

ASTRONOMY & ASTROPHYSICS (Div III)

Chair: Professor Jay Pasachoff

- Marek Demianski, Visiting Field Memorial Professor of Astronomy
- Kevin Flaherty, Lecturer in Astronomy and Observatory Supervisor; affiliated with: Astronomy, Physics
- Anne Jaskot, Assistant Professor of Astronomy and Associate of the Hopkins Observatory; affiliated with: Astronomy, Physics
- Protik K. Majumder, Barclay Jermain Professor of Natural Philosophy, Chair of Astronomy; affiliated with: Physics, Astronomy

How long will the Sun shine? How do we discover Earth-like planets among the many exoplanets circling other stars? How did the universe begin and how has it evolved over its 13.8-billion-year history? How do we detect not only light but also gravitational waves from afar? Astronomy is the science that asks and tries to answer questions like these. We have come a long way toward understanding what makes the sky appear as it does and how the Universe behaves. The Astronomy Department offers courses for anyone who is interested in learning about the Universe, and who would like to be able to follow new astronomical discoveries as they are made. All courses in Astronomy satisfy the Division III requirement. The Astronomy major and the Astrophysics major (administered jointly with the Physics Department) are described below.

The beginning astronomy courses are offered on two levels. Astronomy 101, 102, 104, and 330-range courses are intended primarily for non-science majors and have no prerequisite. Astronomy 111 is designed for students with some exposure to physics. It has a prerequisite of one year of high school physics or permission of the instructor, and a co-requisite of Mathematics 140 or equivalent background in calculus.

Most of the astronomy courses take advantage of our observational and computational facilities including a 24-inch computer-controlled telescope with sensitive electronic detectors, and our own computer network for image processing and data analysis. The Williams Astronomy site can be found at astronomy.williams.edu.

ASTRONOMY MAJOR

The Astronomy major is designed for students with an interest in learning about many aspects of modern astronomy, but who do not choose to take the most advanced physics and math courses of the astrophysics major. It is also appropriate as a second major for students concentrating in another field; in particular, combining an Astronomy major with a related major like Geoscience or Computer Science has been a fruitful path for some of our students. The Astronomy major emphasizes understanding the observed properties of the physical systems that comprise the known Universe, from the Sun and solar system, to the evolution of stars and star clusters, to the Milky Way Galaxy, to external galaxies and clusters of galaxies. Because some knowledge of physics and calculus is necessary to understand many astronomical phenomena, the Astronomy major requires the first two semesters each of the physics and calculus that are also required of Physics majors and Astrophysics majors.

There are several possible routes through the Astronomy major, depending on preparation and interest. Students considering a major in Astronomy should consult with members of the department early and often. A first-year student, if unsure about choosing between Astronomy and Astrophysics, may wish to take not only Astronomy 111 but also Physics 131, 141, or 151 and Mathematics 140 (if necessary) in the fall. Students who might place out of physics courses should read the section on placement under Physics.

Major Requirements for Astronomy

Astronomy 111 Introduction to Astrophysics OR Astronomy 101 Stars: From Suns to Black Holes and either Astronomy 102 The Solar System—Our Planetary Home OR Astronomy 104 The Milky Way Galaxy and the Universe Beyond

Two 200-level Astronomy courses (or additional 400-level Astronomy courses as substitutes)

Two 400-level Astronomy courses

Physics 131 Particles and Waves OR Physics 141 Particles and Waves—Enriched OR equivalent placement

Physics 142 Foundations of Modern Physics or Physics 151 Seminar on Modern Physics

Mathematics 140 Calculus II

Mathematics 150 Multivariable Calculus OR Mathematics 151 Multivariable Calculus OR equivalent placement

The total number of courses required for the Astronomy major is nine. A typical path through the major will begin with Physics 141, which is suitable for students with one year of high school physics and a background in calculus. However, students without high school physics may begin with Physics 131, and students entering with Advanced Placement in physics and/or math may obtain credit toward the major for the equivalent of Physics 142 and/or Mathematics 150 or 151 taken elsewhere. There are some aspects of astronomy that are closely related to chemistry or geosciences. In recognition of this, certain advanced courses in those departments can be accepted for credit toward the Astronomy major.

THE DEGREE WITH HONORS IN ASTRONOMY

The honors degree in Astronomy will be awarded on the basis of a senior thesis presenting the results of an original observational, experimental, or theoretical investigation carried out by the student under the direction of a faculty member in Astronomy. There are no specific grade requirements (other than College-wide requirements for remaining in good academic standing) for entry into the thesis research program; however, a student wishing to do a thesis should have demonstrated both ability and motivation for independent work in previous courses and in any earlier research involvement. Students doing theses will normally choose a topic and an advisor early in the second semester of their junior year and usually begin their thesis work during the summer. During the senior year, those students whose proposals have been approved will elect two courses and a winter study project in addition to the minimum requirements for the major. Preparation for the thesis will occupy at least one course (Astronomy 493) and the winter study project (Astronomy 031). At the end of the winter study period, the department will decide, in consultation with each student, whether to admit that student to honors candidacy. Both a written thesis and an oral presentation to faculty and fellow students are required. The degree with honors will be awarded to those who meet these requirements with distinction. The degree with highest honors will be awarded to those who fulfill the requirements with unusually high distinction.

Honors candidates will also be required to attend departmental colloquium talks.

The department will be flexible with regard to the number and timing of courses devoted to thesis research within the general guidelines of two courses and a winter study project over and above the minimum major requirements and the written and oral presentations, especially in cases of students with advanced standing and/or summer research experience. Students considering unusual requests are urged to consult with potential advisors or the department chair as early as possible.

ASTROPHYSICS MAJOR

The Astrophysics major is designed for students who want a rigorous introduction to the field, and includes not only those who plan graduate study in astronomy, astrophysics, or a closely related area, but also those interested in a wide variety of careers. Astrophysics alumni are not only astronomers but also computer scientists, geologists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, business school professors, and so on. In recent years, many astrophysics majors have had a second major in fields as wide ranging as mathematics, computer science, geosciences, economics, English, and art history. This major emphasizes the description of the Universe and its constituents in terms of physical processes. Potential Astrophysics majors should consult early with members of the Astronomy and Physics Departments to determine their most appropriate route through the major. An essential ingredient in such students' undergraduate training is experience in physics and mathematics. Therefore, the major normally will begin in the first year a student is at Williams with Physics 131, 141, or 151 and Mathematics 140 or 150 or 151 in the fall. Physics 141 is recommended for students with one year of high school physics and a background in calculus. Students with very good background placing them out of Physics 142 and out of Mathematics 140 may choose to take Physics 201 and Mathematics 150 or 151 instead. Astronomy 111 will often be taken in the fall of the sophomore year; however, many students take it in the fall of their first year at Williams, along with physics and math. Students who might place out of physics courses should read the section on placement under Physics; those who place out of Physics 131 or 141 into Physics 142 or 151 should particularly consider taking Astronomy 111 in the fall of their first year.

In addition to the major courses described below, other courses in geosciences, mathematics, and computer science may also be appropriate.

Major Requirements for Astrophysics

Astronomy 111 Introduction to Astrophysics OR Astronomy 101 Stars: From Suns to Black Holes and either Astronomy 102 The Solar System—Our Planetary Home OR Astronomy 104 The Milky Way Galaxy and the Universe Beyond

Physics 131 Particles and Waves OR Physics 141 Particles and Waves—Enriched OR equivalent placement

Physics 142 Foundations of Modern Physics OR Physics 151 Seminar on Modern Physics

Physics 201 Electricity and Magnetism

Physics 202 Waves and Optics

Physics/Mathematics 210 Mathematical Methods for Scientists

Physics 301 Introductory Quantum Physics

Mathematics 150 Multivariable Calculus OR Mathematics 151 Multivariable Calculus

Three 400-level astronomy courses OR two 400-level astronomy courses and one of the following:

Astronomy 211 Astronomical Observing and Data Analysis

Physics 302 Statistical Physics

Physics 402T Applications of Quantum Mechanics

Physics 405T Electromagnetic Theory

Physics 411T Classical Mechanics;

Physics 418 Gravity

The total number of courses required for the Astrophysics major, an interdisciplinary major, is eleven. Students entering with Advanced Placement in physics and/or mathematics may obtain credit toward the major for the equivalent of Physics 141 and/or Mathematics 140 and/or 150 or 151 taken elsewhere, but at least 8 courses in astronomy, physics, and mathematics must be taken at Williams. There are some aspects of astrophysics that are closely related to chemistry or geosciences. In recognition of this relation, certain advanced courses in those departments can be accepted for credit toward the Astrophysics major on a two-for-one basis. It is not possible to double major in Astrophysics and Physics.

THE DEGREE WITH HONORS IN ASTROPHYSICS

The honors degree in Astrophysics will be awarded on the basis of a senior thesis presenting the results of an original observational, experimental, or theoretical investigation carried out by the student under the direction of a faculty member in Astronomy or Physics. There are no specific grade requirements (other than College-wide requirements for remaining in good academic standing) for entry into the thesis research program; however, a student wishing to do a thesis should have demonstrated both ability and motivation for independent work in previous courses and in any earlier research involvement. Students doing theses will normally choose a topic and an advisor early in the second semester of their junior year and usually begin their thesis work during the summer. During the senior year, those students whose proposals have been approved will elect two courses and a winter study project in addition to the minimum requirements for the major. Preparation for the thesis will occupy at least one course (Astrophysics 493) and the winter study project (Astrophysics 031). At the end of the winter study period, the departments will decide, in consultation with each student, whether to admit that student to honors candidacy. Both a written thesis and an oral presentation to faculty and fellow students are required. The degree with honors will be awarded to those who meet these requirements with distinction. The degree with highest honors will be awarded to those who fulfill the requirements with unusually high distinction.

The departments will be flexible with regard to the number and timing of courses devoted to thesis research within the general guidelines of two courses and a winter study project over and above the minimum major requirements and the written and oral presentations, especially in cases of students with advanced standing and/or summer research experience. Students considering unusual requests are urged to consult with potential advisors or the department chairs as early as possible.

STUDY ABROAD

FAQ

Students **MUST** contact departments/programs **BEFORE** assuming study away credit will be granted toward the major or concentration.

Can your department or program typically pre-approve courses for major/concentration credit?

Yes, in some cases, if appropriate course information is available in advance (e.g. syllabi and/or course descriptions), though students should be sure to contact the department.

What criteria will typically be used/required to determine whether a student may receive major/concentration credit for a course taken while on study away?

Course title and description, and complete syllabus including readings/assignments.

Does your department/program place restrictions on the number of major/concentration credits that a student might earn through study away?

No.

Does your department/program place restrictions on the types of courses that can be awarded credit towards your major?

No.

Are there specific major requirements that cannot be fulfilled while on study away?

No.

Are there specific major requirements in your department/program that students should be particularly aware of when weighing study away options? (Some examples might include a required course that is always taught in one semester, laboratory requirements.)

Yes. PHYS 301, a required course for the Astrophysics major, is only taught in the fall, and is difficult to replicate abroad, especially regarding the lab component.

Give examples in which students thought or assumed that courses taken away would count toward the major or concentration and then learned they wouldn't:

None to date.