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## USFSP PROFESSOR NAMED TO PLANETARY PROTECTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

USF St. Petersburg biologist Norine Noonan has been named a member of the [Committee to Review the Planetary Protection Policy Development Processes](#) for the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. The ad hoc committee, which will conduct a study to determine how the United States government and NASA develop policy processes on the subject of planetary protection, met for the first time in March.

The committee will assess the extent to which current policy-making processes take into account current science, technology, and engineering, as well as the interests of state and non-state actors. This includes organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration, which licenses commercial space launches during a time when interest in commercial space exploration continues to grow.

“The idea is to have some policies in place that allow mission managers and NASA leadership to essentially include planetary protection in their mission considerations,” said Noonan, who served as the founding chair of the Planetary Protection Advisory Committee—now the Planetary Protection Subcommittee—for the [NASA Advisory Council’s Science Committee](#). “The academies never tell federal agencies how to operate. The study committees provide advice and recommendations.”

NASA’s plan to launch the Mars 2020 mission—a rover mission that will search for signs of past life and cache rock samples—will be a significant step toward gaining a greater understanding of the planet’s ancient environment. It is the precursor to the Mars Sample Return mission, which will retrieve the samples gathered in the Mars 2020 mission and transport them to Earth for study.

“The Mars Sample Return has been a dream of space science researchers for decades,” said Noonan, who explained that scientists have gained knowledge of Mars geology by studying meteors and meteorites that crashed in Antarctica. However, the samples are sterilized by the vacuum of space and the heat of Earth’s atmosphere. “We’ve never actually been able to get a sample and take it back to Earth in its pristine form, and that has been sort of the ‘holy grail’ for planetary researchers.”

Before joining USFSP in 2008, Noonan served as executive director for the National Space Science and



*Norine Noonan*

Technology Center in Alabama. She also served as assistant administrator for Research and Development in the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development, and on the senior staff at the Energy and Science Division in the Office of Management and Budget for the Executive Office of the President in Washington, D.C.

"You are invited to join these committees if you are a distinguished scientist, engineer, medical professional or physician researcher," said Noonan, who has served on several of the Academies' committees throughout her career and chaired two of them. "It is the culmination of professional recognition in a researcher's career."

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