

# ASTR 4 – Solar System Astronomy

## Winter 2026

**Class days and time:** M/W, 4-6:15pm

**Class Locations:** Monday in ADM 119, Wednesday in PLT

**Instructor:** Caitlin Kepple (she/they)

**Instructor email:** [kepplecaitlinmarie@fhda.edu](mailto:kepplecaitlinmarie@fhda.edu)

**Open office hours:** M/W 2:30-3pm in S55 and Zoom  
M/W 6:15-6:45pm in ADM 119 or PLT

Welcome to Solar System Astronomy! In this course, we will explore current and historical understandings of astronomy from a variety of perspectives. We'll use real-world data to build knowledge and skills around astronomy as a science, while also interrogating the traditional view of science as an "objective" pursuit. We will also draw on knowledge from several disciplines and cultures to help us understand the forces that shape our view of science as individuals and broadly in the US.

### Course Learning Goals

Throughout this course, we will pursue the following set of skills related to studying astronomy:

- Appraise the benefits to society of planetary research and exploration
- Compare and contrast the development of planetary systems and of the major planet types, including those factors that have led to Earth's unique characteristics
- Evaluate astronomical news items or theories concerning solar system astronomy based upon the scientific method
- Describe ethical dilemmas arising out of contemporary scientific research and application from a variety of perspectives among local and/or global communities
- Understand and articulate the relevance and impact of astronomy research on an individual, community, and societal level
- Draw on and integrate lived experiences related to science to construct a shared understanding of astronomical knowledge and research

### Inclusivity Statement

As a starting point for creating a welcoming learning environment, we will refer to the [Inclusive Astronomy Recommendations](#) and actively work to improve on the practices they recommend. Materials in this course will strive to center the experiences of historically marginalized groups in astronomy using an intersectional lens. We will draw on different ways of knowing and learning astronomy, both historically and today. Additionally, we will work as a class to further identify how we are maintaining internalized biases about scientific knowledge and what perspectives are being left out of the conversation.

### Course Texts

- [Astronomy, by OpenStax](#) free online/PDF (also available in print for \$60 or at De Anza Library)
- Selected readings available on Canvas each week

### Important Dates

Jan 18: Last day to add classes

Jan 18: Last day to drop classes with no record

Jan 19: Martin Luther King Jr Holiday (no classes)

Feb 13-16: President's Day Holiday (no classes)

Feb 27: Last Day to withdraw ("W") from courses

Mar 23-27: Final Exam Week

## Grade Breakdown

Grades are based on a combination of note-taking, in-class assignments, a larger project, and final exam grades—each of which is described more below. Each assignment type is constructed so that success in the class is possible via a wide variety of methods (not just one make-or-break assignment).

- Pre-Class Assignments (lowest 2 dropped) - 15%
- APOD Presentation - 5%
- In-class Work (lowest 2 dropped) - 20%
- Wrap-up Quizzes - 25%
- Special Interest Project - 20%
- Final Exam - 15%

**Late work policy:** There is a 24-hour buffer period for most assignments, with no penalty (excluding assignments that involve peer feedback). If it is between 1-10 days late, there is a 5% penalty. For more than 10 days late there is a 10% penalty. You can submit any assignment up until Friday of Week 11 at 11:59pm. *This is a hard cutoff date at the end of the quarter.*

**Grading Scale:** >97=A+, 93-96=A, 89-92=A-, 86-88=B+, 83-85=B, 79-82=B-, 76-78=C+, 69-75=C, 66-68=D+, 58-65=D, <58=non-passing. Grades rounded to nearest % at the end of the quarter.

## Course Structure

Our course is designed so that everyone can construct their astronomy knowledge from the ground up and access the material with a variety of learning styles, starting with short in-class assignments before moving on to the quizzes and special interest project. *For more details, rubrics and make-up options for each item, see the Canvas page.*



### Pre-synchronous work – Videos, Reading, and Assignment (15%)

- You can find the assigned videos and reading for each class session on Canvas (the schedule below is only tentative). As you complete the videos and readings, you should take notes and complete a brief assignment *before* coming to class. ***Treat this as you would a homework assignment!***



### APOD Presentations (5%)

- Early in the quarter, you'll sign up to do a short presentation of an Astronomy Picture of the Day or "APOD" image of your choosing. Each class day (starting in Week 2), a couple of people will present their chosen picture and what they found interesting about it. Sign-ups will be during the first week of class.



### In-class Activities (20%)

- We will have in-class activities every class day (thus attendance is important!). These will mostly be submitted on Canvas in group format, though sometimes individually. They are graded on completeness (70%), correctness (20%), and timeliness (10%). *If you are absent, you can still complete these, albeit without the aid of your peers or instructor to help you in real time.*



### Bi-weekly Wrap-up "Quizzes" (25%)

- Wrap-up Quizzes serve two purposes. 1: A low-stakes way to help you gauge your own progress with the material 2: They are your *best* reference in preparing for the final. Every two weeks, we'll complete a short in-class practice quiz. Then, you'll note any corrections and use the practice quiz to complete very similar questions on Canvas.

### Special Interest Project (20%)

- During the second half of the quarter, you'll choose a topic to research and present about in the last two weeks of class. This may be done solo or in a pair. The topic must relate to Stellar Astronomy in some way, but otherwise is fairly open-ended.



### Final Exam (15%)

- We will have one cumulative final exam at the end of the quarter during finals week. The format will be the same as quizzes, with multiple choice/fill in the blank/short-answer style questions. You will need a calculator, which can be borrowed from the Campus [Library](#).

### Technology in class

This course relies on Canvas and other online sources quite a bit while in class. Therefore, it is ideal if you have the ability to bring a laptop or tablet to class, but it is not required. If you are in need of a laptop for college, the De Anza [Library](#) offers single day or quarter-length lending options for laptops, tablets, and calculators.

### Generative Artificial Intelligence Use and Academic Integrity

I ask all my students to consider the implications of using generative artificial intelligence (AI) from multiple standpoints. **While it can be used as a tool for learning, there are ethical and educational considerations we should all take into account each time we use AI.**

There are certain points in the course I give the option for you to experiment with using AI as a tool to help you solidify your understanding of the material. Otherwise, I specifically discourage the use of AI to search for answers, write up assignments, or complete any portion of the work for you. **I specifically grade assignments assuming that you are human, and that the outcome will not be perfect from the get-go. I ask that you also allow yourself to make mistakes and take time to sit with new material.**

As your instructor, my priority is to give you ample space and time to grow your scientific literacy and knowledge—no matter where you are beginning from at the start of the quarter. Plagiarism or cheating explicitly violates De Anza's [Student Code of Conduct](#) guidelines and will result in a zero on that assignment, or further action if necessary.

There are several *free* resources at De Anza to provide extra support, to prevent cheating and plagiarism (listed below). Additionally, please do not hesitate to reach out to me if there is another way I can support your learning that has not already been made available.

## Resources for this Class and Beyond

### Math, Science & Technology Resource Center

De Anza's Math, Science & Technology Resource Center offers *free* [peer tutoring and workshops](#). Additionally, the [Student Success Center](#) provides help with general college skills, writing, Canvas, and much more. They have drop-in tutoring via Zoom, or Weekly Individual tutoring (see updates for this quarter's schedule on their website).

### Disability Access and Support

If you have registered with the [Disability Support Services](#) (DSS; located in RSS 141; [dss@deanza.edu](mailto:dss@deanza.edu)) or need alternate support for creating an accessible learning experience, please do not hesitate to communicate with me about this. DSS staff can meet with students, review the documentation of their disabilities, and discuss services that De Anza offers and any ADA accommodations for specific courses. Additionally, I will do whatever I can to ensure these needs are met during your time in my class.

## **Pride Center**

The De Anza Pride Center provides a safe, supportive and welcoming space for students across the gender and sexuality spectrum to build community, find resources and connect with the support needed to thrive in their college experience. You can visit the Pride Center at LIB 138 and see additional details about hours and points of contact on the [Pride website here](#).

## **Student disclosures of sexual violence**

De Anza College strives to foster a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. Please note, if you disclose a personal experience as a De Anza student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator (Lauren Balducci).

***To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact the Title IX coordinator using the following forms or by phone at 408-864-8945***

- [Reporting Sexual Misconduct or Concern](#)
- [Contacts Page](#)

## **Mental Health and Counseling Services**

The De Anza [Mental Health and Wellness Center](#) provides a wide variety of counseling services for students or groups **free for students**. Please see their website for their current schedule and list of contacts. They can be contacted at 408-864-8868 or by emailing [mhwc@deanza.edu](mailto:mhwc@deanza.edu).

## **Resources for Basic Needs**

If you or someone you know are in need of housing assistance, food assistance, baby supplies and resources (along with many other services), the [Resources for Basic Needs page](#) has a wide range of support for De Anza students and family members.

## **Academic Advising**

For more general advice on setting up a study schedule, choosing a major/classes, and navigating other logistics of your degree, you can visit the [General Counseling Division](#). There are several other resources related to academics and other resources for De Anza students in this [General Guide](#).

\*Schedule subject to change as we progress through the quarter  
 \*\*OpenStax Astronomy (OS)

## Schedule\* of topics

Week	Class Day	Readings	Important Notes
Week 1	Day 1: Course Overview and Introduction to Astronomy	Syllabus	
	Day 2: Community agreements; Practice with Units & the Night Sky	**OS Ch 1 (selected sections), 2.1	
Week 2	Day 1: Cultural and Historical astronomy	OS 2.2-2.4, Canvas Reading	
	Day 2: Observing Skills	OS 7.1, 7.2	
Week 3	Day 1: No class, Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday		
	Day 2: Planetary Motion, Gravity Laws	OS 3.1-3.5	
Week 4	Day 1: Seasons and Calendars	OS 4.1-4.4	Weeks 1-3 Wrap up Quiz
	Day 2: Lunar Phases and Eclipses	OS 4.5-4.7, Canvas Reading	
Week 5	Day 1: Intro to light as a wave	OS 5.1-5.3	
	Day 2: Spectra	OS 5.4-5.6	Project Idea due Friday
Week 6	Day 1: Telescopes	OS Ch. 6	Weeks 4-5 Wrap up Quiz
	Day 2: Science ethics	7.3, 7.4, Canvas Reading	
Week 7	Day 1: No Class, President's Day Holiday		
	Day 2: Earth as a Planet	OS 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, Canvas Reading	
Week 8	Day 1: Lunar Surface and Features	OS 9.1-9.3	Weeks 6-7 Wrap-up Quiz
	Day 2: Lunar Features Cont'd, Mercury	OS 9.4, 9.5, Canvas Reading	
Week 9	Day 1: Venus and Mars Geology	OS Ch. 10.1, 10.2, 10.4	
	Day 2: Venus and Mars Atmospheres and Life on Mars	10.3, 10.5, Canvas Reading	Project Draft due Friday
Week 10	Day 1: Giant Planets	OS Ch. 11	Weeks 9-10 Wrap-up Quiz
	Day 2: Giant Planets Cont'd	Canvas Reading	
Week 11	Day 1: Exoplanets	OS Ch. 11	Project Presentations Day
	Day 2: Finding ET; Final Exam prep	OS Ch. 14	
Finals Week	<b>Final Exam in ADM 119 Wednesday 3/25, 4-6pm</b>		

**Student Learning Outcome(s):**

- Appraise the benefits to society of planetary research and exploration.
- Compare and contrast the development of planetary systems and of the major planet types, including those factors that have led to Earth's unique characteristics.
- Evaluate astronomical news items or theories concerning solar system astronomy based upon the scientific method.

**Office Hours:**

M,W	2:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Zoom
M,W	2:30 PM - 3:00 PM	S55
M,W	6:15 PM - 6:45 PM	ADM 119 on Monday, PLT on
Wednesday		