from the director

I am pleased to send out this newsletter, not only because it reports exciting developments, but also because it’s been put together by our new staff: Penelope Moon, our curriculum and outreach coordinator, and Cynthia Schulze, our new administrative associate. Together with our associate directors, they are helping to build the Origins Project. Our goals remain the same: to transform the experiences of students, faculty, and staff, bring together individuals of diverse talents to address foundational questions, engage the wider public by prompting consideration these questions, and strengthen ASU’s position as a center for exploration of key issues affecting our understanding of ourselves and our place in the cosmos.

Besides developing compelling public events, such as our November 6 “Great Debate” and a science and culture festival in April, much work is occurring behind the scenes. We are growing an exciting new Origins curriculum that will impact every ASU student. We continue to host several annual workshops that will bring leading thinkers from around the world to ASU. And we’re creating a new interactive website that will help interested faculty propose new Origins activities and allow us to better engage the public.

Join us as we build the Origins Project!

-Lawrence Krauss

fall 2010 events

Origins Public Lecture: Robert Boyd
How Human Culture Transformed Human Evolution
Tuesday, September 21
7 pm Design North, Room 60
Tempe campus, Arizona State University
http://iho.asu.edu/Boydlecture

Origins Workshop: The Origins of Morality
Co-sponsored with the Center for Law, Science, and Innovation, Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, ASU and the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Cambridge.
November 5-7
Tempe campus, Arizona State University

Origins Public Event: The Great Debate
Can Science Tell Us Right From Wrong?
Panelists: Steven Pinker, Patricia Churchland, Lawrence Krauss, Sam Harris, Simon Blackburn, Peter Singer
Saturday, November 6
7pm, Gammage Auditorium
Tempe campus, Arizona State University
Tickets available soon through Gammage Box Office (480.965.3434) or Ticketmaster at ticketmaster.com.
Visit origins.asu.edu/greatdebate.php for the latest information.

Watch for our new look at origins.asu.edu!
Origins Project Science & Culture Festival, April 2011
The ASU Origins Project is proud to present its first annual Science and Culture Festival. Building on our wildly successful 2009 Symposium, this year’s public event explores the interaction of science and culture. From art to dance to theatre to music to the origins of life, the ASU Origins Project is proud to present its first annual Science and Culture Festival. Building on our Origins Project for the latest information.

Black Tie April 8 | Tempe Center for the Arts
7 pm
Performed by innovative Austrian theatre company, Rimini-Protokoll, Black Tie circles the black hole of origins, the strangely eloquent and “helping” young human genetics industry of these times, and the alienation between a South Korean woman and her German environment.

The Planets April 9 | Gammage Auditorium
8 pm
Performed by the acclaimed ASU Symphony and Women’s Chorus, Gustav Holst’s The Planets is a musical journey across the solar system. Accompanied by narration written and performed by Lawrence Krauss, and by images from NASA, the night promises to be an aural and visual feast for all ages.

The Matter of Origins April 11 | Gammage Auditorium
7 pm

“Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.”

Carl Sagan

The Origins Project welcomes Lucy Hawking as its first writer-in-residence. She’ll be here writing and speaking about science, kids, and what to do if you find yourself in a black hole.

Like most British people, I get semi delirious when the mercury creeps past 75, so arriving in Arizona in record September temperatures has been an experience. I’m sure I heard my flip-flops sizzle on the sidewalk this morning. I come from Cambridge, England, a small, dark, cold town, founded in the thirteenth century where people go round on bicycles. It couldn’t be less like Arizona.

In my first week in Phoenix, I’ve driven on the wrong side of the road, confused people with my accent and gained a million tiny pricks in my left hand by touching a cactus. I’ve learnt a whole new vocabulary, about gas and sneakers and restrooms. For the first time ever, I’ve seen sunshine and stayed indoors. In England, as soon as the sun breaks through, everyone dashes outside to catch a few rays in case it doesn’t come back for another six months. I’ve had a drink of what you call ‘tea’ (seriously guys, it just isn’t) and decided to drink coffee for the rest of my time in the US.

I’ve also received the warmest—not just in weather terms—welcome I’ve ever had. The kindliness with which I have been greeted is amazing. And I’m very grateful. Being here, in this green bowl in the red desert mountains is a great privilege for me. My role here is to continue the work I’ve done to make physics and astronomy accessible and entertaining to a young audience. Previous to coming to Arizona, I had written two adventure books for young readers about the exotic phenomena of physics and astronomy. The idea for this series of books came from my own son and his friends who wanted to know stuff like what would happen to them if they fell into a black hole. I thought it would be fun to write a story about a boy who got the chance to travel around the universe. I wanted to use the extraordinary and bizarre reality of our cosmic environment as the setting for the adventures. What’s out there is so much stranger than anything you could dream up in science fiction.

Currently, I’m working on the third book that is all about cosmology—it’s an attempt to describe the first few seconds of the universe for readers aged 8-12. Lots of distinguished scientists are contributing to this book, among them the fabulous Lawrence Krauss of the ASU Origins Project. I’ll also be talking about the books and the concepts they describe. One of my talks will be in December at the Arizona Science Centre. We’ll be taking a look at our future in space and discussing what to do if you find yourself inside a black hole.

It’s going to be an exciting year and I’m delighted to be here. Although if you could turn the heat down a notch, I’d be grateful. Look out for me on campus—I’m the red-faced Brit with the melting flip-flops.
PHY394: Scientific Frontier
Origins—from the Big Bang to Life on Earth and Beyond
Origins Project Director Lawrence Krauss designed this course to expose students to developments that have changed our idea of the origin and evolution of the universe over the past several decades. Part of the purpose is to demonstrate how the toolkit physicists have developed to understand nature can be applied to a wide variety of problems.

JMC445/SLN 20823: Science Writing
Offered by Professor of Journalism, Ed Sylvester, this course provided an opportunity to write news stories about cutting edge research across all the fields encompassed by science’s search for origins. Using material from the 2009 Origins Symposium, students learned how to simplify complex concepts and to present hard news stories about the latest research. Visit http://sciencewriting.asu.edu/ to see the results!

GLG106: Habitable Worlds
Associate Director Ariel Anbar is offering a course framed around the Drake equation to explore the possibility of alien life and the conditions necessary for life. With its combination of lectures, online components, and interactive labs, we hope to develop it into one of our core “origins” courses.

Planned course
We are developing an exciting transdisciplinary course that takes students from the Big Bang to the Future of Technology. In this team-taught course students ponder the biggest questions there are—What is the origin of our Universe? Life? Consciousness?—as they explore their place in the cosmos.

Origins Project Associate Directors

Our Origins Project Associate Directors are responsible for connecting with faculty in key areas where the Origins Project might collaborate to foster new research, develop courses, and co-sponsor events. Their passion for origins questions fuels all of our activities. Ariel Anbar, Professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration, will pursue opportunities and coordinate with physical sciences and engineering faculty. Gary Marchant, Professor in the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, will work with faculty and key personnel in Law, Journalism, and the Mayo Clinic. Peter Rillero, Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, will team with Education faculty and evaluate the potential for an Origins-themed charter school. Gary Schwartz, Associate Professor at the Institute of Human Origins, as well as in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change, will develop relationships with Humanities and Social Sciences faculty.

the origins project and “old main” : a perfect fit

Our new offices are up and running in a building that could not be more conceptually appropriate for the Origins Project. Dedicated in 1898, “Old Main” is the oldest building on campus and served as the entire college when ASU was still Tempe Normal School. So we who are intrigued by questions of origins are now housed in a space intimately connected with the origins of ASU. It is also fitting that our new location is the symbolic center of campus—a place that transcends disciplines, but is linked to each of them. Collaborating in areas as varied as Dance and Astrobiology, the Origins Project is an intellectual hub around and through which students, researchers, and scholars can collaborate, create, and innovate. Stop in and say ‘hello’ to the Origins Project staff!