

Statement of need for a permanent part-time technician for Astronomy.

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The Physics-Astronomy department at Canada College offers its classes that use a large variety of equipment, some of them highly specialized. These are meant to offer students of any background the same, or at least similar experience as our sister colleges do, and the universities many of these students aspire to transfer to.

Throughout the last decade the department relied mostly on its own faculty to set up and handle this equipment, burdening us with extra setup and cleanup time that are unnecessary busy work, better spent on responding to students directly.

Even as we "shared" laboratory technicians in the past with Chemistry, the time from them we were able to secure was minimal. This is understandable because the staffing on that department's end was also stressed to the limit, and we wholly support their efforts to be allowed to recruit new faculty and support staff.

In Astronomy specifically there is currently one faculty employee (Elteto) qualified, experienced, and with access to the special telescope equipment of our Observatory (B24, operational since 2019). This creates a bottleneck in trying to simultaneously deliver instruction to our students, while handling any glitches/breakdowns of equipment. Over time these glitches (see example observatory report below) will result in expensive replacement requests that could have been prevented by maintenance by a qualified technician.

The faculty always emphasized instruction to the students over maintenance of this equipment, but over time, and with increased use both by us at Cañada, and due to our building collaboration with Skyline, this became unsustainable.

Astronomy got a brief reprieve in the 23-24 academic year, with a student assistant (Chanel Meanor), on a temporary appointment, with the enthusiasm to get trained on operating the telescopes, and start analyzing their problems. After much training, this student regularly contributed to operating telescopes during observation nights (approx. 2 hours a week at the observatory), and was actively researching what can be done to fix problems with the telescopes. This allowed the faculty to focus on delivering academic instruction to our students during those nights, instead of spending half the night figuring out how to operate the telescopes around glitches. Unfortunately, the funding for her appointment ran out, her position was not renewed, and since then the bottleneck on the faculty resumed.

Temporary appointments are a temporary fix. If we want to keep up with the increased demand on the observatory, without interruptions by broken equipment, and to deliver equitable

instruction to our students, Astronomy needs dedicated hours from a qualified, permanent technician to maintain its current equipment, and to support the growing collaboration with Skyline College as well.

Example observation night report:

(Sandra and Dorothea are our 14" aperture telescopes. Mayra Lopez-Thibodeaux is faculty from Skyline College, still in training at our observatory, providing primarily instructional support for her students).

Oct. 4, 2024, Friday.

Canada College Observatory.

Weather condition: Clear skies, light clouds by about 8:45PM.

Arrival time: 7:15PM.

Observatory staff: Elteto, Lopez-Thibodeaux.

Student/guest attendance: 5 (4 ASTR 101 from Canada, +1 guest).

Setup start approx. 7:15PM.

Observed objects: Saturn, Mizar&Alcor, M13, M8, M57, M31, Caldwell 14 (after students left).

Comments/problems: after days of very hot weather, Sandra's elevation problem was worse than ever. After twice being tens of degrees off from Altair, she behaved better for Arcturus for alignment, but consistently she was way off. Her clicking sound on the down button was worse than ever.

Dorothea behaved as usual... Still confused as to what's up in the sky, and yet her alignment, and then finding objects (the ones we could have her to go to) were superb.

Close down approx. 9:30PM (students left a little after 9PM).

Thank you!

-Attila Elteto

Physics-Astronomy

Cañada College