

FEB

2025

AUSTIN, TEXAS

BOARD OF VISITORS
— WINTER MEETING —



ABOUT THE BOV

The Board of Visitors (BOV) is one of the most unique advisory councils at The University of Texas at Austin. The BOV formed in 1983, during the tenure of Director Harlan J. Smith. Its purpose is to further the research and educational objectives of the Department of Astronomy and McDonald Observatory, with an emphasis on promoting the welfare of astronomy, through public relations and philanthropic efforts. The generosity and foresight of the BOV ensure the Department of Astronomy and McDonald Observatory remain leaders in astronomical research, graduate education, instrument development, and science outreach.

MEETING LOCATIONS & PARKING

Friday activities will take place at the Texas Science & Natural History Museum on the UT campus at 2400 Trinity St, Austin, TX, 78712. Paid parking is available at San Jacinto Parking Garage next to Texas Science & Natural History Museum.

Saturday activities will take place in the multipurpose event space in San Jacinto Hall MPR at 309 E 21st St, Austin, TX, 78705. Validated parking is available in the nearby Brazos Parking Garage. Ask for parking validation at the BOV registration table.

COVER IMAGE

Image: An artist's concept of the TIDYE-1b system. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/R. Hurt, K. Miller (Caltech/IPAC)

In 2024, Prof. Adam Kraus co-authored a study in which his colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The University of Texas at Austin announced the discovery of the youngest planet ever found using the transit method. With this method, a planet is detected when it passes between its host star and the observer. The planet, named TIDYE-1b, is roughly the size of Jupiter and is an estimated 3 million years old. To put that age into perspective: if Earth were a 50-year-old person, TIDYE-1b would be a 2-week-old infant.

VISIT THE HOBBY-EBERLY TELESCOPE IN AUSTIN

Our Friday evening venue, Texas Science & Natural History Museum, is not only a fellow College of Natural Sciences institution but also home to a scale model of McDonald Observatory's Hobby-Eberly Telescope (HET). Be sure to check out "Big Eye on Dark Skies: The Hobby-Eberly Telescope," an exhibit showcasing the HET's engineering and introducing museum visitors to the Hobby-Eberly Telescope Dark Energy Experiment



AGENDA

Department of Astronomy and McDonald Observatory February 2025 Board of Visitors Meeting

AUSTIN, TEXAS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28

TEXAS SCIENCE & NATURAL
HISTORY MUSEUM

*Validated parking available in San
Jacinto Garage*

5:30 p.m.

Registration Opens
Great Hall

6–7 p.m.

Welcome Reception
Great Hall

7–9 p.m.

Dinner and Awards Presentation
Patio

SATURDAY, MARCH 1

SAN JACINTO HALL MPR

*Validated parking available in
Brazos Garage*

8:30-9 a.m.

Breakfast and Registration

9 –10:30 a.m.

Remarks and Reports

BOV Chair

Marty Heaner

CNS Dean

David Vanden Bout

Astronomy Department Chair

Karl Gebhardt

McDonald Observatory Director

Taft Armandroff

SATURDAY CONT.

SAN JACINTO HALL MPR

*Validated parking available in
Brazos Garage*

10:30-11 a.m.

Coffee Break

11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Science Talks

Faculty Talk

Keely Finkelstein

Postdoctoral Fellow Talk

Matthew De Furio

Graduate Student Talk

Malia Kao

12:30–2 p.m.

Lunch

2–3 p.m.

The Great Lecture

The Evolution of Planetary Systems Across Time and Space

Adam Kraus

CONNECT ON THE SPOT

From your Wi-Fi settings, select
“utguest” from the list of available
networks. There is no password
needed for this unsecured network.

**A LETTER FROM
KARL GEBHARDT
ASTRONOMY DEPARTMENT CHAIR**



As an astronomer, I'm often asked why I spend my life studying something so esoteric, so disconnected from one's day-to-day existence on Earth. As I think over my first year as chair, my reasons for making my home in the Astronomy Department come into focus. I am honored to stand on the front line of research and discovery with my colleagues and watch their seemingly disconnected areas of research come together in one unified picture. Join me in celebrating (and bragging on) the achievements of the incredible faculty you've met and supported over the past decade as Board of Visitors members.

With their research using data from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), Steve Finkelstein, John Chisholm, and Danielle Berg have stepped into leadership roles, revolutionizing the global understanding of galaxies in the early universe. Mike Boylan-Kolchin caused a world-wide course correction showing how a simple theory-based model can lead to vastly different interpretations of JWST observational data. Just a few weeks ago, Pawan Kumar's decade-long theoretical work predicting the behavior of neutron stars' fast radio bursts was confirmed with observational evidence. Stella Offner continues to lead the way in integrating machine learning and artificial intelligence into scientific modeling. Meanwhile, Keith Hawkins is using the largest dataset ever generated in our field to reveal how our home galaxy formed.

This weekend, you'll hear from Adam Kraus, whose work characterizes star and planet formation. I am captivated by recent results pushing the limits to the lowest-mass star systems. Our other faculty speaker, Keely Finkelstein, brings this work together to advance one of our primary goals: ensuring future astronomy educators have the tools they need to share our knowledge with the public.

It inspires me to share the unique advantage of owning our own excellent facilities at McDonald Observatory with UT students and researchers. Knowing that we are exploring everything from the possibility of extrasolar life, to measuring the formation and evolution of the universe with telescopes in our own "backyard" of West Texas, brings astronomy that much closer to home.

The connection between research and outreach, between the surreal and the natural world we inhabit, allows us to use astronomy in a special way. Astronomy forces us to step outside our mundane world and think about our place in the cosmos. Please enjoy the meeting and get lost in exploration and discovery.

**A LETTER FROM
TAFT ARMANDROFF
MCDONALD OBSERVATORY
DIRECTOR**



Thank you for your interest in and support of McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy through your membership in the Board of Visitors (BOV). We are very glad to welcome you back to “the Forty Acres” for this BOV meeting.

There are two themes that I would like to highlight in my talk at the membership meeting on Saturday morning: developments at McDonald Observatory in West Texas and progress on the Giant Magellan Telescope.

We hope you enjoy the Texas Science & Natural History Museum, our stimulating venue for Friday evening's reception. The museum features the exhibit “Big Eye on Dark Skies: The Hobby-Eberly Telescope,” showcasing the largest and most powerful telescope at McDonald Observatory. The exhibit's centerpiece is a scale model of the Hobby-Eberly Telescope. We appreciate the Simons Foundation for donating the telescope model to McDonald Observatory after developing it for their “In the Path of Totality” eclipse viewing party at the Long Center in Austin in April 2024. The Simons Foundation is one of the largest philanthropic funders of mathematical and scientific research in the nation. We are delighted and honored to work with them collaboratively for the first time.

The "Big Eye on Dark Skies" exhibit represents emerging cooperation between the various science outreach components of UT's College of Natural Sciences, including McDonald Observatory, the Patton Center for Marine Science Education in Port Aransas, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, and the Texas Science & Natural History Museum. We look forward to additional opportunities to share our work in astronomy with engaged audiences for science at our peer centers.

On behalf of the entire McDonald Observatory team, thank you for your ongoing generosity. We look forward to catching up with you during this BOV meeting.

**A LETTER FROM
MARTY HEANER
BOARD OF VISITORS CHAIR**



Welcome to the Winter Board of Visitors Meeting! It is always a pleasure to gather with such a dedicated and passionate group of individuals who share a deep commitment to advancing the mission of the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy. Your continued support plays a vital role in fostering scientific discovery and outreach, and we are grateful for your engagement.

I am especially delighted to introduce several new members joining us: Marie and Cameron Chandler, Peggie Mueller, Dr. Kennon & Mrs. Laura Guglielmo, Jim & Sylvia Phillips, Philip & Karen Kelton, and Wayne Rosing. Please take the opportunity to introduce yourselves and extend a warm welcome to them as they become part of our Board of Visitors family.

This year, we are introducing a change to our traditional Friday evening dinner. After many years at the AT&T Center, we are excited to host this gathering at the Texas Science & Natural History Museum. This new venue provides a more science-focused and engaging atmosphere, allowing attendees to explore the museum's regular collections as well as the special exhibit, "Big Eye on Dark Skies: The Hobby-Eberly Telescope." This exhibit highlights the remarkable engineering behind the HET and offers an introduction to its role in the groundbreaking dark energy experiment.

On Saturday our membership meeting, science talks, and the annual Great Lecture will take place in San Jacinto Hall's Room 207 at 309 E 21st St, Austin, TX, 78705. We have an outstanding lineup of presentations from the scientists of the Department of Astronomy, who will share some of their latest research and discoveries. These talks are always a highlight of our meetings, providing us with deeper insights into the cutting-edge work being conducted at McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to the Observatory's mission. I look forward to a fantastic weekend of learning, discussion, and camaraderie.

BOV EXCELLENCE AWARDEES

The Board of Visitors (BOV) honors the following staff and faculty of The University of Texas at Austin Department of Astronomy and McDonald Observatory for their excellence in service and in teaching:

2024–2025

BOV TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

Julian Muñoz

Assistant Professor

Department of Astronomy

BOV STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

John Good • Austin

Engineering Scientist

McDonald Observatory

Ty Holloman • Austin

Academic Program Coordinator

Department of Astronomy

Judy Meyer • West Texas

Sr. Outreach Program Coordinator for K-12 Education

McDonald Observatory

Camilo Nino • West Texas

HET Sr. Software Engineer

McDonald Observatory

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2025

San Jacinto Hall Room MPR; 11 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

FACULTY TALK

Teaching and Education Best Practices, Highlights, and Impacts of McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy

KEELY FINKELSTEIN, *ASTRONOMY DEPARTMENT ASSOCIATE CHAIR & ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF INSTRUCTION*

Education and teaching have always been a pillar and a core part of the mission of both McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy. I will share the important role McDonald Observatory takes in both the education of UT Austin students, as well as for K-12 teachers and students from across Texas and the country. Learn about and experience some of the best practices that we employ in our teacher workshops, and with students in our astronomy courses here at UT Austin. We will also share some of the impacts and history of K-12 education programs that have been ongoing at McDonald Observatory for more than 25 years.



Keely Finkelstein is an associate professor of instruction and the associate chair in the Department of Astronomy at The University of Texas at Austin. Keely works closely with the K-12 Education team at McDonald Observatory, helping run many of our K-12 Teacher Professional Development programs. Keely also works in the Office of STEM Education Excellence (STEMx) in the College of Natural Sciences, as the Faculty Director for Instructor Development, heading up STEMx's Teaching

Professional Development suite of activities.

Keely received her B.S. in Astronomy & Physics from the University of Washington in 2002, and her Ph.D. in Astrophysics from Arizona State University in 2008. Keely has been a faculty member at UT Austin since 2012. Keely enjoys many of the sights and sounds of the vibrant Austin community, including playing pickleball, going to concerts, and attending many Austin FC home soccer matches with her husband and two kids.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2025

San Jacinto Hall Room MPR; 11:30 a.m. – noon

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW TALK

Probing the Limit of the Star Formation Process with JWST

MATTHEW DE FURIO, *POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW*

Stars are formed from the fragmentation of turbulent giant molecular clouds. Less massive objects such as brown dwarfs and free-floating planetary mass objects, those that cannot generate hydrogen fusion in their cores, are also formed through the same fragmentation process. Theory predicts a mass limit for the formation of objects produced through fragmentation, 2-10 times the mass of Jupiter (M_J). Previous studies have characterized the content of stellar populations down to roughly 10 M_J, but were not sensitive to lower mass objects down to the theoretical limit. In this talk, I will discuss recent results exploring the stellar and sub-stellar population within a young (less than one million years old) star-forming region, NGC 2024 (the Flame Nebula), down to sub-Jupiter masses using the Near Infrared Camera on the James Webb Space Telescope. Our program probes beyond the lowest masses theoretically produced through star formation processes, finding no likely cluster members below about 3 M_J, potentially the fundamental limit of the star and brown dwarf formation process.



Matthew De Furio is an NSF Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellow at The University of Texas at Austin. Originally from Tampa, Florida, Matthew graduated from the University of Florida in 2016 with a B.S. in Physics and Astronomy with a minor in Mathematics. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 2023.

Matthew is an expert in star and brown dwarf formation with a focus on multiplicity. He is a member of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) NIRCam and

NIRISS science teams, and he leads several Hubble Space Telescope and JWST programs to explore free floating planets and the fundamental limits of the star formation process.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2025

San Jacinto Hall Room MPR; noon – 12:30 p.m.

GRADUATE STUDENT TALK

Uncovering Earth-Sized Diamonds with the Otto Struve Telescope

MALIA KAO, PH.D. STUDENT

White dwarfs are among the oldest objects in the universe, and are the evolutionary endpoint for nearly all stars, including the Sun. Since they slowly cool over time, their temperatures can be correlated with their age, with cooler white dwarfs generally being older. This cooling relationship has historically been used to estimate the age of the Milky Way and its stellar populations. However, recent observational evidence has revealed that white dwarfs undergo crystallization, where their cores begin to solidify as they cool. This process releases additional heat, effectively rejuvenating the aging white dwarf and making it appear younger than it is. Therefore, to improve the accuracy of white dwarf cooling models, it is essential to understand the physics and effects of crystallization on their interiors. A promising tool for studying this phenomenon is asteroseismology. Like seismology on Earth, we use asteroseismology to analyze periodic brightness variations, known as pulsations, to probe the inner layers of stars. For very massive white dwarfs, crystallization begins at higher temperatures, and there exists a narrow temperature range in which these stars are both crystallizing and pulsating. These rare "crystallizing pulsators" offer a unique opportunity to study crystallization in more detail. To enhance our understanding, I conducted a campaign using the 2.1-meter Otto Struve Telescope at McDonald Observatory to expand the sample of these pulsating, crystallizing white dwarfs from seven to 24. This newly discovered sample will be critical for future asteroseismic studies aimed at refining our models of white dwarf crystallization and advancing our knowledge of stellar evolution.



Malia Kao is a 4th-year graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in Astronomy at The University of Texas at Austin. Before coming to UT, Malia earned her B.S. and M.S. in Physics at New Mexico Tech in Socorro, NM, and interned at Sandia National Laboratories. In her first two years as a graduate student at UT Austin, Malia began studying crystallizing white dwarfs through pulsations using the 2.1-m Otto Struve Telescope at McDonald Observatory with Prof. Don Winget. This research will be featured in an upcoming

publication. In her third year, she began working with Prof. Keith Hawkins to utilize machine learning to identify white dwarfs that are swallowing up planetary remains. She is now using McDonald's Hobby-Eberly Telescope to characterize the atmospheres of these white dwarfs and better understand the composition of planetary interiors.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2025

San Jacinto Hall Room MPR; 2 – 3 p.m.

THE GREAT LECTURE

The Evolution of Planetary Systems Across Time and Space

ADAM KRAUS, PROFESSOR

Planetary systems are ubiquitous throughout the universe, though many differ dramatically from our own Solar System. We have now gained exquisite views of the environments where planets are forming, as well as their final demographics billions of years later. However, many twisting paths could lead from one specific protoplanetary system to one specific mature planetary system. The broad diversity we have discovered must emerge from the physics of planet formation and planetary evolution across these billions of years. I will outline how UT Austin and McDonald Observatory are tracing these paths. Using young planetary systems that still reside in their birth environments, we capture detailed snapshots of planetary populations across age and formation environment. Using old binary star systems, we conduct controlled experiments that connect final planetary outcomes to the modified properties of their original tidally-truncated protoplanetary disks. Using spectroscopic observations of young planets, we are directly observing their condensation and evaporation. UT Austin and McDonald Observatory are thus revealing the full epic of planetary formation and evolution, without the five billion year wait.



Adam Kraus is a professor of astronomy at The University of Texas at Austin and is the author of over 200 refereed publications. Adam earned his Ph.D. in Astronomy from the California Institute of Technology and was awarded a NASA-Hubble Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Hawai'i and a Clay Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics before joining UT's faculty in 2013. Adam and his research group study the formation and evolution of planetary systems and

their host stars across their full lifespans, from collapsing clouds of gas and dust to the oldest planetary systems, identifying the key forces that sculpt planetary systems to look like - or very unlike - our own. To carry out this research, he uses observations from a wide range of ground-based telescopes, most notably McDonald Observatory and Keck Observatory, as well as space telescopes such as James Webb, Gaia, Hubble, Kepler, and TESS.

2024–2025 NEW MEMBER NOMINEES

Please extend a warm welcome to our new member nominees.

Marie and Cameron Chandler
Heath, TX

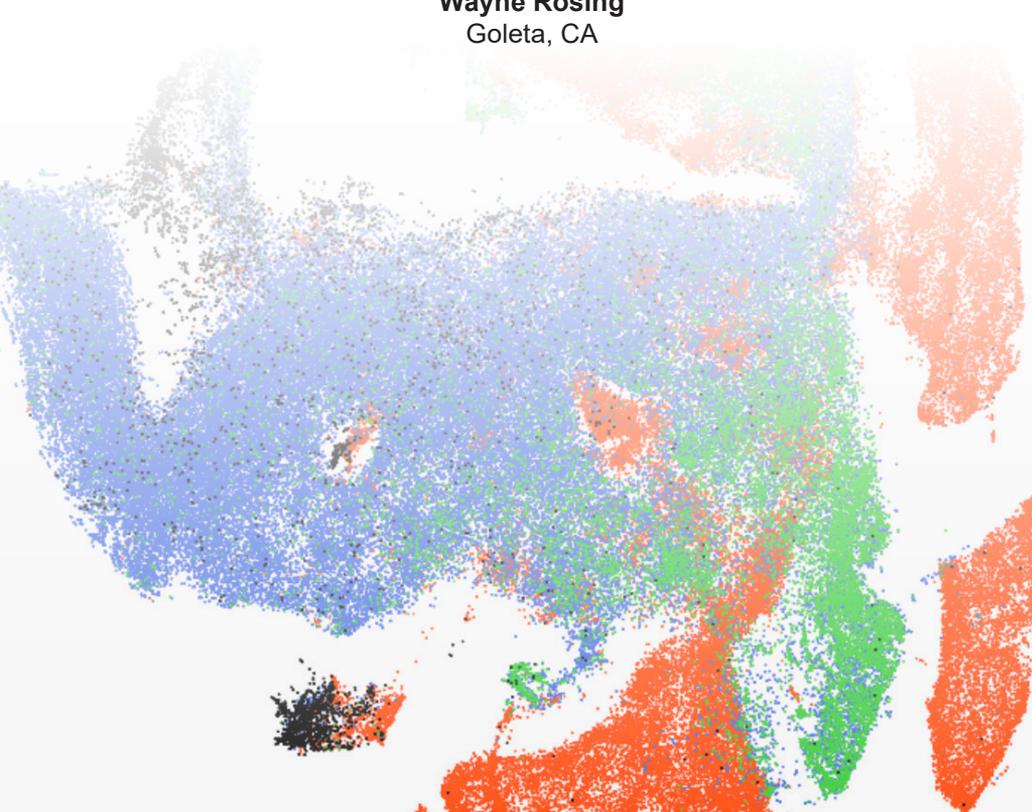
Laura and Kennon Guglielmo
San Antonio, TX

Karen and Phillip Kelton
Austin, TX

Peggie Mueller
Houston, TX

Sylvia and Jim Phillips
Austin, TX

Wayne Rosing
Goleta, CA



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Thank you to the following Board of Visitors members for their service!

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Trei Brundrett

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Sandy Gorka Timte

Ian Yanagisawa

THANK YOU

to the following Board of Visitors members for their generous contributions in the 2024-2025 term. On behalf of our faculty, staff, and students, we are truly grateful!

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Former Director of McDonald
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Alan Y. Chow
Mrs. Harlan J. Smith (Joan)

IN MEMORY

Honoring our members who passed in 2024-25

Walter Foxworth

Stephen Hellebusch

Joan Lewis

Image: Still from a simulation of star formation in a massive (20,000 solar mass) giant molecular cloud. Credit: Michael Grudic and the STARFORGE Collaboration.



GETTING HERE - FRIDAY

PARKING

Validated parking is available for San Jacinto Garage (SJG) at 2401 San Jacinto Blvd. From inside the garage, take the elevator or stairs to the third floor and follow the sidewalk to the front entrance of the museum on Trinity St.

ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE

The accessible entrance is on Trinity St., just past the main museum entrance on the right. Follow the sidewalk and signs south along Trinity to the path leading to the accessible entrance, which is a white door with an ADA button. Once inside, turn right and head to the passenger elevator at the far end of the hall. Take the elevator to level two to access the Great Hall and BOV registration tables.

Dinner will be on the back patio in a heated tent. Exit through the accessible entrance on the first floor and head back towards the parking garage to access the walkway to the patio. Attendees without mobility restrictions can use the museum back entrance to access the patio.



GETTING HERE - SATURDAY

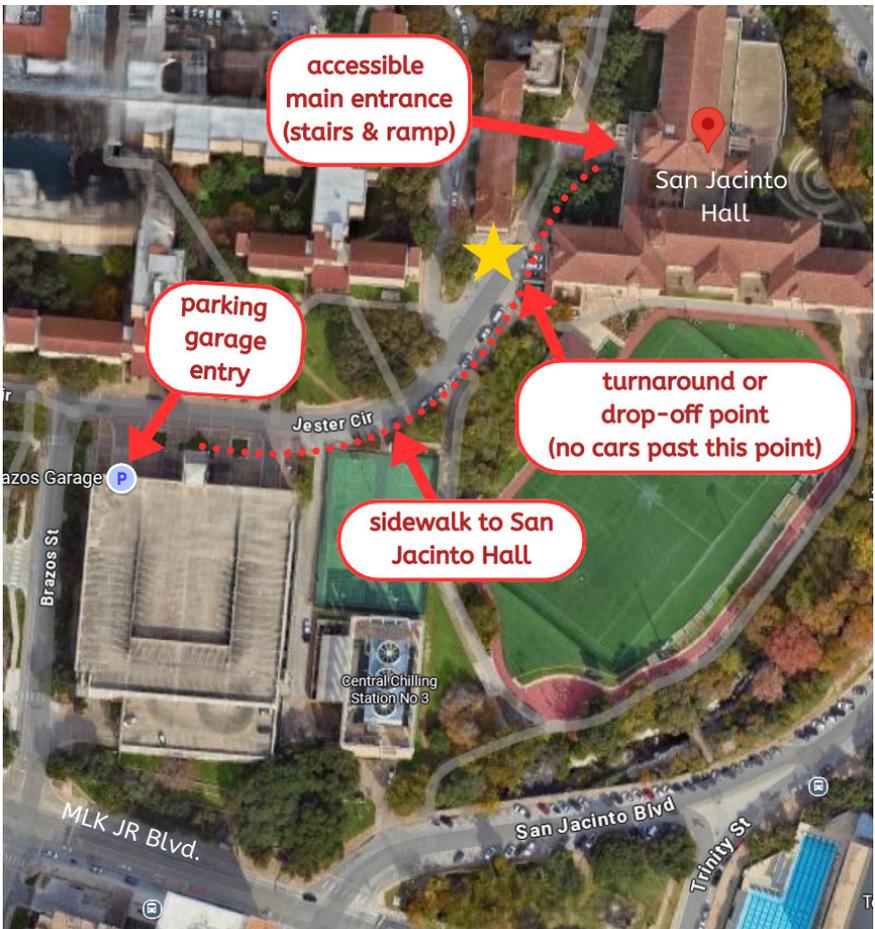
PARKING

Validated parking is available for Brazos Garage (BZG) at 210 E. MLK Blvd. From inside the garage, exit towards Jester Circle and follow the sidewalk past the sports complex until you reach the entrance to San Jacinto Hall.

ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE

The main entrance is accessible by ramp or stairs. The front desk staff will direct you to the stairs or elevator to access the lower level. Our meeting is located in the "MPR."

If you are driving someone with limited mobility, you can drop them closer to the entrance at the starred location on the map below before parking in Brazos garage.





The University of Texas at Austin

Department of Astronomy

College of Natural Sciences



McDonald Observatory

The University of Texas at Austin

SAVE THE DATE: SUMMER MEETING

JULY 25-26, 2025 • MCDONALD OBSERVATORY

sites.utexas.edu/bov/meetings