

Project Title - VIP (Virtual Interesting People) Talks

School – Wakefield High School

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Brief summary of the project

Real scientists meet virtually with our sustainability club to discuss their work, their pathway to conservation/environmental work, and then field student questions. Virtual meetings affords the scientists more flexibility in schedule and allows students to be a little more comfortable. This year we had two VIP Talks:

Dr. Sandra Elvin - Manager for Overseas Safety and Security with the US Institute of Peace

Dr. Deborah Landau - Conservation Ecologist for the Maryland/DC Chapter of The Nature Conservancy for 20yrs

Getting Going

How did the project start? In the past I have had scientists Skype in from around the world. I first did this with friends from grad school (Mason school of environmental science). Then during Antarctica Week (2019) we had an Antarctic scientist Skype into my ecology class with the help of the International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration (<https://thwaitesglacier.org/>).

This year, other members of the Society for Conservation Biology DC Chapter (SCBinDC) reached out to me. SCB is an international network of scientists that hold annual meetings, usually in developing nations to increase access for scientists in less affluent parts of the world. The fall 2021 meeting was supposed to be held in Rwanda, but was postponed due to COVID restrictions. The original idea was to have students Zoom into conference presentations, but that fell through. Instead, we brought some of the presenters into our classroom virtually.

Who were important people to contact at the beginning? I am a member of the SCBinDC and am happy to reach out to the group for you. Many local universities may have researchers willing to call in. Also, reach out to PTSA and parents. Many may know someone who works in the conservation field, or be an expert themselves. I also consulted with IT to make sure my SMART board and camera (courtesy of hybrid teaching) all worked well. I had a colleague call in from another room

What are the threshold resources that need to be identified at the beginning before proceeding further? (For example, robust parent volunteer network, elevated loading docks, nearby outdoor spigot.) This is super simple to set up. The biggest thing is the tech. I

also consulted with IT to make sure my SMART board and camera (courtesy of hybrid teaching) all worked well. I then had a colleague call in from another room to check camera placement and make sure the connection worked well. I ended up clipping my gooseneck camera to the board near my SMART panel. Scientists were projected on the panel and could see students, but I could access my computer off camera as needed.

What are the policies (if any) from APS or elsewhere that may affect the project and need to be considered? None! Virtual guest speakers do not need pre-approval. That being said, I did make sure that admin was aware of the event.

What budget and/or funding sources were needed? None!

Implementation

Did you pilot or test the project and then scale it up? If so, describe your process. This was the test run. Next year I am hoping to make this a monthly event and invite other clubs. Eventually it might be fun to invite a full panel.

As you rolled the project out, how did you present this to students and encourage their participation? This was done during one of our club meetings after school. Students were encouraged to attend the club meeting as usual.

Approximately how many students were actively involved, and how many were affected? There were very few as club participation was sparse this year. However, those involved were very excited to participate.

What obstacles were overcome? Are there continuing obstacles? What lessons did you learn from doing this? The biggest obstacle was scheduling with the scientists and getting the word out. Next year I want to make this a monthly thing and will likely pick a day for VIP Talks (*ie. the first Tuesday of each month*).

Will the project continue into future years? If so, how will you keep continuity? Do you plan modifications? This year I focused just on conservation work, but I plan to open up to any interesting person. As the sustainability liaison and ecology teacher I lean towards environmental work, but would love to open up to social justice work and then have conversations about environmental justice.

What effect has it had on the school? TBD

Are there photos that could help others visualize how this worked for you? If so, please insert them here.



Replication

Do you have resources you used that would be helpful for someone trying to replicate this project? Would you be willing to share them? I would be happy to chat personally.

What else should someone wanting to implement a similar project at their school know? It may be hard to drum up excitement for a guest speaker, but again, I think having them more regularly will be a good shift.