

Adventurer and space visionary embarks on a new journey at ASU

Meet Julia Tizard Hunter, Interplanetary Initiative's latest explorer-in-residence

By Alicia Barrón, ASU News

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Julia Tizard Hunter is an explorer in every sense of the word.

In fact, Hunter's most recent adventure was a 10-month voyage across the Pacific Ocean with her husband and two sons, aged 8 and 10 years old, which she completed earlier this month.

Now Hunter is bringing that impressive sense of adventure and exploration to Arizona State University's [Interplanetary Initiative](#) as the latest explorer-in-residence, starting in February.

Of her recent sailing expedition, Hunter said the boat was like a spaceship. It was what they had to survive on — themselves and all the systems on the boat. They used solar power and made their own drinking water, provisioning often for weeks at a time.

"You've got to subsist on the boat with complete ownership of everything in our bubble. Our lives depended on it," she said.

In addition to being an accomplished sailor, Hunter is a marathon runner, mountain climber and former senior vice president of leadership and sustainability at Virgin Galactic. She holds a master's degree and PhD in astrophysics from the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom.

"I stand for the human species thriving in balance with the planet and expanding outwardly from Earth with intention," Hunter said. "I am passionate about making sure we can educate and train ourselves to have the right consideration and prioritize, not just for ourselves, but for the larger ecosystem on the planet."

Hunter was familiar with ASU because she attended several of Interplanetary Initiative's annual convenings. Her career has focused on space and Earth together, and that's what Interplanetary Initiative is all about — so the explorer-in-residence role felt like a natural fit.

"I spent a lot of time in academia with my PhD, prior to my private sector career. Having the chance to bring together space, the future-thinking, the academia, and mentoring the next generation is a fabulous opportunity," Hunter said.

As explorer-in-residence, Hunter will be part of the Interplanetary Initiative leadership team, giving her a platform to talk about important space topics on behalf of the university.

"Julia Tizard Hunter is one of those rare gems: A person who is deeply knowledgeable in space exploration and space hardware, and has risen to tremendous leadership heights in the private sector, while holding strong ideas about values and how humans should work best together, combined with humility and a skill for connecting with others. On top of all that, she is an adventurer and world-class sailor, with many expeditions under her belt. We could not be more fortunate to have her joining the ASU team," said Lindy Elkins-Tanton, who spent the past eight years as vice president at the Interplanetary Initiative. Elkins-Tanton is now transitioning to advisor and founding chair so she can focus on the NASA Psyche mission that she leads.

Jessica Rousset, director of Interplanetary Initiative, is leading the organization into its next chapter.

"We've had the privilege of getting to know Julia from our annual convenings. Adding to her extensive experience in the aerospace industry, it is her commitment to sustainability and her adventurous spirit that make her an asset to our mission," Rousset said. "Balancing the pursuit of ambitious space goals with long-term stewardship requires a leader that can navigate technological complexity with ethical decision-making. Julia embodies these qualities, and we're excited to bring more global-scale leadership and to launch new programs with her on board."

Hunter's first big mandate is to form a global council that can take collective action toward a bold space future that offers shared prosperity.

This council will get together and ask questions like: How can we ensure that our rapid technological progress in space delivers widespread social good? That will then be the genesis of new projects at the Interplanetary Initiative.

Additional goals include scaling and growing the initiative's current research and learning portfolios, leveraging its convening power toward a bold and responsible space.

Hunter said she is also really excited to offer guidance and support to students within the university.

“I hope I’m going to get a lot of time with students, for mentorship. I have a lot to give back,” she said.

Hunter has a wealth of experience to offer students on taking risks and pursuing goals.

After reading books about all the old explorers at the North Pole and wanting her own experience, she discovered there was a North Pole marathon. So she signed up for the 2010 marathon and trained for eight months, running her first-ever marathon in a blizzard.

When she got there, she encountered an incredible group of people who routinely challenged themselves, running marathons in unique places.

“For this small community, challenge was so normalized. Everyone’s attitude was, ‘OK, we’re just going to go run a marathon over the North Pole ice sheet today,’” Hunter said. “I learned that if you surround yourself with people who have the same passions, it takes the question out of achieving things and becomes just about the experience.”

She said crossing the Pacific Ocean was a similar experience. She and her family did a lot of training and planning and made sure that they got to know the boat, sailing in the Caribbean for a year.

“Then, crossing the Pacific from Panama to New Zealand was a simple extension of who we already were — sailors. Even our longest passage, 21 days at sea, each day was just what we were doing that day.”

While sailing across the Pacific Ocean, Hunter co-wrote a children's book titled “The Adventures of Skylark” with her 8-year-old son. They wanted to write something that represented the characteristics they felt one needs to take on big adventures like theirs.

“We wanted to instill that spirit and also those traits in the younger people,” Hunter said.

Hunter’s advice for someone who wants to take a big leap is to literally sign yourself up. Then tell everybody about it to bring your community in and hold yourself accountable.

“When you share your passions and goals outwardly,” she said, “you’re creating them for yourself and perhaps inspiring others.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Photo courtesy of Julia Tizard Hunter

Text image(s)



Julia Tizard Hunter on night watch, sailing from Tonga to New Zealand. Courtesy photo



Julia Tizard Hunter came in third place in a 2021 women's marathon in Antarctica in the South Pole. Courtesy photo