

PHYS 2021 Syllabus

The Solar System, 80424, 3 credits

Fall 2026

Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00AM – 12:15PM

Howey (School of Physics) Building S204

Instructor Information

Instructor	Email	Office Hours & Location
Dr. Paul Sell	psell3@gatech.edu but please use the Canvas Inbox	TBD in CCB 115 and by appointment
Teaching Assistant	Email	Office Hours & Location
TBD	TBD	TBD

General Course Information

Catalog/Course Description

This course covers Ancient and Renaissance astronomy, gravity, sky phenomena, telescopes, and the solar system.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

None

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to...

- ... demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, methodologies and theories used within astronomy.
- ... communicate astronomy knowledge, ideas, and reasoning clearly and effectively in written or oral.
- ... analyze astronomy information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives.
- ... explain more generally how science is done.

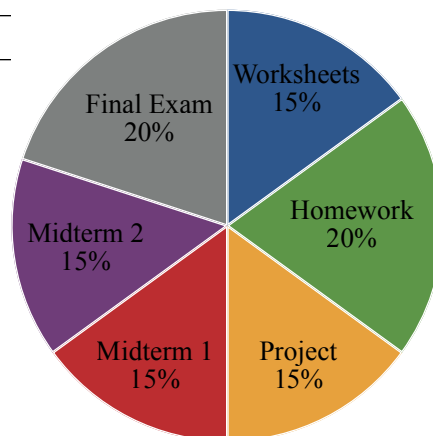
Through class activities (lectures, demos, class discussions, assignments, etc.), you will engage in the course material.

Personally, I hope that you develop an excitement about astronomy for a lifetime!

Course Requirements & Grading

Each of the components of class described above will be assigned the following weights to determine your final score:

Worksheets:	15%	Midterm Exams:	2×15%
Homework:	20%	Final Exam:	20%
Class Project:	15%		



Description of Graded Components

Worksheets: Worksheets will be assigned during many classes to give you an opportunity to review the material and give the instructor the opportunity to check your comprehension of the material. Worksheets typically will be due at the end of the class they are assigned and are not accepted late. Class participation is expected and will greatly help you complete this work.

The number and frequency of these assignments is at the discretion of the instructor. The lowest few (depending on the total number given) will be dropped or counted as extra credit for your final grade; this action will be taken into account in the calculation of the final grade and never show up on Canvas. Given this lenient policy, please do not contact the instructor to make up this work unless you have a serious ongoing problem, which should be an excused absence consistent with university policy: <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>

Homework: Homework will be assigned throughout the semester through Mastering Astronomy. The assignment with the lowest grade will be dropped. Late homework will be penalized 10% per day.

Class Project: A handout and discussion to explain the class project will be provided at the appropriate time. All guidelines including due dates will be provided in the handout.

Exams: There will be three exams given over the course of the semester: two midterm exams and a final exam. The midterm exams will cover material in each of the first and second thirds of the course and the final exam will be cumulative. All exams will include material from lecture and the book, though students should use the lectures as a study outline. Bring a working scientific calculator without memory capability, at least two pencils (with erasers), and your ID with you to all exams.

Extra Credit: A handout and discussion to explain the extra credit options will be provided early in the semester. All guidelines including due dates will be provided in the handout.

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

A: 90-100% B: 80-89% C: 70-79% D: 60-69% F: 0-59%

Course Materials

Course Text

You must purchase the required e-text with access to Mastering Astronomy: *The Cosmic Perspective*, 10th edition, by Bennet, Donahue, Schneider, Voit. To do this and make sure you receive a proper access code, please purchase it through the GA Tech Barnes and Noble Bookstore. There are two options: 18-week (ISBN: 9780135582855; commonly recommended) or 24 month (ISBN: 9780135582862; only recommended if you know you will also enroll in PHYS 2022 in the next semester).

Course Website and Other Classroom Management Tools

Canvas and Mastering Astronomy

Course Policies, Expectations, & Guidelines

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. [Review Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on an exam or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

See also statement regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) below.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Attendance and/or Participation

Attendance will be tracked through worksheets (see this graded category above). Importantly note that earning an A final grade is impossible if you never attend class except for exams.

Collaboration & Group Work

Generally, I expect students to complete their own work, following the university's Honor Code. However, working in groups is often encouraged for the worksheets, although if you do, discuss the problem/solution and then write your own answers without looking at the other students' paper.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Please see the description of graded components section above regarding the late policies for assignments in each category. Especially if you will miss an exam, you must contact me ASAP so that we can make special arrangements. Excused absences are consistent with university policy: <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>

Inclement Weather and Digital Learning Days

If the campus is shut down, please follow the instructions posted on Canvas regarding the plan for that class.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Students who do well in this class will not be distracted by technology. Please put away your phone, tablet, laptop, etc. unless you are using them to take notes. Please stay focused on the class lecture and discussion and refrain from using social media apps.

Additional Course Policies

No student is allowed to use any AI tools (e.g., including Grammarly) to assist with any assignments in this course. Doing so will be considered a violation of the student honor code. I want to see your own work.

Campus Resources for Students

Undergraduate Student Academic Success Resources: A list of resources for undergraduate students' academic success and information about advising can be found at [Success at Tech](#).

1:1 Tutoring: Students looking for additional assistance outside of the classroom are advised to consider working with a peer tutor through Knack. Georgia Institute of Technology has partnered with Knack to provide students with access to verified peer tutors who have previously aced this course. To view available tutors, visit gatech.joinknack.com and sign in with your student account.

Student Well-Being: At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A comprehensive list of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being: [student-resource-guide \(gatech.edu\)](http://student-resource-guide.gatech.edu)