



## Web life: Universe Awareness

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URL: [www.unawe.org](http://www.unawe.org)

### So what is the site about?

If you've ever taken a young child to a planetarium – or remember visiting one yourself when you were younger – you'll appreciate just how exhilarating it can be to encounter the wonders of the cosmos for the first time. Not all children have access to such opportunities, though, and even those who grow up in rich countries with good local science museums generally visit them only now and then. This is where the Universe Awareness project (UNAWE) comes in. Founded in 2006 by George Miley, an astronomer at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, UNAWE aims to bring the beauty and grandeur of the universe into the classroom, as a means of inspiring children aged four to 10 and encouraging them to develop an interest in science.



### How do they do that?

The UNAWE site is home to a wide range of resources, from videos and posters to a programme called *The Awesome Amateur Astronomer* that aims to introduce children to "every aspect of astronomy" in 10 steps (Step 1: Observe the night sky). One of the most interesting resources is [Space Scoop](#), a site that hosts kid-friendly news stories about recent astronomy research. The stories are taken from press releases issued by several international astronomy organizations and then rewritten in age-appropriate ways by UNAWE staff members and volunteers.

### Who is behind it?

The University of Leiden remains a major partner, and UNAWE has also received substantial support from the European Union through a programme called EU Universe Awareness (which ran from 2011 to 2013) and an ongoing effort, EUSPACE-AWE, that aims to build enthusiasm for space science and engineering. Other collaborators include the European Southern Observatory (which supplies many of the press releases for *Space Scoop*) and the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan.

### Anything else I should be aware of?

Theoretically, *Space Scoop* is available in 40 languages, from Albanian and Arabic to Vietnamese and Welsh. However, several of the non-English versions appear thinly populated; at the time of writing, the most recent Arabic articles were posted in June 2013 and we couldn't actually find any *Space Scoop* articles written in Albanian. Still, it's possible to read kid-friendly scoops about radio stars in Danish, comets in Farsi and dwarf planets in the central American language K'iche', among many others.

### Can you give me a sample quote?

From a 30 May *Space Scoop* about a new class of galaxies called "red geysers" that contain supermassive black holes: "Almost everyone is afraid of the dark at some point in their life. Creaking floorboards, rustling curtains or random bumps in the night will fill them with terror. But it's not the dark itself we find so terrifying, it's the fear of what is lurking in the dark...But we all know the boogeyman isn't real, so is there really anything to be afraid of? Maybe not on Earth, but there are monsters hiding in space – they're called black holes. Black holes form when a massive star dies. Anything that gets too close to a black hole is pulled to it with such a strong force that it has no chance of escape. The monster will gobble it up! To make these monsters even more menacing, black holes are all but invisible. Until they start to feed... Black holes are messy eaters. As it gobbles up material, it is spraying out hot cosmic gas like cookie crumbs...The hot gas is heating up the entire galaxy to the point where it is unable to make new stars."

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