

Astronomy 392J- Astronomical Instrumentation

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Introduction

This course teaches the fundamentals of the design and construction of experimental apparatus using astronomical instruments as the model for the process. We will cover key aspects of some of the most important topics in the field: optics and optical design, mechanical design and machining, electronics design and fabrication, real-time computer control, project planning, and performance analysis. Since we cannot teach you everything you need to know in a single semester, we will try to equip you with enough background to be able to continue learning on your own.

Overall Objectives

By the end of the course, you should have a concrete knowledge of many of the essentials of instrumentation. You should be able to plan out, schedule, and organize an instrumentation project and have some idea of what goes into a project budget. You should understand the steps involved in the mechanical, optical, software, and electronics design. You should have a good working knowledge of where to obtain information you need for your project in each of these areas. You should have concrete knowledge of computer aided design (CAD) programs for mechanical design (**Inventor**), electronics design and simulation (**Circuit Maker**), and optical design and simulation (**Zemax**). You will know how to do basic work with hand tools and with machine shop equipment. You will be able to assemble and understand some electronics circuits and be able to use laboratory equipment to test them. You will know the fundamentals of optical design and be able to design and build a grating spectrometer. You will be able to use **LabView** to interface an instrument to a computer.

How the Course Works

Philosophy

Astronomy 392J is a team-taught course where you are part of the team. There will be only occasional classes in a more conventional seminar/lecture format. Most of the time, the class will look more like an apprenticeship, an engineering project course, a physics lab course, or a bunch of curious people let loose in a room full of great toys. The learning in this course is centered around the activities of teams of 4-5 students. We have structured the activities to emphasize collaborative learning. As future teachers, researchers, and technical managers, you will need to know how to help colleagues, coworkers, employees, and students master complex material. You will start that process here. Your participation as a teacher/trainer in this course is as

important as your role as student/trainee. You will be encouraged to work together on almost everything. Although there will be some background reading to do, most of the learning will take place in the form of activities. Compared to the typical course, this course will involve much more "class" time and somewhat less time outside of class. We encourage people to make themselves available to their peers by spending some extra time in the lab (without food!). Feel free to hang out, but be ready to give up your space if a working group or team needs it for some reason.

As professor and TA for this course, we serve four purposes: (1) As facilitators. We are here to make sure you have all resources necessary to do the activities and learn the material. This includes making sure the software works, the hardware is there, the materials are clear etc. (2) As part of the coaching staff. Along with the other members of the Department and the Observatory who are making themselves available, we are a knowledge resource. You can come to us for advice, for direction to additional people or material, or for help when you are flat-out stuck. (3) As referees. When there are conflicts between or within teams and groups over resources or (heaven forbid!) personalities that cannot be resolved satisfactorily without our help, we are there to deal with them. (4) As evaluators. This is after all a course. You will get a grade (see below). We also take seriously the part of this role that involves evaluating the course materials and organization, as well as the performance of the outside instructors and even ourselves. You need to contribute to this effort by taking your own evaluating role seriously.

Texts

Building Scientific Apparatus by Moore *et al.* (3rd edition)

The Art of Electronics by Horowitz and Hill (2nd ed.)

Both of these are great references as well as textbooks. If you have any inkling at all that you may be around instrumentation in the future, **hang onto these books at the end of the semester!**

Suggested Labview References:

LabView for Everyone by Travis (2nd edition)

LabView Graphical Programming by Johnson & Jennings

Segments and Segment Groups

The curriculum for this class has been divided into four segments. Each segment covers an important aspect of instrument design and construction: mechanical design and fabrication, electronics and circuit design, optics and optical design, and computer interfacing and software design. The segments will consist of a reading assignment, a set of problems, some hands-on skill learning tasks and a laboratory exercise.

The class will be divided into **segment groups**. Each **group** will rotate through the segments in succession. **Groups** will have 3 weeks to complete each segment. You will do most of the activities as a group.

Projects and Project Teams

A major aspect of this course will be the use of what you are learning to design and construct a working instrument. The instrument project will consist of designing and building an optical spectrograph. This instrument will have a solid-state optical detector and operate under computer control. It should be able to take wavelength-calibrated spectra of bright emission-line sources (lamps).

You will carry out the project as a member of a **project team**. Each **team** will be responsible for planning, designing, and building its own instrument. The members of your **team** will all come from different **segment groups** so that your team quickly collects all of the skills needed to carry out the project.

Assignments and Deadlines

Each segment will have a reading assignment, a set of paper exercises, a piece of software to master, a practical exercise, and an evaluation/debrief. Because other **groups** will need access to the hardware, your **group** must complete each section within the allotted time. The evaluations should be done individually and handed in to the instructors. You should work out the paper exercises or problem sets on your own. You may then consult with your group about the answers. Once you are sure you know the answer, you must hand in your own writeup. Problem sets will be due at the end of each segment (note that, for the computer interfacing segment, you will need to demo your knowledge rather than do a problem set). Each project team will have a preliminary review of their design and a final review of the project. At the two reviews, each member of the team will be expected to be able to stand up and make any part of the presentation. At the preliminary review, approximately six weeks before the end of classes, each team member will have to turn in a written description of the instrument, how it will work, and how it will be built. This document should be about two pages long, plus figures.

Class Meetings

In order to transfer information between the **groups** and **teams** and between these entities and the instructors, to settle scheduling conflicts, and to provide an opportunity for making adjustments in the material, we will have at least a brief class meeting each MWF at 1:00. Once in a while, I will present a class lecture/activity on an instrumentation topic. The other time will be used for meetings of groups and teams, together with the Prof. or TA. Attendance at the meetings is a course requirement. Do not be late for class. We will notice.

Getting Help

(a) Your Segment or project group: You are all working together, so split up the learning task in a way that makes sense to you and then teach each other what you know.

(b) Your classmates: Many of you come into this with a great deal of knowledge and talent. Make it your business to find out which of your classmates is already an expert in something and tap into that expertise.

(c) The Prof and TA: Each of us will spend time in the laboratory outside of class time, randomizing our hours to try to cover all the times used by groups and teams. If you need to meet with us, have a member of your group arrange a time for one of us to be here when your group or team is. Personal problems of individual students can be handled in my office, by arrangement.

(d) Other experts: One advantage in being in a place where a lot of building is going on is that somebody usually knows the answer to your question. We will be calling on some of the local experts to share their expertise in certain areas and to serve on the design reviews for your projects. Sometimes, these folks can be helpful before you get to that stage by getting you started on something, giving you a reference, or telling you your idea won't work. These folks can be found on the 15th to 17th floors of RLM. Here is a partial list.

Optics: Phillip MacQueen, Gary Hill, John Lacy, Povilas Palunas.

Electronics: Phillip MacQueen, Joe Tufts

Computer Interfacing: Bill Spiesman, Chris Wilkinson

Mechanical Design: John Booth, Jimmy Wellborn, Pedro Segura, Gordon Wesley, George Barczak

(f) (Heaven Forbid!) A book. There are tons of books out there. Some of them are even helpful. Also, check out parts catalogs. They often have little tutorials in them. The parts themselves sometimes give you ideas. Individual segments will contain some specific references to relevant reading material.

Evaluation of Your Performance

We intend your grade in this course to reflect the amount of skill you acquire and the strength of your contribution to the efforts of your group to learn the material and your team to build the instrument. Items we will include in setting your grade are: (1) Attendance (including coming on time) (~15%) (2) Individual problem sets and group segment reports (~25%) (3) The completeness, thoughtfulness and insight displayed in your evaluations of the segments and the project (~10%) (4) Your writeup of the instrument for the preliminary review (~10%) (5) Your performance and that of your team at the preliminary review (~5%) (6) The level of mastery you display when you (individually and as a team) exhibit and demonstrate your instrument at the end of the course (~35%). To carry out this last point, during the last week of class, your team will demonstrate your instrument. Each of you will have a private discussion with the prof. and TA in which you explain the workings of the various elements of your system. Your evaluation on item (6) will depend equally on how well your team did on the project, and on how well you did yourself.