Careers in Astronomy

A discussion, not really a lecture, about what career paths might be available to people really interested in astronomy.

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Why study astronomy?
Why study astronomy?

Why NOT study astronomy if you really enjoy it?
Typical academic faculty career path

• Bachelor’s degree in astronomy, physics, geology or related field (4 yrs)

• Ph.D. degree in astronomy, astrophysics, physics, geology, space science or related field (4-6 years)

• Postdoctoral fellowship (2-3 years; sometimes more than one)

• Assistant professor, untenures (5-6 years)

• Associate professor, tenured (5+ years)

• Full professor, tenured (the rest)
To grad school or not to grad school: is that the question?

• Most graduate students in physical sciences are supported on TA-ships, GRA-ships or fellowships for 12 months/year.

• Graduate courses are higher level versions of undergraduate courses; they are not easy.

• Graduate research is hard work, sometimes fun, more often frustrating (that is the nature of research).

• But, most graduate students are well-fed and adequately housed and dressed. Many have cars, big screen tv’s etc.

• So, it really depends on your personal goals and motivation!
Where AAS Members Work

Source: K. Marvel, AAS
Career Services

Job Profiles from the AAS Newsletter archives:

- Preparing for the College Teaching Job Market by Luke Keller
- Succeeding in a Large Research Collaboration by Andy Howell
- Balancing Research and Service at NOAO by Knut Olsen
- Working at a Soft-Money Institute by Barb Whitney
- Back to School: A Ph.D. Enters the Classroom by Joshua Roth
- Jobs in Industry by Peter Williams
- Science Communication as a Press Officer by Christine Pulliam
- Bush-Whacking a Career Trail by Blake Bullock
- Astronomers Working in Public Outreach by Liam McDaid
- Beyond Ivory Towers by Leila Belkora

About

The AAS offers several career resources to our members, including the monthly Job Register. The AAS Committee on Employment serves as an advisory body to the AAS to provide input and
Career paths of Astronomers

• Following in the footsteps of your PhD adviser
• Working on the staff of a national observatory in a support staff position
• Working as a “soft money” researcher
• Federal\agency program manager (NSF, NASA, NRC)
• Teaching at a principally-undergraduate college
• Teaching in the K-12 arena
• Teaching in the (new) distance-learning arena
• Public outreach (museums, tv)
• Journalism/science communications/press officer
• Working in industry/private sector
  • Aerospace industry
  • Financial services
  • Management consultant
  • Computer graphics/visualization