

The COPUS Clarion

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The Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) is a grassroots effort linking universities, scientific societies, science centers and museums, advocacy groups, media, educators, government agencies, businesses, and industry in a peer network having as its goal a greater public understanding of the nature of science and its value to society.

Science Cafés Put Science on the Menu

Ben Wiehe, Outreach Coordinator, WGBH Educational Foundation

It is a Sunday in Boston—right after an important win by the Celtics. The sports bar is abuzz with a celebratory energy, but a buffet of free appetizers and a short video on the TV screens helps the fans settle down. It's the kick-off of a lively half-hour conversation between the crowd and . . . a geneticist.



A free drink offer packs the downtown Raleigh restaurant on what is usually a slow Tuesday evening. But, it's the T. rex discussion led by a local museum paleontologist that grabs the attention of the after work crowd.



At a local coffeehouse in a rural southern Illinois town, a nurse from a nearby hospital chats with a room full of young couples and families about the roots of the obesity epidemic.

Science cafés like these are popping up all over the U.S., generating excitement and interest in science. Whether run by individuals or organizations, science cafés draw crowds to intimate public venues like pubs and coffeehouses, to share drinks, food, and good conversation.

Anyone can start a café. The basic format is flexible enough to adapt to any local audience. Check-out the many cafés taking place right now at www.sciencecafes.org/find.html.

Although no two science cafés are exactly alike, there are some characteristics that most share:

Values—Science cafés reach out to new audiences and welcome people who do not typically attend science discussions. Successful cafés create a comfortable atmosphere that encourages everyone at the event to share perspectives, opinions, and information. They provide the opportunity for the public to direct the conversation, and for the presenting scientist to learn from the audience.

Content—Each café is organized around a specific topic. To kick-off the discussion, a scientist with expertise in the topic

gives a brief presentation, sometimes preceded by a short video clip. To help promote audience participation, a moderator or host often facilitates the ensuing dialogue. A break during the event can encourage the audience to further explore the topic together. The featured scientist often circulates after the event to chat with audience members.

Scope—Science cafés are inexpensive, simple to plan, and easy to run. Because the goal of a café is to foster an inclusive conversation, they rarely involve more than 100 people. The events are usually offered free of charge.

Impacts—National evaluations show that cafés contribute to participants' interest in science and motivate them to share their enthusiasm with others. Scientists taking part in these evaluations report that the experience enhanced their ability to communicate their work to the public. By moving science dialogue out of traditional venues, cafés demonstrate the cultural relevancy of science. And, as an added bonus, the press often cover the event. Recent coverage has appeared in popular publications like *The New York Times*, *Wired*, and even *People* magazine. Find out more at www.sciencecafes.org/cafe_impacts.html.

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Welcome New Participants!

- American Humanist Association
- Base Pair-Program,
- University of Mississippi Medical Center
- BIO5 Institute
- Claire the Loon Music
- College of Science, California State Univ., East Bay
- comPADRE: The Physics Front Digital Library
- Encyclopedia of Life
- Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology
- Environmental Literacy Council
- Falls of the Ohio State Park
- Grassroots Science in the Unorganized Borough
- HHSscience Investigation Group
- International Volcano Research Centre
- Littleton Middle School
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI)
- MTSU Women In Science and Engineering
- Northern Mountain Branch of AALAS
- San Diego Natural History Museum
- San Lorenzo Valley High School
- Science & the Arts at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York
- Science Chicago
- Science in the News
- Science, Engineering and Mathematics Link Inc
- SciEnTeK-12 Foundation
- Teachers' Domain, WGBH
- Tennessee Science Teacher Association
- Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology
- U.S. Section, Int'l Association for Landscape Ecology
- Universe Awareness
- University of Hawaii at Manoa
- Library Science & Technology Department
- VM Television
- Western Center for Archaeology & Paleontology

Get Involved!

Many COPUS participants are already presenting at or running cafés. Many more are planning on integrating them into their Year of Science celebrations. Here are some ways you can get involved:

1. Present at a café. If you are a scientist who enjoys discussing your work with the general public, a café is a great place to share information about your field. Start out by looking over the tips for presenters at www.sciencecafes.org/presenters.html.

2. Partner with an existing café. You or your organization may be able to work together with an existing café series. Use the map at www.sciencecafes.org/find.org to find one in your area.

3. Start your own. Even if there is already an active café in your region, it's likely there is room for another. For steps to get started, go to www.sciencecafes.org/copus.html.



Who's Starting Science Cafes?

- COPUS regional hubs are planning cafés that align with the Year of Science themes. They can provide opportunities for your organization to participate.
- Professional societies are starting cafés to invigorate local chapters or add a public outreach component to their programs.
- Universities are starting cafés to engage their community while providing a forum for staff to gain experience communicating their work to the public.
- Informal science institutions (like museums and public television stations) are starting cafés to reach new audiences.
- High school teachers are starting cafés to empower their students to take ownership of their education (for more on this see www.juniorcafesci.org.uk/).
- Independent volunteers are starting cafés to fulfill an interest in both science and socializing.

Year of Science Internship Opportunity

COPUS is seeking an intern to begin fall 2008 assisting with the development of the Year of Science Web site and promotions. The internship is part-time with flexible hours and location. Interested candidates should submit a resume to Sheri Potter at spotter@copusproject.org.

Explore. Empower. Engage...



A café moderator helps direct conversation. Images by Ben Wiehe.



Available Resources

NOVA scienceNOW has supported and encouraged the growth of science cafés in the U.S. for several years. Here are some resources they provide:

Advice and support for starting a new science café. Outreach staff are in daily contact with café organizers and partners across the U.S. and can provide practical suggestions and tips for starting and maintaining your own café.

Connections to partners. Get connected to others in your area interested in cafés, national organizations, and the larger community of café organizers.

Start-up funding. Small grants are available to help you launch a new café series.

Video. Many cafés integrate video clips into their events using free DVDs from the public television program NOVA scienceNOW. Find a list of topics correlated to Year of Science themes at www.sciencecafes.org/copus.html.

Contact NOVA scienceNOW at (617) 300-3980 or getinvolved@wgbh.org.



Strangers meeting at a science café.

Questions? Comments? Ideas? Contact Sheri Potter at spotter@copusproject.org.

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