



ASTR 1303 1HE: Stars and the Universe
COURSE SYLLABUS: Spring 2026
Course Meeting Time: MWF 11:00-11:50
Course Meeting Place: McFarland Science Room 122

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Kurtis A. Williams

Office Location: McFarland Science Building Room 106A

Office Hours:

- Tuesday 10-11am
- Wednesday 1-2pm
- Thursday 10-11am
- Friday 2-3pm
- Appointments and Zoom talks available if arranged ahead of time

Office Phone: (903) 886-5488

University Email Address: Kurtis.Williams@etamu.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: **Email**

Communication Response Time: 24 hours (business days only)

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

Textbook(s) Required:

- 21st Century Astronomy, 7th Edition with Smartwork5 Access by Palen & Blumenthal
 - Publisher website: <https://wnorton.com/books/9780393877021>
 - ISBN (Ebook+Smartwork+Student Site): 978-1-324-04670-7
- The Glass Universe by Dava Sobel
 - ISBN 978-0-14-311134-4

Software Required:

- Subscription to Smartwork
 - **Important:** You *WILL* need access to Smartwork. New textbooks or ebooks come with Smartwork access.
 - Used or rented books usually do NOT include access to Smartwork. As of Dec 2025, Smartwork is available as a stand-alone purchase of \$52+tax for 360 day access.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Course Description

Hours: 3

A descriptive survey of astronomy with emphasis on modern developments in stellar and galactic astronomy and the role of physical science in the measurement and interpretation of astronomical data. Included are studies of structure and evolution of stars and galaxies and of current cosmological theories.

Student Learning Outcomes (Should be measurable; observable; use action verbs)

1. You will be able to apply basic physical and mathematical reasoning to draw scientific inferences about astronomical objects.
2. You will be able to explain the characteristics of stars and their life cycles.
3. You will be able to identify the classes of galaxies and their basic properties.
4. You will be able to state evidence supporting astronomers' explanations of the origin and fate of the Universe.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

How to Get Started

myLEO Online Access Information

This course uses myLEO Online, the learning management system at East Texas A&M. All materials, assignments, and resources will be made available through this system. To access this course, go to: <http://myleoonline.tamuc.edu>. Log in with your myLEO account and password. Then click on the link to [Spring 2026 Stars and the Universe](#) to get to our course.

How This Course Is Organized

This course is organized by units. You should listen in class and check the course page on D2L often to see what activities and assignments are coming due.

What Should You Do First?

After attending class and reading this syllabus, you should proceed to the course page on D2L and familiarize yourself with the resources.

Next, proceed to "Things to Do First" and start to look over the items. If anything confuses you, it can wait until the first day of class.

Finally, show up on the first day of class: Monday January 13.

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

You will need to be able to access myLEO Online, also known as D2L or Brightspace, and be able to use it. You should be able to read PDF documents. You should be able to create Microsoft Word documents (.docx) or plain text files. You should have minimal knowledge of Microsoft Excel. You must be familiar with Internet usage and safe browsing. You need to be able to watch YouTube videos on a computer.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Instructional Methods

Participation

Attendance is a crucial part of learning, and so attendance will be taken during most class meetings. If you are absent due to illness or other circumstances such as those listed under section 1.3 of the ETAMU [Class Attendance Policy](#), you will be excused from class with not penalty to your grade. Unexcused absences will hurt your grade.

Excessive tardiness or leaving class excessively early will also result in grade penalties.

This class will include several activities that involve working in pairs or small groups; students who do not fully engage in these activities may also be penalized.

Class Preparation

I often will assign reading, video watching, and easy quizzes (“quasi-quizzes”). These are due before the start of most classes. You will earn no points if you don’t finish the assignment before the start of class.

Exams

Short exams will be given multiple times during the semester. These exams will focus on material covered since the previous exam. There will also be a cumulative final exam, weighted separately. Most students do well enough on the exams that they get decent course grades, even if they do not perform well on one exam.

For all exams, you may also bring a “cheat sheet” of 8.5x11 inch paper in size (or smaller) with whatever hand-written information you’d like. No other books, backpacks, calculators, computers, iPods, headsets, cell phones, PDAs, tricorders, etc. will be permitted. Using any aids other than your cheat sheet will result in you being removed from the exam and a grade of a zero.

If you are certified as needing special accommodations for examinations, please see me privately well before the exam with you letter of accommodation from the Student Disability Resources and Services office.

Homework, aka Smartwork

Smartwork is an online astronomy homework and tutoring tool associated with the assigned textbook. Its advantages are that Smartwork will give you instant feedback on whether you got a question right or wrong and provide you with hints and tools to better learn the material.

I call Smartwork assignments “homework;” each unit in a course will have its own Smartwork assignment. This means you should expect to see roughly one Smartwork assignment each week. If you do the homework and find you still don’t understand something, you definitely want to ask me about that topic in office hours or by email.

The grading policy for each Smartwork assignment is shown in each assignment. You may get multiple attempts to answer a question correctly; however, submitting an incorrect answer will cost you some credit. ***Late homework is penalized 20% per day late. After 5 days, you will receive a zero on the assignment.***

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The following are considered cheating and will not be tolerated: Use of generative AI to seek answers to assignments, copying text from a website or other printed source, obtaining copies of solutions to homework questions (whether from past students or other sources), directly copying another student's work, etc. See the section on "Academic Integrity" below for full details.

Extra Credit:

The *only* extra credit available in this course are the two options below. If you fully complete an option, you will earn 1.5% extra credit on your total calculated grade. You may earn extra credit for each activity only once (i.e., a maximum of 3% extra credit). There are no other options for extra credit. **All extra credit must be completed by April 24.**

Visit a planetarium show: The East Texas A&M Planetarium exhibits several different shows every Friday night at 7 pm and 8 pm. Tickets are \$5 for all ages.

<http://www.etamu.edu/planetarium/> has a current listing of shows. Viewers of any age are welcome to the planetarium shows. All shows are rated appropriate for all audiences, but typically the 7 pm show is aimed at younger children, while the 8 pm show is more enjoyable for tweens and older.

If you attend a show, tell the staff that you are a member of this class. The staff will have class rosters; you are responsible for making sure the staff mark down that you attended.

Visit the Commerce Observatory: You will have two opportunities for a visit to the Commerce Observatory (about 5 miles south of Commerce). On two evenings, we will have telescopes set up to look at planets and other interesting objects in the night sky. At each session, there will be an activity you must complete in order to earn extra credit. One visit is sufficient. Times and transportation options will be announced closer to the event.

Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

Students who do well in this course share most of the following common habits:

- Arriving a couple minutes early for class and not leaving until class is dismissed.
- Not using phones, tablets, or computers during class
- Checking MyLeo often for announcements and assignments
- Completing all assignments on time
- Asking for help and advice early in the semester
- Taking responsibility for their own grade.

GRADING

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale:

A = 90%-100%

B = 80%-89%

C = 70%-79%

D = 60%-69%

F = 59% or Below

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Grading is on an absolute scale with no competition. If you all earn an A, you all get an A. I may curve grades for specific assignments at my discretion; your percentage earned will never go down if I apply such a curve. Your current grades are available through the gradebook on D2L – look for “Total Calculated Grade.” The gradebook on Smartwork is not official.

Grades are based on a weighted system. The categories and weights are:

Attendance:	10%
Class Preparation:	10%
Homework:	30%
Midterm Exams:	30% (10% each)
Final Exam:	20%
TOTAL	100%

Course Outline/Calendar

The course will cover many of the topics outlined below. Specific dates are subject to change.

1st Block: Tools of the Astronomer

- Unit 1: Thinking Like an Astronomer
- Unit 2: Light and Telescopes
- *Exam 1 – estimated date Feb 4*

2nd Block: Stars

- Unit 3: Measuring Stars
- Unit 4: Properties of Stars
- Unit 5: Our Star – the Sun
- *Exam 2 – estimated date March 4*
- Unit 6: Star Birth, Life, and Death
- Unit 7: Supernovae, Neutron Stars, and Black Holes
- *Exam 3 – estimated date April 8*

3rd Block: Galaxies and the Universe

- Unit 8: Galaxies
- Unit 9: The Milky Way
- Unit 10: Cosmology

Important Class Dates:

- Jan 12: First Day of Class
- March 9-13: **No Classes (Spring Break)**
- March 27: Last Day to Drop Class
- Apr 24: Last Day for Planetarium Extra Credit
- May 1: **Last Day of Classes**

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday May 6th, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

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TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

Zoom Video Conferencing Tool

https://inside.tamuc.edu/campuslife/CampusServices/CITESupportCenter/Zoom_Account.aspx?source=universalmenu

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@etamu.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, an ETAMU campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR COURSE

CWID and Password

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@etamu.edu.

Technology-Related Issues

Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a ETAMU campus open computer lab, etc.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPORT

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Students will need reliable computer and internet access for this course. Students must be able to effectively use myLeo email, myLeo Online D2L, and Microsoft Office.

Learning Management System (LMS) – D2L

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are the technical requirements:

- View the [Learning Management System Requirements Webpage](#).
- Learn more on the [LMS Browser Support Webpage](#).

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found on the [Brightspace Support Webpage](#).

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

Interaction with Instructor Statement

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your instructor. Correspondence will always be through university email (your “myLeo” mail) and announcements in myLeo online (D2L). You will not RECEIVE email through D2L, so be sure to check your ETAMU email for communication. Students are encouraged to check university email daily.

Include the Following in Emails with Instructor:

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

- Course name and subject in the subject line
 - Salutation (Good afternoon, Dr. Jackson)
 - Proper email etiquette (no “text” emails – use proper grammar and punctuation)
 - Student name and CWID after the body of the email (possibly add to student signature on email)
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COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The [Code of Student Conduct](#) is described in detail online in the [Student Guidebook](#).

Students should also consult the [Rules of Netiquette Webpage](#) for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum.

ETAMU Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy, please view the [Attendance Webpage](#) and the [Class Attendance Policy](#)

Academic Integrity

Students at East Texas A&M University are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty see the following procedures:

[Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.03](#)

[Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.10](#)

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

East Texas A&M University acknowledges that there are legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, ChatBots, or other software that has the capacity to generate text, or suggest replacements for text beyond individual words, as determined by the instructor of the course.

Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism).

Individual instructors may disallow entirely the use of such software for individual assignments or for the entire course. Students should be aware of such requirements and follow their instructors' guidelines. If no instructions are provided the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed.

In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources

Students with Disabilities-- ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

East Texas A&M University

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@etamu.edu

Website: [Office of Student Disability Services](#)

Nondiscrimination Notice

East Texas A&M University will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

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Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in East Texas A&M University buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and ETAMU Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

For a list of locations, please refer to the [Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus](#) document and/or consult your event organizer.

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all East Texas A&M University campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

East Texas A&M Supports Students' Mental Health – Counseling Services

The Counseling Center at East Texas A&M University, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

Mental Health and Well-Being

The university aims to provide students with essential knowledge and tools to understand and support mental health. As part of our commitment to your well-being, we offer access to Telus Health, a service available 24/7/365 via chat, phone, or webinar. Scan the QR code to download the app and explore the resources available to you for guidance and support whenever you need it.



As an Institutional Member of the National Association of Schools of Music, East Texas State A&M University supports the Association's commitment to student health and wellness. The following web address provides links to information for resources related to physical and mental well-being, as well as assists in offering preventative measures that students can take to avoid serious and/or chronic conditions: [Musician Health and Safety - East Texas A&M University](#)

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