

# 2013 AAAS SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING MASS MEDIA FELLOW

## CHRISTOPHER CROCKETT

**DEGREE:** PHD, ASTRONOMY  
**SCHOOL:** UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES  
**SPONSOR:** NOYCE FOUNDATION  
**MEDIA SITE:** SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

**Research Focus:** Giant planet companions to T Tauri stars

**Translation:** I search for planets around very young stars. These stars, only a million years old, are still in the final stages of formation. If we can find planets around such young stars, then we can better understand how, when, and where planets form.

### What are your goals for the summer?

I want to get a better handle on crafting a story around a piece of research news, dabble in a wide variety of media (blogs, podcasts, video, etc), and build a network of other science communicators from whom I can learn.

### What are you most excited about?

I'm most excited about the chance to work closely with other writers and editors and finally get some much needed feedback and mentoring. All the writing I've done so far has been entirely on my own. I'm looking forward to finally having some guidance!



### Why are you passionate about science communication?

Because if we, as a species, are going to save ourselves, it is going to be through advancements in science and technology. Getting people excited about the latest discoveries is crucial to continuing public support for science funding. I also love the challenge of finding a way to distill complex ideas into something more accessible. Not only is it a great test of my own understanding, but it's hard to beat that moment when you see a light bulb turn on in someone's mind as they begin to see the universe in a slightly different way.

### Who is your favorite science communicator?

It almost feels cliché to say this but, it's hard to beat the master: Carl Sagan. He got me interested in astronomy and science when I was very young and that clearly had a lasting impact. He was reaching out to people at a time when that was simply not done. But in doing so, he blazed a path for many other scientists to follow. What's more, his writing had a grandeur well-matched to the ideas he explored. Some may read it as pompous, but I found it to be an excellent vehicle for stirring the soul as well as the mind. When taking the reader on a tour across entire galaxies, I want the words to soar as well!

### Do you have a link to an article you'd like to share?

I don't think it's the best thing I've ever written, but I'm

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particularly proud of this article at EarthSky because it was my first paid gig. Someone actually gave me money in exchange for writing about astronomy. After that, my whole perspective on science writing changed.  
<http://earthsky.org/spac-e/citizen-scientists-uncover-a-galaxy-of-bubbles>

### Describe your dream job.

Freelance science communicator. Getting paid to learn about cool things and then tell people about them? Sign me up!

### Tell us about something you do outside of the lab.

I'm an active swing dancer, actor, backpacker, runner, and SCUBA diver. I particularly like trying all those things in as many different countries as possible.

### Anything else you'd like to share?

I don't really watch TV, but my favorite television program is The West Wing. I love it because it does the opposite of most TV shows: it raises the bar, rather than lowering it. It's a celebration of smart people trying to do good things in a world that doesn't always honor intelligence. Kind of like science writing.

I once came between a mother bear and her cubs while hiking in Virginia. I also pretty much sank someone else's sailboat that same summer. I'm told you should always leave the audience wanting more, so now you have something to ask me about should we ever meet...