

APR15-2015-000793

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the APR15 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Impacting Society through Astronomy Undergraduate Courses

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A high percentage of non-science majors enroll in undergraduate, introductory astronomy courses across the country. The perception of the astronomy course as being easier than the “hard sciences” and the idea that the course will focus on “pretty pictures”, influences the interests of the non-science majors. Often the students that enroll in these courses will not take other science courses, resulting in the only opportunity to teach college students about basic scientific concepts that impact their lives. Vast misconceptions about the nature of science, the role of science and scientists in society, and social issues embedded in scientific information, impact the decisions that individuals make about every day events. In turn, these decisions influence the policies that construct our society. This talk will provide an overview of the common misconceptions and discuss how they impact our society as a whole. The research presented provides evidence of the impact that introductory college astronomy courses have on changing these everyday misconceptions and influencing non-science majors’ ideas about science in society. The research suggests that introductory courses designed for non-science majors are extremely important in impacting our society, and begs for a stronger understanding and implementation of best practices for teaching and learning in the college classroom environment.