

# ASTR196: Astronomical Problem Solving

Fall 2014 – Section 001

Thursdays from 12:30–1:45 pm

## Syllabus

### I. Contact and User Information

**Professor** Dr. Don McCarthy  
Email: [dmccarthy@as.arizona.edu](mailto:dmccarthy@as.arizona.edu)  
Phone: (520) 621-4079  
Twitter: @stellarDon  
Office: Steward Observatory, room N404. Ride the main elevator up to the fourth floor and walk straight ahead.  
Office hours: Wednesday 12-1:30 pm. Also by appointment. Do not hesitate to contact me!

### Links, Settings, Times

Class Web site: [D2L](#)  
Wednesday evening Collaborate online conferencing (9-10 pm)  
<http://illuminate.oia.arizona.edu/scheduleMeetingnochair.php?sessionId=2906259>

### II. Course Overview

ASTR 196 is a weekly seminar in problem-solving and critical thinking available to freshmen planning to major in astronomy. It is designed to introduce these students to astronomy and the types of thought processes they will need in order to succeed in their future courses and careers. Based on topics involving astronomical and natural phenomena, this course emphasizes basic reasoning and numerical skills using pre-calculus mathematics. Students will learn techniques for analyzing questions, formulating logical solutions, physical intuition, the scientific method, and the use of numerical techniques, both mental and electronic.

Time and location: Thursdays from 12:30-1:45 pm in Optical Sciences, room 410. There may be occasional exceptions to be announced beforehand in class and on our Web site. Classes will begin promptly. If you arrive late, please enter quietly. Food and drinks are not allowed in the auditorium.

Textbook: The book entitled “*How to Solve It*” (Polya, 1945) is recommended but not required.

Expectations: Each student is expected to come prepared for every scheduled class. As a general rule students can expect to spend ~3 hours per week in preparation. During class students are expected to participate actively in problem-solving discussions with their peers. Since each class will build on the previous one, if you miss a class, you can get behind so quickly that it may be very difficult to catch up, and you will also miss important quizzes, discussions, collaborative work, etc. Throughout the semester students are expected to write clear sentences and paragraphs using good English grammar.

Electronic devices will not be used during class except for taking notes.

Your personal Messier object:

On the first day of class you will be assigned a Messier object as your code name for all submitted materials and for posting of grades. **To protect your privacy, never write your personal name or student ID number on any assignments in this course. Instead, use the number of your Messier object.**

### **III. Homework, Optional Project, and Final Exam**

Weekly homework assignments are a major component (60%) of this course and will emphasize skills in logical thinking, physical intuition, numeracy, writing, and basic astronomy. Students will take turns presenting their solutions during class. The following **rules** apply to homework assignments:

1. Electronic submissions are not accepted.
2. Homework is due at the start of class on the specified date. Permission to submit late must be granted by Dr. McCarthy in advance of the deadline. A **late-penalty** of 20% may be assessed. Assignments will not be accepted more than one week late.
3. You must always **SHOW** or explain **HOW** you reached a solution by recording the intermediate, logical steps in a calculation or describing your solution logically in words. Simply listing an answer is not acceptable and will not receive any points.
4. Some problems require your opinion to be clearly stated. In these cases, your grade will be determined more by your reasoning and writing performance than by the exact answer.
5. You may **START** an assignment in a team. However, after deciding **HOW** to approach a problem, **you must then make all your own measurements, graphs, and tables and always use your own wording to interpret and express conclusions.** Homework solutions that appear identical are a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity and will receive a grade of zero plus potential expulsion from the course and University.
6. Sometimes students misread a question, get started in the wrong direction, or make a simple mistake leading to the wrong conclusion. Such assignments will receive a “TBD” grade (i.e., to be determined), allowing you to get back on track if you meet with Dr. McCarthy within one week to discuss your work and arrange to improve it.

Daily quizzes will be given to promote understanding, self-assessment, attention, participation, and teamwork. Quizzes may consist of several questions spread throughout each class.

A final exam is scheduled for December 18, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. You may bring a handwritten, double-sided page of notes (“crib sheet”) to consult during the exam. Exams will emphasize understanding, not memorization.

Optional project: In lieu of the final exam each student may undertake a substantial project that will comprise 20% of the final grade. This project can take many different forms but should involve creative problem-solving work, not a library “research paper.” The topic must be approved in advance by Dr. McCarthy by October 16, and then summarized in a brief proposal.

## IV. Course Policies

### Academic Integrity

Dr. McCarthy and the Department of Astronomy adhere to the University's Code of Academic Integrity (<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/academicintegrity>). The Dean of Students Office has prepared a [video](#) describing the Code and resources that are available to you for improving your work. It is expected that each student will do his/her own work on all homework, projects, exams, etc. During his years of teaching, Dr. McCarthy has developed skills in recognizing plagiarism and outright cheating. Such violations of the Code can be penalized by expulsion from the University and negative reports in your official records. **If you are having difficulty in this course, PLEASE just ask for help instead of sacrificing your future.**

Teamwork Policy: You may **start** an assignment in a team. However, once you decide HOW to approach a problem, **you must then make all your own measurements and use your own wording** to interpret and express conclusions. Any assignments that appear identical will be awarded "zero" points and can lead to expulsion from the class and the University. At a minimum such violations of the Code will lead to an Academic Integrity investigation with the Dean of Students Office.

Absences: You are required to attend each class in accordance with University policy (<http://catalog.arizona.edu/2007-08/policies/classatten.htm>).

Holidays: All holidays <http://www.registrar.arizona.edu/religiousholidays/calendar.htm> observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion. All absences pre-approved by the Dean of Students will also be accepted.

Behavior: Dr. McCarthy promises to be respectful of all students. He hopes you will do the same as stated in the Student Code of Conduct (<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policiesandcodes/studentcodeofconduct>) and other University guidelines concerning disruptive (<http://policy.arizona.edu/disruptive-behavior-instructional>) and threatening (<http://policy.web.arizona.edu/threatening-behavior-students>) behavior.

Special accommodations: If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, please meet with Dr. McCarthy so that we can discuss ways of ensuring your full participation in the course. If you determine that disability-related accommodations are necessary, please register with Disability Resources (621-3268; <http://drc.arizona.edu>) and notify Dr. McCarthy of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

## V. Grading

Course Grade: The course grade will be calculated from the following categories with the indicated percentage weights.

Weekly homework (60%)

Participation: Attendance, quizzes, office hours, study sessions, etc. (20%)

Final exam or project (20%)

“Participation” includes attending class regularly, completing assignments, in-class quizzes, asking relevant questions during class, seeking help during study sessions and office hours, helping to lead discussions, etc.

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: A (90-100%); B (80-89%); C (70-79%); D (60-69%); E (<60%). Borderline grades, such as B+, will be rounded to the next letter grade only if the student has participated actively throughout the semester.

## **VI. Class Schedule**

Aug	28
Sep	4, 11, 18, 25
Oct	2, 9, 16, 23, 30
Nov	6, 13, 20,
Dec	4, 18 (possible final exam)