Course Summary

Astronomy 121 is a combination of ancient Greek philosophy, biology, physics, geology, and of course astronomy. Not only will we explore the planets and moons, but take a look at early astronomy, origins of life on Earth and exoplanets. The emphasis in this and all other science courses is critical thinking skills meaning that given some parameters, evidence or information, one can reason the cause and/or effect of the observations and test various hypotheses.

Please read this entire page. It contains the links to assignments, class schedule and syllabus. A link to the syllabus is also located on the sidebar. There are no required materials for this course, however you will need a scientific calculator for tests and homework. These are relatively inexpensive (under $20) and should be available at the bookstore or at any office supply store.

Course Structure

This course is set up as a set of 5 modules, each taking roughly 2 weeks to cover - some will take more, others will take less. The first module covers a brief history of science starting from the ancient Greeks to Newton. The second discusses coordinate systems, stellar motion, solar system properties and the moon. These first two modules emphasize critical thinking skills and math. The third and fourth modules discuss the properties of the terrestrial planets, gas giants and their moons. The third and fourth modules are more fact based learning - specifically, you will be introduced to the different characteristics of each planet and some major moons. The last module delves into life origins and exoplanetary systems. There are several new planets detected every year and possibly this section will be expanded to discuss recent discoveries.

Grading

You are graded on the following:

- Homework (5 assignments) 40%
- 1 midterm (best of 2 tests) 27%
- Final 33%

All grades are curved based on the class average

Homework

You are graded on 5 homework assignments. Each homework is weighted equally meaning that regardless of what the total points, each assignment is worth 8% of your total grade. If you skip even one, it will significantly effect your grade. **Homework is to be typed in the assignment hand-in form and turned in at the beginning of class.** Any diagrams or calculations can be drawn/written by hand. At least one homework assignment will require you to run a JAVA script simulation on your computer. These simulations are old and occasionally won't work on certain operating systems or browsers (always try Firefox first and be sure to get JAVA). Students who wait to begin the homework on the day its due maybe unpleasantly surprised to find that the simulation doesn't run on their computer.
Sometimes you are asked to go look up information on other websites to answer certain questions. You are to respond to these questions by writing the answer in your own words. Do cite sources (a link to the website is just fine), but don't use quotes from the articles to answer the question. Again use your own words.

**Math:** Math is required to describe planetary motion and properties. In the first 3 weeks of the course, you will see a significant number of equations and in particular, the first homework assignment will consist of more math than questions. However the math in this course is all algebra-based and examples will be shown in class utilizing each equation.

**Copying:** Homework is to be done on an individual basis. It is okay to work with someone, but if you and your study partner have identical answers or even just switch a few words or sentences around, this is considered copying and results in zero credit for all similar answers. In a class this size, it is easy to catch so don't do it!

**Avoiding Plagiarism**
Don't cut and paste text from sources to answer questions - even if you cite these sources. This is very very bad! Some professors make it a mission to go after students by notifying administrators and professors of the suspected plagiarist. Don't sabotage yourself! If you are confused as to what is considered plagiarism click on this example.

**Late Policy:** Late homework is accepted but loses 10% of the total assignment points for each day they are overdue, and yes this includes weekends.

**Redos:** There are no “redos” for homework or tests.

**Homework Pick up:** Graded homework is left outside my office (Wil 417) on a desk for you to pick up at your leisure. Usually it takes 1-2 weeks to get homework graded.

**Policy for Emailing Homework:** Unless you are absent and can't find someone to submit for you, you must hand in your homework in class. However, if you are not able to attend class, you may email it to me. The format must be in word or pdf (not Pages). The drawback is that you will not get your homework back so you won't be able to find out what you got correct and what you missed. You will simply receive a score in blackboard. If your homework is late you can also email it as well. Again, same rules apply.

**Responsibility:** You are responsible to monitor your grades. If you don't see a grade for an assignment you submitted, you must let me know ASAP. Since it takes 1-2 weeks to grade homework, I will post a column in blackboard that shows your homework has been received. This column will be available the evening of the homework due date. If you don't see that your homework has been received in blackboard, then it is your responsibility to hand-in the homework again. Thus homework lost or inadvertently unattached to an email is not an acceptable excuse for missing homework!

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**Tests**
You will have two midterms and a final. Your midterm grade will be the best of the two midterms. This was created as a response of giving too many make up exams. For example, if you get an 87% on one test and a 72% on the 2nd midterm, your midterm grade is 87%. If you take the first midterm and then miss the 2nd midterm it won’t count against you, but you won’t have a chance to improve your midterm score. All tests will contain multiple choice, some true false and possible matching. There also maybe a written answer portion as well.

**Make up policy:** Make up tests are only given to those who had a serious illness and provide a note from a doctor or have a family emergency that can be documented. If you do need to make up a test and have the proper documentation, it will be an essay-question exam. Traditionally, students get lower scores on these than the in class tests.

**You can’t make up a test due to vacation, etc.**

**Final:** The final will be in class March 19 at 8am in Fenton 110. You have 2 hours for the test. If you have more than 3 finals in one day, you can reschedule the test, but it will be a long answer style test - no multiple choice. If you qualify, provide proof that you have 3 other tests on Tuesday and a new test will be scheduled for you.

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**Email, Questions and Homework Help**

Come to class for homework hints and examples of using equations. Come to office hours or email me for more help. There are no TAs for the course - only graders. Be smart about email - if it can be answered on the syllabus, I probably won’t answer it.

**Extra Credit**

There is none for this course.

**Students and Disability Services**

If you require extra assistance, such as notes, extra time on assignments, exams, etc., please contact me before or after class and provide the appropriate documentation from Accessible Education Center as soon as you can. Also let me know what works best for you.

**Academic Dishonesty**

If you are caught cheating looking at your neighbor’s test or with notes either on your phone, mp3 player, a piece of paper, hat, arm, water bottle or whatever, you get an automatic 0 on the test. Therefore, no headphones, sunglasses, hats or phones during test time. You can't use your phone or any web-capable device to do calculations for the tests.