Sandford take questions about both science and culture;
The inter-cultural team facilitates educators learning the classroom activities.*

On January 28-29, 2010, the “NASA and the Navajo Nation” project team hosted a large-scale workshop for educators across the Navajo Nation. Over 100 teachers participated, despite the worst snow storm in 25 years, some traveling hours through severe conditions. On the first day, the teachers heard background lectures from both a cultural expert and an astrobiologist, Scott Sandford from Ames. On the second day, the team trained teachers on classroom use of the six activities in the Sq' Baa Hane' booklet, inter-cultural materials developed by the project in 2006.

The guiding philosophy for the project is that by bringing together the cultural and scientific perspectives, a “dual-learning” environment is created in which learners are invited to discover and define the points of conceptual overlap for themselves. The project's efforts are focused entirely on the benefit to Navajo teachers and students, empowering them to teach both culture and science more effectively.

For the past five years, the project has progressed and evolved into a successful collaboration involving members of the education communities of both NASA and the Navajo Nation, led by the NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI) and the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education. It began as a NASA Explorer Institute project in 2005, in which a “focus group” of educators from the Navajo Nation detailed the desirable characteristics of a partnership with NASA. It continued with funding from the NASA Office of Education through 2006, during which time the Sq' Baa Hane' classroom materials were developed, bringing NASA astrobiology science and Navajo cultural knowledge together in K-12 hands-on activities. Two grants from SMD took the project further, one providing short-term support for the Educator Workshop, and another providing long-term support to develop a “companion” volume to Sq' Baa Hane' focused on the Moon.

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