Cosmic Connections: An Introduction to Astronomy and Maine's Magnificent Night Skies.

Astronomy Friends,

Hello, my name is Russ Pinizzotto and I'm the instructor for the Midcoast Senior College course *Cosmic Connections: An Introduction to Astronomy and Maine's Magnificent Night Skies.*

I'm both honored and amazed that the course reached the enrollment limit of 30 several weeks ago. Teaching a class on Zoom with this many students can be a challenge. As you already heard from Harry, there are several Zoom practices that we should all follow so the classes go smoothly. Probably the most important point is to make sure your audio is muted so that we all can't hear what's going on in your background.

I encourage asking questions, and also leave time for comments and testimonials. When you want to be heard, certainly take yourself off mute! This is done most efficiently by holding down the space bar. When the space bar is depressed, you are no longer muted and everyone can hear you. Releasing the space bar puts you back into mute. Getting used to using the space bar this way means you don't have to remember to turn your mute button on and off. I think several of you are pilots. The space bar acts like the push-to-talk button on the control stick.

What are questions, comments, and testimonials?

Questions - you're puzzled and would like to get an answer. Example - Why is Madison, Maine brighter than Bangor when seen from space when it only has a population of about 4,000?

Comments - you have something relevant to say and want the whole class to hear it. A comment means that anyone else in the class can comment back. Example - I think Pluto should be a planet. Don't you?

Testimonials - you have something that you really need to say that doesn't require an answer or invites commentary. Example - I just had an existential experience thinking about how small a human is compared to the size of the Universe! (A student in my class at Simmons University actually said this.)

I've attached a ***proposed*** syllabus for the course. It can change at any time based on our experiences as we move through the course. It can also change if something astronomically amazing happens over the next nine weeks. For example, maybe object 4I, yet to be discovered, really is from an alien civilization!

Most astronomy courses that try to cover as much material as in the course syllabus are either one semester long (45 hours) or one semester for the solar system (45 hours) plus a second semester for the rest (another 45 hours). For example, this past Fall there was an MSC course that was focused just on the planet Mars. Covering everything in the syllabus in 16 hours means we will be moving along at a fairly rapid pace. That means that you'll probably have lots of questions, which is great! Don't be afraid to ask anything at all. The syllabus can and probably

will be changed as we go along. It's more important that we learn something than covering a somewhat arbitrary list of topics.

While we won't be using a specific textbook, I have recommended the book *Astronomy: A Self-Teaching Guide,* Eight Edition, by Dinah L. Moche that you can use to fill in any gaps. Unfortunately, Dr. Moche passed away in 2018. Dr. Moche worked for many years as a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Queensborough Community College and the City University of New York (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinah_L._Moché).

We will also be using the planetarium program *SkySafari* (https://skysafariastronomy.com). It currently is in Version 8 for iOS and Version 7 for Android. I use an older MacBook Pro for class and a newer iPad and newer iPhone when out in the field. The version on my Mac is Version 6 Pro, so there may be some slight differences in what you see in class and what is on your device, but they shouldn't be significant. (The cpu chip in my MacBook is incompatible with the later versions.) SkySafari was chosen based on our experiences in my Fall class about binocular astronomy. While the planetarium program *Stellarium* is free, SkySafari seemed much easier to use.

We'll briefly talk about the planisphere in the first class, but buying one is optional.

I'm often asked about how to get started observing and my answer is - use binoculars! Observing isn't required for the class, so you don't need binoculars or a telescope.

I'm looking forward to meeting all of you (and re-meeting some of you) next Tuesday morning.

As a reminder, here's the Zoom link
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://maine.zoom.us/j/84333945421?pwd%3DEhJZLLA50n5jOwhppe37V6TOynw2Rc.1&sa=D&source=calendar&usd=2&usg=AOvVaw0_RyNRbazvNI6xsNyeGTmy

I'll be posting a lot of more info on our class website, and will send you that address ASAP.

Clear Skies,
Russ

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