

Astronomy 3303A – Galaxies Course Outline

1. Course Information

Course Information

Astronomy 3303 – Galaxies

Fall 2026-2027

Physics and Astronomy Building Room 117; Tuesday 9:30-10:30am; Thursday 9:30-11:30am

List of Prerequisites

[Physics 2101A/B](#), ([Physics 2104A/B](#) or the former Physics 2102A/B).

Unless students have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from the Department of Physics and Astronomy to enroll in it, they may be removed and withdrawn from this course in accordance with university policy. This may be done after the add/drop deadline of the academic term, and the course will be marked as withdrawn (WDN) on their academic record. This decision may not be appealed.

2. Instructor Information

Instructors	Email	Office	Phone	Office Hours
Dr. Els Peeters	epeeters@uwo.ca	PAB 206	x 80973	Fri 11:00am-12:00pm (starting Sep 18)
TA Yashpranav Sairam	ysairam@uwo.ca			

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors. Office hours will be in-person unless otherwise arranged in advance.

3. Course Syllabus, Schedule, Delivery Mode

Course Meeting Times (in-person)

Physics and Astronomy Building Room 117; Tuesday 9:30-10:30am; Thursday 9:30-11:30am

Course Information

Introduction to galaxies, including the Milky Way. Galaxy components and their variation with location, shape, and age; the distribution of galaxies in space and time; interpretation of observational data to derive physical properties of galaxies.

Course Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students should have a basic understanding of the theory and observations that underpin current research in galaxies and galaxy evolution. More specifically, students should be able to:

- Explain quantitatively how the three-dimensional structure of the Milky Way, the Local Group, and the large-scale distribution of galaxies is measured, and the results of those measurements.
- Quantitatively describe the components that make up galaxies, explain how these components are studied and their relation to galaxy morphological type.
- Compute properties of galaxies by combining observational data with physical laws.
- Describe the statistical distributions of integrated galaxy properties in the universe and explain how these properties have changed over cosmic time.

Outline of Topics

1. Galaxies in the Local Universe
 - The Milky Way and its satellites
 - The Hubble Diagram
2. Galaxy Structure
 - morphology: (thin and thick) disk, bulge, halo
 - globular cluster systems
 - interstellar medium and star formation
 - light distribution
 - dynamics of stars, gas, dark matter (rotation and random motions)
 - nuclei
 - stellar populations
 - scaling relations (Tully-Fisher, fundamental plane)
3. Distance Scale
4. Galaxy Populations
 - giant galaxies: spirals and ellipticals
 - dwarf ellipticals, dwarf spheroidals, dwarf irregulars
 - properties and environmental dependencies
5. Galaxy Environments
 - field
 - groups
 - clusters
 - large scale structure
6. Galaxy Evolution
 - changes with cosmic time
 - the active galactic nuclei phase
 - mergers

A detailed syllabus will be posted to the course Brightspace site. Course content may be adjusted over the course of the semester.

Key Sessional Dates:

Classes begin: September 9, 2026

Fall Reading Week: October 10 – 18, 2026

Classes end: December 9, 2026

Exam period: December 11 – 22, 2026

4. Course Materials

Textbook and Other Learning Materials

- **Required textbook:** Sparke & Gallagher, *Galaxies in the Universe, An Introduction*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press. **The textbook costs** 102\$ (ebook) or 125.45\$ (hard copy)

[https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2026A&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/AST3303A]

You may use either the hard copy or online version.

- **Students are welcome to purchase second-hand editions of this textbook.**

As needed, additional reading materials will be posted to the course website.

All course material will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL Brightspace site regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL Brightspace site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Calculator

A basic, non-programmable, scientific calculator (e.g. the Sharp EL-510RB calculator used for first year physics courses) is allowed during the midterm and the final exam. Cost: 9.99\$ (Staples, Sep 7, 2026)

Gradescope

Assignments will be submitted to Gradescope, accessible from the course Brightspace site. Gradescope accepts pdfs, scans or photos of handwritten assignment pages. These will be accessed by the TA to grade, and marks and feedback will be returned to the student via Gradescope.

5. Methods of Evaluation

Grading Scheme and Assessment Dates

The overall course grade will be calculated as listed below:

Assignments (best 3 out of 4)	35%
Midterm Test (Oct 29)	30%
Final Exam (cumulative)	35%

Please note: The Department of Physics and Astronomy may, in exceptional cases, adjust the final course marks in order to conform to Departmental policy.

Tentative due dates of Assignments:

Sep 29, Oct 20, Nov 17, Dec 1

Essential Learning Requirements

Even when Academic Consideration is granted for missed coursework, the following are essential to earn a passing grade in this course:

- a minimum weighted average on the midterm test and final exam of 50% to ensure that students demonstrate sufficient mastery of the learning outcomes

When a student has not demonstrated proficiency in an essential learning requirement listed above, and when the shortfall results from a granted Academic Consideration, they will be withdrawn (WDN) from the course. The student may appeal to the Associate Dean (Academic) for reinstatement with an Incomplete (INC) standing. Where an appeal for INC is granted, their maximum course load may be reduced during the term in which they complete the outstanding course requirements.

Information about Missed Coursework

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs*, posted on the Academic Calendar:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf,

This policy does not apply to requests for Academic Consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage: https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/. All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

Midterms and Tests

This course has 1 midterm test(s)/term test(s) and a **cumulative** final exam. There is no makeup test for a missed midterm. If a student misses a midterm, its weight will shift automatically to their final exam grade. If their final exam grade is higher than their midterm grade, their final exam grade will replace the midterm's weight in their overall grade. They do not need to request Academic Consideration for a missed midterm; the reweighting will be done automatically.

The only exception is an early sitting, offered solely for a university-sanctioned schedule conflict (e.g., conflict of two midterms, Varsity competitions) or a religious accommodation that prevents a student from writing the midterm at its scheduled time. If a student requires this accommodation, they must notify their instructor in writing no later than one week before the test. No other circumstance, including illness, qualifies for an early sitting or makeup; these are addressed through the automatic reweighting described above.

Assignments

This course has 4 assignments. Students are expected to complete 3 of 4 to receive full credit for this component. If they miss up to 1 of these, they do not need to request Academic Consideration; the missing item(s) will not count against them, and their grade for this component will be calculated from their best 3 submissions.

If a student completes fewer than 3 of the total, the missing items will be recorded as a zero and included in their grade for this component. They are encouraged to submit all work, even if

incomplete, since a partial mark is always better than a zero. If their final exam grade is higher than their grade on this component, their final exam grade will replace it.

Deadlines: The 48-Hour No-Late-Penalty Period

All take-home assignments with a stated due date include an automatic 48-hour period after the deadline during which students may still submit without a late penalty. For example, if an assignment is due on November 5, they may submit it until November 7 without penalty. After this 48-hour period, no further submissions will be accepted, and students do not need to request Academic Consideration for a missed deadline; their grade for this component will be calculated as described above.

Special Examination

Per university policy, Academic Consideration requests with supporting documentation are required for the final examinations scheduled during official examination periods by the Registrar's Office.

If the student has been approved by the Academic Advising Office to write a Special Examination (SPC) and the final exam is their only outstanding course component, an SPC will be assigned to them and scheduled by the instructor per university policy.

If the student misses their SPC exam and is approved for Academic Consideration, they will be withdrawn from the course without academic penalty. If they experienced extenuating circumstances such as prolonged illness, they may appeal to the Associate Dean (Academic), on a case-by-case basis, for the opportunity to write the final exam the next time the course is offered. An outstanding SPC will reduce their course load for the term in which the exam is deferred, as outlined in the [Definitions of Types of Examinations](#) policy.

If the student misses their SPC exam and Academic Consideration is not approved, or was not requested, they will receive a grade of zero on the exam.

6. Additional Statements

6.1 Religious Accommodation

When a recognized religious holiday either requires a student to be absent from the University, or requires or prohibits an activity that makes it impossible for them to complete an academic requirement scheduled that day, they are entitled to accommodation. No student will be penalized for an absence for religious reasons, and an alternative means of satisfying the requirement will be arranged. This accommodation is provided in accordance with the University's policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf

The student should submit their requests through the Student Absence Portal (SAP), identifying the conflict and the specific course component(s) affected (e.g., test, midterm, exam).

Midterms and Tests: If a religious observance conflicts with a midterm test, they must submit their request no later than **one week** before the test. Their instructor will arrange an early sitting of the test. As set out above, no makeup test is offered for any other reason; this early sitting is available specifically for this accommodation.

Final Examinations: If a religious observance conflicts with the final exam, the student must submit their request no later than **two weeks** before the exam. Their instructor will arrange a Special Examination to take place no later than one month after the end of the examination period.

Students are responsible for finding out what was covered in any class they miss due to a religious observance, and for taking the appropriate steps to keep up with the course.

If a suitable arrangement cannot be reached between a student and their instructor, they should consult the Undergraduate Chair of the department offering the course, and if necessary, the Associate Dean (Academic) of the Faculty of Science.

For a list of recognized religious observances, please visit the calendars posted on the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion website - <https://www.edi.uwo.ca> (About Us – Resources – Additional Resources – Calendars).

6.2 Academic Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf.

6.3 General Academic Policies

The website for Registrar Services is <https://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>.

Use of @uwo.ca email: In accordance with policy, https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf, the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university email address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that emails received from the University at their official university address are attended to in a timely manner.

Requests for Relief (formally known as “appeals”)

Policy on Request for Relief from Academic Decision:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/requests_for_relief_from_academic_decisions.pdf

Procedures on Request for Relief from Academic Decision (Undergraduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf

6.4 Scholastic Offences

Policy on Scholastic Offences:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

Procedures on Scholastic Offences (Undergraduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf

Use of Electronic Devices During Assessments

In courses offered by the Faculty of Science, the **possession** of unauthorized electronic devices during any in-person assessment (such as tests, midterms, and final examinations) is strictly prohibited. This

includes, but is not limited to: mobile phones, smart watches, smart glasses, hidden cameras and wireless earbuds.

Unless explicitly stated otherwise in advance by the instructor, the presence of any such device at a student's desk, on their person, or within reach during an assessment will be treated as a scholastic offence, **even if the device is not in use**.

Effective September 2026, the typical penalty for this offence is a failing grade in the course AND a 12-month prohibition on retaking the course.

Only devices expressly permitted by the instructor (e.g., non-programmable calculators) may be brought into the assessment room. It is their responsibility to review and comply with these expectations.

Use of Generative AI Tools

Unless otherwise stated, the use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, or similar platforms) is **not permitted** in the completion of any course assessments, including but not limited to: assignments, lab reports, presentations, tests, and final examinations.

Using such tools for content generation, code writing, problem solving, translation, or summarization—when not explicitly allowed—will be treated as a **scholastic offence**.

If the use of generative AI is permitted for a particular assessment, the conditions of use will be specified by the instructor in advance. If no such permission is granted, students must assume that use is prohibited. It is the student's responsibility to seek clarification before using any AI tools in academic work.

Use of Software for Assessments

Gradescope

Assignments will be submitted to Gradescope, accessible from the course Brightspace site. Gradescope accepts pdfs, scans or photos of handwritten assignment pages. These will be accessed by the TA to grade, and marks and feedback will be returned to the student via Gradescope.

6.5 Support Services

Academic Advising. Please visit the Science & Basic Medical Sciences Academic Advising webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, requests for relief, exam conflicts, and many other academic-related matters: <https://www.uwo.ca/sci/advising/>.

Mental Health Support. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence. Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If a student has experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), they can find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, at:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Accessibility for Coursework. A student may contact the course instructor if they require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to them. If they have any questions regarding accommodations, they may also contact Accessible Education at http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Learning Development and Success. Learning-skills counsellors at Learning Development and Success (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help students improve their learning skills. The facility offers strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

Student Councils.

Student-run support services are offered by the University Students' Council (<https://westernusc.ca>) and the Science Students' Council (<https://www.westernssc.ca>).