US-ELTP Career Profile

Tim Sacco

NSF's NOIRLab Postdoctoral Research & Associate

"Say yes to opportunities that arise, it may open new doors you didn't know existed."

It wasn't until college that Tim Sacco began to develop an interest in science. At a small state school in New Hampshire, Tim took courses in sociology and science, which led him to a "new and interesting way of understanding the world." This new viewpoint shifted Tim's personal goals, leading him to study how people work together within the sciences and the social inequities embedded there. His work broadly focuses on inequalities in astronomy ranging from race, gender, sexuality, and disability to inequalities across institutions of various sizes and how they shape collaboration.

Tim is currently a postdoctoral researcher working for the US-ELTP Research Inclusion Initiative. He is developing a Research Inclusion Toolkit that US-ELTP scientists and the broader scientific community can access. The toolkit will strengthen participation, along with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, within the scientists' projects and programs. With his doctorate in sociology, Tim is a prime example of how collaboration across disciplines is essential for the success of projects and even entire organizations. You don't have to have a background in astronomy to play an important role in a world-class astronomical institution.

What do you enjoy about your career?

I enjoy talking to people in the science community about their jobs and their understanding of their social circumstances. I am grateful for the opportunity I have in my current role to make a difference and apply my work and knowledge base, beyond just getting published in an academic journal. I am also thankful to have Dara Norman, the Research Inclusion Lead for the US-ELTP, as my supervisor and to work with her to bring about meaningful change in astronomy.

What were some challenges or opportunities you faced along the way?

While navigating the sociology graduate program, I faced challenges from being the first person in my family to attend college and not having a strong science background. I faced barriers in relating to peers or professors who weren't coming from a similar background. My advice for other first-generation college students is to find your resilience through building a community with people of common ground. For me, it has also been important to pursue a career in science and sociology but not have it be my entire identity: to have a work-life balance.

I got to where I am today by saying yes to as many things as possible. For example, I was the editor-in-chief of my college newspaper, and this led me to be mindful in writing, especially with communication and audience. I also learned at NOIRLab that I enjoyed different types of collaboration and wanted to explore this further.

Do you have any advice to share with students?

My advice for students thinking about college is that it is okay to not know what you want to do with your life. Not all STEM professionals have had a linear path to where they are today. Throughout your college experience, follow what interests you and say yes to opportunities that arise. Things may not work out, but they may open new doors you didn't know existed.

[1] Tim's work broadly focuses on inequalities in astronomy ranging from race, gender, sexuality, and disability inequalities, to inequalities within various sizes of institutions and how this shapes collaboration.

Fun Facts

I am a musician and have played bass and guitar in a few different bands that have toured the East Coast and Midwest. The type of music we played included punk and indie rock.

I enjoy reading science fiction and have been inspired by the works of Octavia Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin. degree.

Tim's Pathway to NOIRLab's Postdoctoral Research Associate