Welcome to the 4th annual Issue of equilibriu

I am often asked how physics is relevant in the modern day world. While physics may seem esoteric to some, the truth is that every aspect of our modern life relies on scientific underpinnings, and the physics of quantum mechanics and relativity have found their way into the use of our favourite gadgets like mobile phones and GPS systems.

Our department offers a very positive educational and research experience to its students. We offer small class sizes beginning with an enriched version of first year physics. We offer much support for internships and international exchange studies. Every upper year student is guaranteed at least one summer of paid internship. Western's modular system of courses also allows for creative interdisciplinary degrees than can enhance the marketability of graduates. Concurrent programs also exist that can pair up Engineering with Physics, or Physics and Business (HBA). In the current environment, students want to enhance their repertoire and credentials to gain an advantage—our modular system allows for this. Our graduate MSc and PhD Physics and Astronomy programs also allow for collaborative degrees with Environmental Science, Materials Science, Planetary Science, and Scientific Computing.

An extensive renovation to the main Physics and Astronomy Building ended in 2012. We have the most modern teaching and research facilities but ensconced within the graceful, charming, and beautiful campus of Western University. Give us a visit and find out for yourself!

Shantanu Basu, Chair

Highlights of 2013

* The Grand Re-Opening of the renovated Physics and Astronomy Building on 29th November took a significant amount of planning by many of our staff and faculty and was likely the largest event we’ve ever hosted.
  * Special guests included Provost Janice Deakin, Dean of Science Charmaine Dean, MPP Deb Matthews, and representatives of local companies that offer student internship opportunities.
* About 300 people packed into the Paul Davenport Theatre to hear Nobel Laureate Klaus von Klitzing deliver the Elizabeth Laird Memorial Lecture on 19th September.
* The International Conference on Nanomaterials, organized by Prof. Mahi Singh and Prof. Godfrey Gumbs of CUNY, took place in August 2013.

Looking ahead in 2014

* Be Stars Conference, organized by Profs. Aaron Sigut and Carol Jones, will take place in August 2014.
* We are proud to be hosting some ~100 astronomers for a major international review panel in March 2014.
Staff/Faculty Awards

At the Faculty of Science Faculty and Staff Recognition Lunch in December, Henry Leparskas was presented with a Science Award of Excellence. Henry has served Western for 29 years and plays an invaluable role in maintaining its computer systems, web, and social media presence, and in organizing many Department events.

Dr. Peter Brown was selected as the Faculty of Science’s Distinguished Research Professor for 2013-14. When announcing this prestigious award, Department Chair Shantanu Basu explained, “The DRP is awarded for significant one-time research opportunities. Peter is coordinating a worldwide effort amongst many consortia to analyze the recent meteor fireball over Chelyabinsk, Russia, and working with NASA, the European Space Agency, and other US government agencies.

Dr. Giovanni Fanchini has won The Petro-Canada Young Innovator Award for 2013-14 for Western University.

The announcement read, “We are pleased to announce that Prof. Giovanni Fanchini has received Western University’s Petro-Canada Young Innovator Award for 2013-2014. This award was established to recognize, promote and support outstanding new faculty researchers whose work is particularly innovative, impacts positively on the learning environment in the department in which they study, and has the potential to be of significance to society at large. The program is intended to help attract and retain bright young minds at Canadian Universities and to help researchers launch their scholarly careers and enable them to carry their research forward.”

Faculty Recruitment

Dr. Stan Metchev began his appointment as an Associate Professor in July and was nominated for a Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Extrasolar Planets.

Stan came to us from Stony Brook University, New York, where he had been an Assistant Professor since 2008. There he built a large and active astronomy research group and he continues to do the same here at Western. Stan’s research is the study of demographics and atmospheres (including clouds and weather phenomena) of extrasolar planets and brown dwarfs, as well as circumstellar debris disks, the extrasolar analogs of the solar system main asteroid belt and Kuiper belt.

Stan brings with him an established network of international collaborations, including at NASA JPL, the NASA Ames Research Center, University of Arizona, Max-Planck Institute for Astronomy Heidelberg in Germany, and the Universidad de Valparaiso in Chile. He currently leads the “Weather on Other Worlds” international collaboration, which was awarded at least 10% of all available time on the Spitzer Space Telescope in 2012 and 2013. Stan will take full advantage of Canada’s access to international telescope facilities, such as the Gemini, ALMA, and soon, the James Webb Space Telescope and Thirty Meter Telescope.

Stan’s appointment brings additional international visibility to the research program in the Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Centre for Planetary Science and Exploration, and strengthens our ties with NASA and other academic institutions in Ontario, Canada, and beyond.

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.
Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

Marie Curie

Astronomy compels the soul to look upwards and leads us from this world to another.”

Plato

“If quantum mechanics hasn’t profoundly shocked you, you haven’t understood it yet.”

... Niels Bohr
Stardust ...

Kingston telescope comes home

Harold R. Kingston's telescope is a piece of Canadian and Western history that has recently come home to London. Dr. Kingston brought the telescope with him from Manitoba when he joined Western as the Head of the Mathematics Department in 1921. He had a passion for astronomy and willingly shared it with others, helping to found the London Chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC). As a result of the public's new interest in Astronomy, the department's name was soon changed to Mathematics and Astronomy and remained so until 1959.

Upon Dr. Kingston's death in 1963, the telescope spent many years in the home of Kingston's son, John, in Washington. The Kingston's recently donated it to RASC in loving memory of their father and grandfather, but RASC felt that Western was a better, more permanent home for it, so currently it resides in our Boardroom. Pictured with it, at left, is RASC London Centre president Rick Saunders, who was instrumental in bringing the telescope here and in the production of the commemorative plaque that is now affixed to it.

“A good scientist is a person with original ideas.”

... Freeman Dyson

Honoring our Chairs

The International Astronomical Union recently named asteroids after the Chairs of the Departments of Physics and Astronomy, dating back to 1989.

In November, an asteroid naming ceremony was hosted by Prof. Paul Wiegert, who discovered the asteroids at the Canada France Hawaii Telescope in 2005. Attending the ceremony to receive commemorative plaques were (L to R) past Chairs David Gray, James Moorhead, and John de Bruyn, as well as current Chair Shantanu Basu.

Named previously for past chairs are Asteroids Wehlau, Moorcroft, Cottam, and Landstreet.

We as a department are very happy to recognize and celebrate the tireless work and excellent research of our departmental chairs throughout the years.

The Nobel Laureate

Dr. Klaus von Klitzing—winner of the 1985 Nobel Prize in Physics—absolutely packed the house in September with his 2013 Elizabeth Laird Lecture on his 1980 ground-breaking discovery, “The Quantum Hall Effect.” After his talk, he was surrounded by small groups as they marvelled at his Nobel Medal which he pulled from his jacket pocket.

He was greeted like a celebrity by some of the finest minds at Western. He was asked by one reporter, What's life like when you have a Nobel Prize? "People expect that I know everything," he said with a smile, "but it's not true!"

He entertained a full house with stories on “How to win a Nobel Prize.” His sage advice was “Don’t set out to win the prize. Choose to engage in the research you love then commit fully to it. Most Nobel winners found something that was not expected. It was not planned.”
Physics & Astronomy Building—the big reveal!!
... 29 November 2013 — Renovations Grand Opening

Donations gratefully accepted
The Department of Physics and Astronomy welcomes donations from alumni, friends, and well-wishers. To make a donation to the Department, please contact Paula Luchak (contact information below). Donations are tax deductible.

Alumni Relations and Development
Paula Luchak
Faculty of Science
Western University
WSC 107
London ON N6A 5B7
CANADA

Phone: 519-661-2111 ext. 86642
Email: paula.luchak@uwo.ca

Contact the Department
Please feel free to contact the Department by any of the means below:

By mail: Department of Physics and Astronomy
Western University
PAB 138
London ON N6A 3K7
CANADA

By phone: 519-661-2111 ext. 86438
By email: p-a.info@uwo.ca or Jodi@uwo.ca

Department Chair: Prof. Shantanu Basu
Assistant to the Chair: Jodi Guthrie
Visit us on the web: http://www.physics.uwo.ca/