

## ASTR 561/661 - Student Seminar

A professional development course designed to help graduate students improve their presentation skills through seminars on topics of interest to Astronomy students and faculty.

### Fall 2026/Spring 2027 Syllabus

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Office hours: In-person or zoom meetings available upon request.

Class times: Fridays 14:30-15:30. Location TBD. Zoom link to be announced by email.

### Course Description and Requirements

- A. Every registered student will present during the course one ~30-min seminar to their fellow students and interested Department members, typically on a scientific paper that they have researched. A chair-moderated Q&A discussion will follow each presentation.
- B. Every registered student will also chair one of the sessions during the year, and will submit to the course supervisors anonymous feedback about the presentations at least twice per term.
- C. This is a 1.5-unit pass/fail course which all Astronomy graduate students are expected to register for until they are granted credit, by either completing their degree (MSc students, ASTR 561), or by passing their Candidacy Examination (PhD students, ASTR 661).

### Schedule and Detailed Requirements

- 1. Registered students are expected to attend all seminars.
- 2. Students will be assigned a speaker slot and a chair slot in the course schedule at the beginning of the year, starting with all registered ASTR 661 students, followed by all ASTR 561 students, selected at random.
- 3. The speaker/chair master schedule will be posted on Brightspace at the beginning of the academic year. Students are allowed to exchange slots with another student, upon mutual consent. Any changes should be communicated promptly by both students to the course supervisors, so that the master schedule can be updated.
- 4. Students will have the option to deliver a practice talk to the course supervisor(s), on a voluntary basis.
- 5. Attending students are expected to submit feedback forms to the course supervisors, which will be used to provide anonymized feedback to the student delivering the seminar. A minimum of two (2) feedback forms per term will be required from each student.
- 6. Students will receive feedback on their presentation from the course supervisors, typically within a week of their seminar.
- 7. Failure to complete the course requirements over the year will result in a failing grade.

**Procedure if a Speaker or Chair becomes unavailable**

If a Speaker unexpectedly becomes unavailable (typically because of illness or some other unfortunate circumstance) students will proceed as follows:

A--Once a decision to postpone a seminar has been made (only in cases of force majeure, and after consultation with the course supervisors), the Chair will send out an email cancelling the scheduled talk.

B--The student postponing the event is responsible for deciding on a make-up date, in consultation with the Chair. Normally, this would be the following Friday, or the next available Friday that has not already been scheduled with a double talk. This should be done in the couple of days following the postponement, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

C--Once a new date has been agreed upon, the new date should be communicated to the course supervisors, so that the master schedule can be amended.

D--The Chair will be responsible for sending out a new round of emails announcing the new date for the talk.

If it is the Chair who needs to cancel, first reach out to other scheduled Chairs to ask to be substituted. If that works, both Chairs (old and new) should let the course supervisors know so that the master schedule can be amended. Paper Session will not be cancelled if a Chair unexpectedly becomes unavailable. If, after reasonable effort, no substitute Chair can be found, then one of the course supervisors will step in to chair the session. Hopefully this will only happen as a last recourse.

Please be aware that cancelling a talk puts an extra burden on the Chair, so it is important to ask for postponement only in case of emergency.