



PMSA Astronomers

(“...we do it in the dark!”)



PMSA Astronomers is a club devoted to all things bigger than this speck of dust we live on. We seek to understand the universe around us, while seeing as much of it as possible with our own eyes.

PMSA Astronomers meets on Tuesday mornings in room 409, usually from 6:45 am to 7:30 am. When the sky is calling, we will meet right on the lawn in front of the south entrance, with telescopes.

PMSA Astronomers goes to where the universe is. We take frequent observing trips to both nearby and favorite remote (“dark sky”) locations, and we keep aware of local events and occasional sky spectaculars.

PMSA Astronomers has history. We’re a new club, but we inherit a legacy of astronomy going back to the dawn of civilization. Visiting the historic observatory at Northwestern University and learning about Chicago’s 150 years of astronomical history is a club tradition.

PMSA Astronomers has friends! Community amateur astronomers and Cernan planetarium staff have generously volunteered their time, their expertise, and their amazing high-end amateur telescopes, to help us learn the sky they know, and the lifelong hobby they love.

PMSA Astronomers owns some very nice equipment of its own, and would like to teach you how to care for and use fine optical instruments.

PMSA Astronomers needs you, and your parents. We have some exciting trips planned for this year, but they all depend on your participation, and some will require parent chaperones. See the back of this flyer for details.



In order to make the 2021–22 year a success for our club, we are hoping to repeat some of our best field trips from last year, and add some exciting new ones. We are an active, hands-on, observation oriented club; and the things we observe are mostly seen in the dark (which means at night, or sometimes in the very early morning), and often in the really dark (which means far from the lights of Chicago).

As an educator, a Boy Scout leader, and a parent, our sponsor Dr. Burton is acutely aware of the special challenges that come with safely planning after-hours and remote student trips. We will rigorously maintain a two-deep leadership rule, meaning that two adults will lead each trip (parents are always welcome, and are eagerly sought as chaperones whenever available) and that no child will ever be alone with one adult. We will also require that every participating student have a parent individually agree to have his/her child take part in nighttime and remote activities: this requires an in-person or phone meeting with Dr. Burton at the beginning of the year in addition to regular permission slips for each trip. If you are coming to a back-to-school night, come visit in room 409 and we can discuss any concerns.

One special concern is weather. We will avoid extremely cold (sub-freezing) observing, but we may be outdoors for up to two hours in chilly night weather. Participants (both students and parents) are responsible for dressing warmly and appropriately. Also, most field trips are subject to weather cancellation and will have fallback dates. School policy allows a single field trip permission slip to cover both the intended date and the fallback dates; be advised that any observing trip may be rescheduled on short notice.

Here is a list of the trips we have taken in past years, with particular concerns. Please consider these descriptions when granting permission for your child to attend. **All trips in 2021–22 will be subject to COVID–19 safety guidelines!**

- Room 409 or south lawn: any Tuesday morning. View bright objects in the dawn sky (moon, planets, Pleiades star cluster) with eye, binoculars, or telescope. Also, safely filtered daytime observation of sunspots in white light or hydrogen alpha, under Dr. Burton's close supervision. No permission slip required.
- Monthly Cernan space center program, on Triton campus. 2nd Saturday of each month, 7 pm to 8:30 pm for lecture, followed by telescope viewing if skies are clear. Community event, parent dropoff/pickup (Dr. Burton will attend, but this is not a PMSA supervised event). No permission slip.
- Visit to Adler Planetarium, downtown. Planned for Columbus Day, a school holiday and a free day at the planetarium. Parent dropoff/pickup; not a PMSA event. No permission slip.
- Tour of Dearborn historic observatory, on Northwestern campus. Annual club tradition, planned for midwinter Friday night. Date will be reserved months in advance, and will be announced by mid-September. Group will leave PMSA by school van about 3:30 pm, enjoy supper as guests at Dr. Burton's home (parents welcome to come by separate transportation and join us), then proceed to nearby Dearborn to see famous telescope and learn about discoveries it made in 19th century. If skies are clear, we will get to look through the telescope ourselves. Van will drop students back at PMSA before 11 pm. Permission slip required.
- Guest viewing, private telescopes. We are fortunate to have several community members, in La Grange, Berwyn and other west Chicago towns, who volunteer their personal telescopes (some as big as a minivan; these are truly professional scopes!) as well as their time to introduce PMSA students to their hobby or career. We will usually leave PMSA about sunset by school van, observe for up to two hours from our host's backyard, and return directly to PMSA. Two-deep rule means parent chaperonage will be required if a second teacher is not available to join us. Weather postponement possible; permission slip required.
- Green River state recreation area. This is an empty field about ten miles south of Dixon, IL, or 110 miles west of PMSA; it is the darkest observing site within two hours of Chicago, and is well known to amateur astronomers. The park rangers are supportive, and turn out the few streetlights for us on observing nights. The nearest store / gas station is about three miles from the site; cellphone reception is fair. This is a warm-weather weekend trip (Sept/Oct and May only). We will leave PMSA by school van about two hours before sunset, stop for sandwiches at the Dixon Subway off I-88, and arrive at the site at dusk, to get telescopes set up before full dark. We will return to PMSA between 1 am and 2 am, and will offer to drop students directly at their houses or at PMSA for phone-arranged parent pickup. Weather postponement possible, permission slip and parent chaperones definitely required. This is a truly unforgettable dark-sky observing experience for our students; we need your support!

By signing below, you are acknowledging that you have personally spoken with Dr. Burton or PMSA administrators, are satisfied with our resolution of all safety and supervision concerns, and are prepared to help in any way you can, ideally as a chaperone or driver, to make our outdoor adventures successful. This sign-off, in addition to individual permission slips for each particular trip as described above, will be required for any off-campus student participation in PMSA Astronomers. Thank you for your understanding and for your feedback!

Student: (print) _____ (sign) _____

Parent: (print) _____ (sign) _____

Dr. Burton: (print) _____ (sign) _____