Keynote Address

An Astronomer Walks into a Buddhist Temple and Asks…..

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During the Summer of 2007 I was fortunate to have been asked to travel to northern India to



Edward Prather teaching Physics and Astronomy to Tibetan Monks

teach classes on topics in Physics and Astronomy to a group of Tibetan Buddhist Monks. For a month, I shared morning tea and meditation, ate all meals and lived with a cadre of Monks at the Dzongsar Institute for Advance Studies of Buddhist Philosophy and Research in a small Tibetan village located high in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains.  I have no doubt that this time with the Monks will stand out as one of the most personally and professionally profound experiences in my life.  I am honored to have the opportunity to share with you the beauty, compassion and incredible perspective on teaching and learning that this adventure into the unknown provided me.

Dr. Edward E. Prather is an Associate Staff Scientist with Steward Observatory and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Astronomy at the University of Arizona.  In 2000 earned his Ph.D in physics from the University of Maine . From 2001 through 2004 he served as co-director of the Conceptual Astronomy and Physics Education Research team known as CAPER, at the University of Arizona .  Since 2004 he has served as Executive Director of the NASA and NSF funded Center for Astronomy Education (CAE) at the University of Arizona .  Through collaboration with members of CAPER and CAE he has lead several rigorous research programs to investigate student understanding and learning difficulties in the areas of astronomy, astrobiology, physics, and planetary science.  The results from this research are used to inform the development, evaluation and dissemination of innovative instructional strategies and public outreach activities designed to intellectually engage learners and significantly improve their understanding of fundamental science concepts. Dissemination of this work is provided through CAE’s research-guided multi-day “Teaching Excellence Workshops”, which have been attended by over 1000 college faculty around the nation.  Recently members of CAE were awarded an NSF CCLI Phase III grant to create the Collaboration of Astronomy Teaching Scholars (CATS) Program.  Through the CATS program CAE has created a national collaboration of Astronomy faculty, post-docs, graduate and undergrad students who are actively engaged in fundamental research on issues of teaching and learning.