


Northwest University's Student Magazine

TALON



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UW PH.D. CANDIDATE LECTURES ON THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE FORMS ON OTHER PLANETS



Photo courtesy of www.uidaho.edu

By Martanna Broom

Hayden Smotherman, a Ph.D. candidate in astronomy and astrobiology at the University of Washington, guest lectured on the possibility of life sustaining environments on other planets last Friday. Northwest University's College of Arts and Sciences was invited to join as he gave an astronomer's perspective on astrobiology in HSC 104.

Students in attendance mentioned that Smotherman's youthful appearance and dapper attire were complementary to his intelligent discourse. One student noted that it is inspiring to see someone so young who is already achieving so much in his academic career.

The subject of the talk was "Understanding the Physical Requirements for Life in our Universe." Smotherman gave listeners what he called an astronomer's perspective on astrobiology. Listeners were able to ponder the possibilities of life on other planets, what life requires, where we should look for life, and what the implications of possible life elsewhere are in the Christian faith.

Smotherman posed the question, "What does it mean if we find life elsewhere?" When it comes to microbial life, he said, there are not many implications. If microbial life is all over our planet, why else wouldn't God place it everywhere else in the universe? Multicellular life he said, is less hardy than microbial, requiring a more sustainable terrestrial environment. This still doesn't challenge one's theology much, as multicellular life merely includes animals such as fish and birds. Finding intelligent life is where the theological challenges come in.

"If it has a soul it must have a savior," Smotherman said.

He then left students to explore this issue on their own time.

Smotherman is also a candidate for the position to replace associate professor of science Dr. Dan Tomandl who will no longer be teaching full time at NU. If he receives the position, Smotherman will teach physics and astronomy.

Many students in attendance were offered class credit for attendance and others came out of curiosity. One of those students, Allison Monea, said she felt a new confidence in astrobiology from the lecture. She said it allowed her to explore the theological portion of the talk by herself a bit more.

Emily Campbell, a previous student of Dr. Tomandl's, said that given the chance, she would take a class with Smotherman if he was hired.

The science department will announce Dr. Tomandl's replacement toward the end of Spring 2018. The Talon will provide a story when the replacement is announced.

