

## Summer camp season under way

6/21/13



Alfred University (AU) is hosting an overnight astronomy camp for high school students this week (June 23-27), one of the more popular summer programs offered to young students on campus during July. (Also welcoming student this week: ceramics and glass, creative writing, and equestrian residential campus, and the theater day camp.)

Astronomy activity convenes at the University&s Stull Observatory as the campus celebrates the 150th anniversary of its first observatory, opened in 1863.

During the co-ed, four-day, astronomy program, students entering grades 10-12 this fall attend classes taught by faculty whose many interests include variable stars, asteroid measurements, solar activity, computational physics, and fluid dynamics.

Camp Director and Professor of Physics David Toot says the camp explores concepts that range from basic topics such as learning how telescopes work and how to find things in the sky to sophisticated topics such as how to measure the brightness of objects, motions, relativity, and quantum mechanics.

"It&s a good exposure to the range of things we do in physics and astronomy to excite them about the field in general and Alfred University specifically," says Toot.

"We&ve had the camp here since 1998," says Melody McLay, director of summer school, summer programs and parent programs. "It is one of our most popular camps. Thirty-one of our (previous) astronomy campers have come to AU as freshmen over the past 10 years." McLay adds past students have also come from as far away as New Zealand and Korea.

"We normally have about 20-25 students in the camp each year," says McLay. "This year we are up to 32 and have added an additional faculty member to the camp staff to accommodate the increase."

That additional faculty member, Edgard Rivera-Valentin, a 2008 AU graduate and a postdoctoral research associate at Brown University, says AU exposed him to his first planetary science class with a mid-semester course titled Geology of Venus. He says he went on to take an honors course in planetary geology and worked with students and faculty

members to construct a planetary science minor.

Rivera-Valentin, who received his Ph.D. in space and planetary science from the University of Arkansas in 2012, participated in the summer astronomy camp as an aide and instructor while at AU. He says he&s looking forward to returning as an instructor this summer. His contributions will include courses on the geology and hydrological history of Mars, lunar science, and impact physics.

“These students are so excited to be here,” says Rivera-Valentin, recalling his previous campus work. “They have an inspiring thirst for knowledge and awe of science that reminds me why I do what I do.”