THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

Astronomy & Steward Observatory

May Newsletter

University of Arizona Astrophysicist Erika Hamden Named 2026 Guggenheim Fellow

This week, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation has named Erika Hamden, Associate Professor of Astronomy at the University of Arizona and Director of the Arizona Space Institute, a 2026 Guggenheim Fellow.

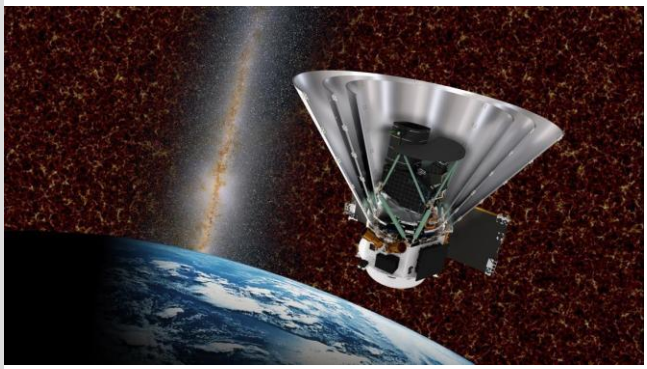
Learn More

Giant Magellan Telescope Consortium releases video of inaugural summit

On April 14, during International Dark Sky Week, scientists and engineers across the International Giant Magellan Telescope Consortium convened virtually for a 1-hour livestream offering a front-row view into the progress and future of one of the world's

most ambitious scientific projects: the Giant Magellan Telescope.

Watch a full recording of the summit here!



The Spectro-Photometer for the History of the Universe, Epoch of Reionization and Ices Explorer (SPHEREx) mission will provide an all-sky spectral survey.

NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory

Learn More

Turbocharging SPHEREx: How U of A Cosmologists Are Using AI to Unlock the Universe's Largest Galaxy Survey

Starting May 1st 2025, NASA's SPHEREx mission has been in low-earth orbit conducting the first ever all-sky infrared spectral survey. Over the course of 2 years, SPHEREx will eventually map the position and redshifts of ~450 million galaxies.

Among around 1000 individual quasars, there is on average only one double quasar. At the end of their development, the two spirally approach and merge with each other. They

What shines brighter than a quasar? Two quasars!

With the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA), a team led by astronomer Minghao Yue from the University of Arizona succeeded in confirming an extraordinary double system: instead of two stars, there are two closely adjacent quasars, the extremely luminous cores of active galaxies. The latter are about

leave an even more massive, single black hole (illustration).

to merge with each other and date from a time when the universe was just over a billion years old..Learn more

Learn More

Aspera NASA Space Telescope

Find out what is happening with this space mission that is currently scheduled to launch in January 2027. Newsletter

Learn More

Class of 2026: The Next Generation of Discovery

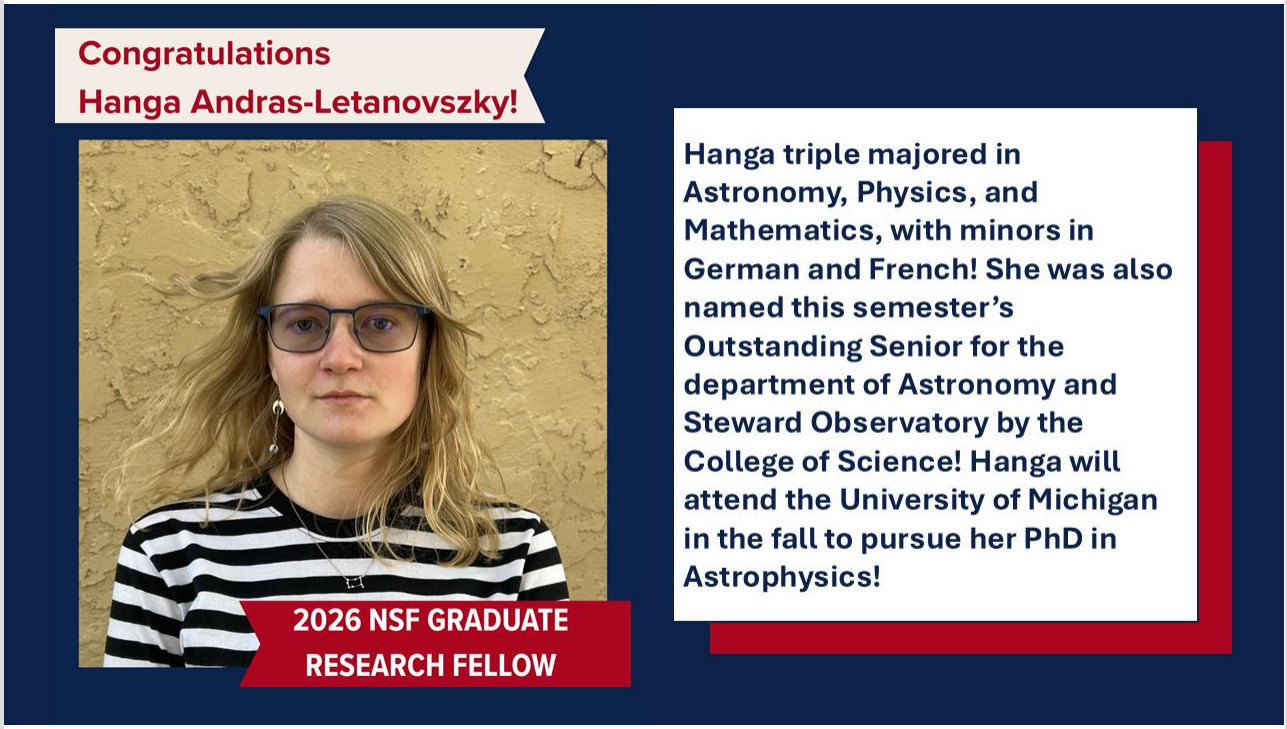
A Historic Milestone: Department of Astronomy Celebrates Its Largest Graduating Class Ever

This record-breaking class size is no accident. Over the past decade, the department has made deliberate, sustained changes to its undergraduate program to better support students from their first year through graduation. The result is visible in the caliber

and ambition of this year's graduating cohort.
Learn more

Learn More

Celebrating Outstanding Achievement



Congratulations Yang Sun!

2026 COLLEGE OF SCIENCE GRADUATE AWARD FOR SCHOLARSHIP

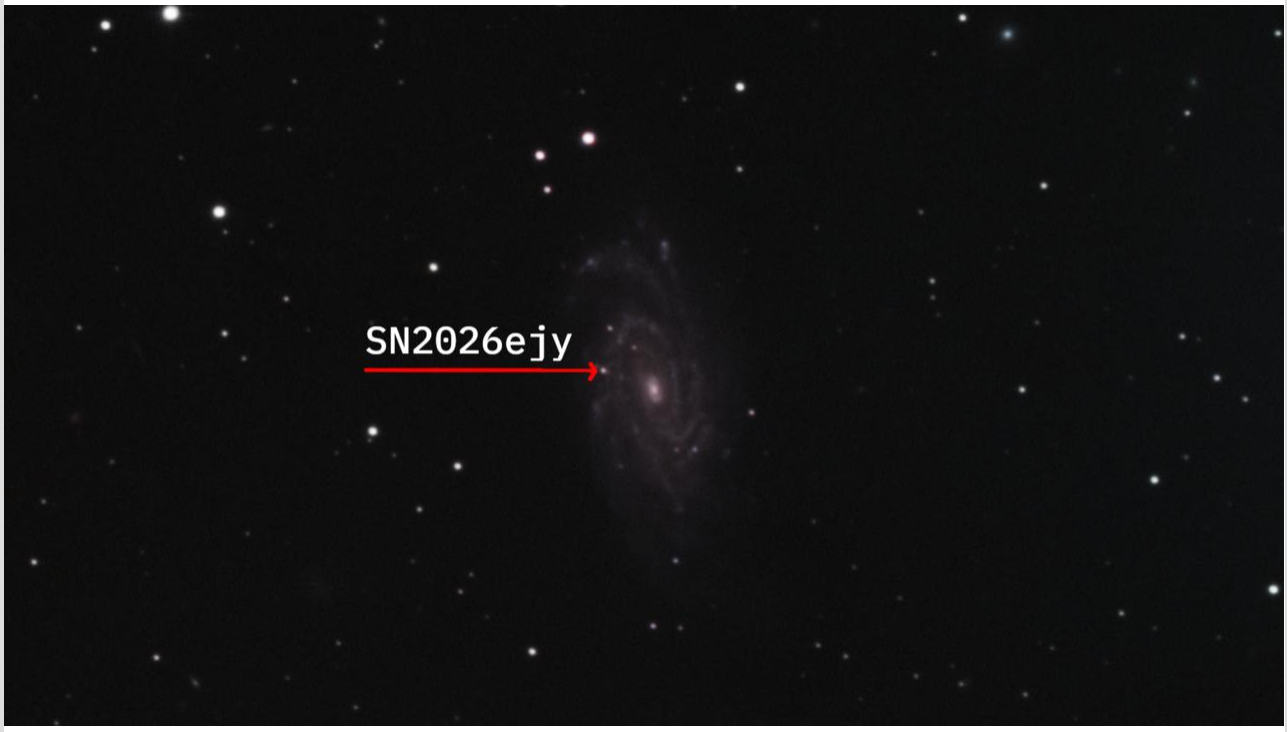
Yang has 43 papers published in or submitted to peer reviewed journals, including 7 first-author articles! Her research focuses on how supermassive black holes and galaxies grow together across cosmic time using JWST. She is most interested in when the first galaxies and black holes emerged and how the black holes impact the galaxies' evolution.

Congratulations Hayden Foote!

2026 COLLEGE OF SCIENCE GRADUATE AWARD FOR TEACHING

Hayden is the Graduate Student Coordinator for TIMESTEP's Astronomical Software Engineering Internship, teaching software engineering practices for astronomical research to help undergraduate students find jobs after graduating. He also served as a teaching assistant for the Theoretical Astrophysics (ASTR 400B) and Exploring our Universe (ASTR 170B) courses.

From Classroom to Cosmos: Hands-On Discovery, Real-World Experience



As we celebrate the close of the academic year, Steward Observatory is proud to highlight the incredible work of our students—where classroom learning meets real-time discovery.

Pictured here is **NGC 6070**, a galaxy in the constellation Serpens. Earlier this year, on February 25, 2026, a supernova—**SN 2026ejy**—was detected within this galaxy (circled in red), offering a rare opportunity to observe a transient cosmic event as it unfolds.

This image was captured by undergraduate Astronomy & Physics major **Chase McMahon** using the Mt. Lemmon SkyCenter Schulman 32-inch telescope as part of his Observational Astronomy research course and public outreach efforts.

What makes this moment especially meaningful is what followed. Less than a month after its discovery, SN 2026ejy became the focus of a student-led spectroscopy follow-up using the 90-inch Bok Telescope. Through this hands-on experience, students were able to analyze the supernova's properties and contribute to ongoing scientific understanding in real time.

Experiences like this exemplify the power of undergraduate research at Steward Observatory. Students don't just learn about astronomy—they actively participate in it, engaging with dynamic events like supernovae as they occur.

Flandrau Science Center & Planetarium New Exhibit

Mysteries of the Cosmos: Grand Opening!

A new interactive exhibit at the Flandrau Science Center & Planetarium explores astronomy, exoplanets, and one of humanity's most enduring questions: Are we alone in the universe?

Through hands-on activities and immersive displays, guests will encounter the science behind the search for life beyond Earth, highlighting real-world research from the University of Arizona and beyond.

Learn more

Public Evening Lecture Series will return in the Fall

In the meantime, take the opportunity to catch up on any missed lectures!

Previous Public Lecture Videos

Friends of Steward Observatory

Your generosity fuels discovery and inspires future astronomers!

🎓 **Steward Observatory: A Season of Discovery and Achievement**

As the academic year comes to a close, we celebrate a remarkable season at Steward Observatory—one defined not only by discovery, but by achievement.

May brings graduation, a time to recognize the dedication, curiosity, and perseverance of our students. While they prepare to take their next steps, the research and innovation that define our community continue to move forward.

🌱 **Where Curiosity Becomes Achievement**

In astronomy, every journey begins with a question. For our graduating students, those questions have led to hands-on research, new insights into distant galaxies, and meaningful contributions to our understanding of the universe. Their work reflects the spirit of exploration that defines Steward Observatory.

💐 A Community That Makes It Possible

Behind every graduate is a network of support. Your generosity helps provide scholarships, expand opportunities, and ensure students gain real-world research experience. Because of you, curiosity grows into accomplishment—and accomplishment into impact.

🎓 Celebrating What's Next

As we honor this year's graduates, we also look ahead. The discoveries they've helped advance—and the paths they now pursue—are just the beginning.

Here's to the Class of 2026, to bold exploration, and to a future shaped by discovery.

.**Learn more**

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For more information or questions

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