

Winter 2010

ILEAD course: "The Night Sky and You"

Wednesdays, Jan. 13 to Feb. 3, 12 noon at the D.O.C. House

Bob Mead email: [claire.mead@alumni.duke.edu](mailto:claire.mead@alumni.duke.edu)

### Course Introductory Letter

Welcome. I'm so pleased that there are adults that have shown this particular interest in learning more about a resource that is free to all of us – the starry heavens. As promised in the course description and evidenced in the syllabus, this course will survey many facets of astronomy. My focus as instructor will be to convey an understanding of the concepts and not just a myriad of names, facts and terms. Here I will elaborate on a few of the course highlights. My content can be adjusted according to your special interests. Being a hobbyist and not a professional, I will present informally.

After introductions, the first session will be an active one in which we construct some of the visuals that will help us see the workings of the Sun and Moon, the planets, the seasons and how these orient with key constellations. Some of these aids you will be able to keep. Others will be fixtures that we can refer to when puzzling out the concepts.

In Class 2, we will focus on the history and cultural development of astronomy from the classical era to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You will be asked to research a topic for a short report to be given in Class 3 or 4. You may be asked to present the mythologies and a list of important features within a given constellation. Your text (Audubon Guide) is well suited for this research and the stories tend to breath life into the science. Other types of topics can be choices too. Class 3 will present some hands-on work with equipment and accessories. We will share suggestions about beginning a hobby.

In class 4, I hope to send you off with an enthusiasm for doing more observing on your own. You will learn how to read monthly sky maps and a planisphere (a map that adjusts to all seasons). We will finish by sharing the fruits of our research: the stories and the dazzling features of the major constellations, and the details of other chosen topics.

Our course will focus on the sky objects in season, leaving a large bit of the astronomical year for you to observe on your own. In the furtherance of Lifelong Education, we will establish two resources that can grow with your participation.

1. An email group that can share ideas for the course and beyond. If you are willing to share your email address, we can take advantage of the ideas among us. Please email me at the above if you would like to take part.
2. A website of resources in which we can all share our findings and receive "midweek" alerts to sky happenings. The Winter 2009 class initiated and made good use of this site at

<http://www.unclebobpuzzles.com/ILEADsky/SkyandYouMenu.html>

I look forward to meeting and working with you.

Bob