

# Final Report First GUAtemalan School of Astrophysics –GUASA2015–

Eduardo Rubio–Herrera<sup>1</sup> & Enrique Pazos–Ávalos<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Escuela de Ciencias Físicas y Matemáticas  
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala  
erubioherrera@gmail.com, pazosenrique@gmail.com

Guatemala City, March 18, 2016

## 1 Short Summary of the Project

We have launched the second GUAtemalan School of Astrophysics (GUASA). The school was held in the colonial town of Antigua Guatemala and aimed to bring together local Central American/Caribbean undergraduate students of physics/mathematics/engineering, with experts from prestigious astronomical institutions from around the world. During the second edition, the school was devoted to the topic of *Cosmology* under the motto: *Our Dark Universe: Galaxies, Dark Matter, Dark Energy and High Precision Cosmology*. We believe that this school helped to motivate the students to pursue major degrees in Astronomy elsewhere. On the other hand, the school helped to consolidate a group of students who hopefully will become and create the critical mass of professional astronomers/astrophysicists in the region. As a complementary activity we also organized outreach activities for the general public. These activities were composed by public lectures, one cinema discussion, one public observation using a small telescope, an exposition of astronomical images and activities for small children. We hope that these activities have encouraged children and teenagers to get closer to science and to continue their studies aiming for higher education. For all the details of the activity please visit this web–site: <http://fisica.usac.edu.gt/~GUASA>

## 2 Reached Objectives

Here we list all the objectives originally proposed and below each objective, we explain how we did reach them.

1. *Introduce last year undergraduate students with top researchers from abroad.*

This was achieved by inviting lecturers from prestigious universities and research centers from around the world. Specifically we invited Drs. Elena D’Onghia, from the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Vladimir Ávila–Resse and Dr. Octavio Valenzuela from the Institute of Astronomy of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Dr. Jaime Forero from the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, and Dr. Julio Gallegos from the European Space Agency/ESTEC.

2. *Allow the undergraduate students a first hand experience with professional astronomers.*

We achieved this goal by undertaking academic and social activities.

**Academic Activities:** The academic activities were composed by the courses we offered about cosmology. This time we have offered five courses, which were organized to give a comprehensive description about the state of the art on Cosmology. We provide here the lecturers name and the title of each set of lectures. **(i)** From CMBR to the First Stars by Dr. D’Onghia, **(ii)** From tiny perturbations to galaxies by Dr. Ávila–Reese, **(iii)** Galaxies & Cosmology by Dr. Forero, **(iv)** Observational Cosmology Seeing Cosmology grow Dr. Gallegos and **(v)** Dark Energy and Cosmology by Dr. Valenzuela.

**Social Activities:** Besides the academic interaction of the students with the lecturers, we had social activities in which the students had the chance to have a closer interaction with the lecturers, these activities consisted of **(i)** coffee breaks, **(ii)** lunch every day (we asked the lecturers to sit in a different table in such a way that the students could chat with each of them), **(iii)** welcome toast, and **(v)** school dinner. The close interaction between lecturers and students, allowed the latter to have time to ask to the professionals questions about his academic and personal life as an astronomer.

3. *Motivate and encourage undergraduate students to pursue major degrees in astrophysics.* Aiming to boost the motivation of the undergraduate students, as part of GUASA2015 we held an activity in which we asked each of the lecturers to describe

their academic pathway. This was one of the most motivating activities we had because for about 2 hours, we heard the stories about how the lecturers became professional astronomers.

4. *Expose the students to an international environment (25% of the school was in English).* This time Spanish prevailed over English, due to the fact that most of the speakers we invited were from Latin American countries. From all the lectures, 4 sets were given in Spanish (Dr. Ávila–Reese, Dr. Valenzuela, Dr. Forero and Dr. Gallegos) and 1 in English (Dr. D’Onghia). All the public activities were done in Spanish language.
5. *Involve the general public of rural Guatemala, at the place where the activity takes place with astronomy activities, specially children and teenagers, and encourage them to continue their studies and aim for high goals through education.*

This goal was achieved by undertaking four different activities that included the participation of the general public of Antigua Guatemala. The activities we undertook were **(i)** Series of public lectures given by Dr. Gallegos on Tuesday Dec. 5th. and Dr. Forero on Thursday. **(ii)** Exposition of astronomical images at the corridors of the venue. The exposition gave an “astronomical taste” to the venue during the week of GUASA2015. **(iii)** Astronomical Observation. On Friday, after 6 PM, we sat about 15 small telescopes at the main square of the venue, and we showed the stars to anyone who happened to be walking around the square. We showed the Moon and a variety of other astronomical objects. **(iv)** Finally during the morning of Saturday 5th, we had an activity for small children. During this activity we helped the children to build planispheres with cardboard and white glue. The planispheres were for  $20^\circ$  of latitude (similar to the latitude of Guatemala which is about  $15^\circ$ ).

### 3. Deviations from the original project

The only major deviations from the original project presented to the IAU were:

- Change of dates. Originally we proposed GUASA2015 to take place from December 7–11 2015 and instead, due to availability constrains in the venue, GUASA2015 happened from November 30th. to December 5th 2015.

- **Origin and Use of resources.** As we will explain in §6, we had to implement some changes in the origin and use of resources presented to the IAU in the original proposal. From Guatemalan institutions we only got support from two institutions which we were not expecting originally, and we did not get support from the Guatemalan National Science Fundation because of the painstaking bureaoucracy involved (see §3). However we did manage to acomplish our goals with the budget we got at the end.

### 3 Significant challenges encountered

Since we planned all the activity well ahead of time, we faced a few challenges regarding the organization of GUASA2015. Below we enumerate the challenges we encountered and we explain how we did circumvented them.

1. *Raising local funds.* We encountered a big challenge raising local funds within Guatemala. We have tried to raise money from the local council for sciences but due to their extremely complicated bureaoucreacis, we decided to decline due to the uncertainty of getting the funds in time.
2. *Raising the Interest of the local Authorities in the School/Science* We finished the GUASA School with the impression that the majority of the local authorities (private and public) did not have enough interest on it. It was only, when we started the activity and they saw the magnitude of our success, that they approached us and showed more enthusiasm. For the inauguration and for other activities such as the farewell dinner, we invited the authorities of all the major institutions that in one way or in other, supported us. However a very few of them showed up at these activities. We believe the need to improve the interest of the local authorities in science and thus this kind of activities.
3. *Recruiting Lecturers* We decided to include among our lecturers, researchers from top institutions. Although this can be very good for the school, recruiting them was a bit complicated. We believe that this was due to the fact that (i) this was the first school held in Guatemala and (ii) perhaps to the low academic image of the country abroad (No PhD/Masters programs in astrophysics/astronomy). We hope to change this image through the coming years, by showing a good selection of lecturers, through the image that the first school has given us, and by choosing always the best and most motivated students.

## 4 Self Evaluation

From our perspective, we believe that GUASA2015 was one of the best events of Science/Astrophysics that happened in Guatemala and in Central America during 2015 and probably also in the last few years. For us, it was inspiring, encouraging and exciting event. We believe in our previous statements because we got comments from the students and the lecturers we invited. Many of the students said that they had one of the most exciting, scientific encouraging, happiest and memorable weeks in the last years. After all the above is said, we only can conclude that GUASA2015 was a great success, and that we managed to meet all the objectives we listed in the original proposal.

## 5 Suggestions/Recommendations to the OAD

We could not have glimpsed the level of success we achieved without the support from the institutions who believed in our project. This success is due to the high confidence that the IAU/OAD and the selection committee showed in us when we presented the proposal. In order to improve even more our success or the success of other projects of similar nature, we have the following suggestions/recommendations.

- We strongly recommend that if possible, institutions such as the IAU, should give advice to the heads of scientific funding institutions of developing countries in order to show them how to work and develop projects keeping bureaucracy to the minimum and showing them that with low budgets ( $\sim 14000,00$  EUR) and a good organization it is possible to achieve events of extremely good quality.
- We recommend to keep the support towards this kind of events and scrutinize well the background and motivations of the organizers in order to maximize its impact in developing countries. Events such as GUASA2015 can be organized by a small number of motivated people and with relatively low budgets. We are glad to give any advice for similar events in other parts of the globe.

## 6 Financial report

We are extremely grateful for the funding support given by the IAU, however we would like to have received the amount we requested since we had to face serious challenges

reuniting the amount needed to cover all the expenses. Despite this, we note that without the support from the IAU, GUASA2015 would have been impossible. We spent the money in the most optimized way possible in order to cover all the expenses. Below in Table 1, we show all the funding we got and in Table 2 we show all the expenses we did, all the amounts are in EUR. We used the following conversion rates (EUR = Euro, GTQ = Guatemalan Quetzal, US\$ = United States Dollar): 1.00 EUR=8.40 GTQ and 1.00 EUR=1.12 US\$.

Table 1: Funding sources (in EUR).

INSTITUTION	AMOUNT
International Astronomical Union	5000,00
International Centre for Theoretical Physics/UNESCO	4000,00
Mesoamerican Centre for Theoretical Physics	1245,00
Universidad del Valle de Guatemala	1110,00
Private Donnors	1650,00
Institute of Astronomy UNAM	100,00
Sociedad Mexicana de Física	100,00
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>13205,00</b>

Table 2: FINAL BALANCE GUASA2015 (in EUR).

ITEM	ICTP/UNESCO	IAU GRANT	OTHER SOURCES	TOTAL COST
Accomodation	1600,00	1170,00	2170,35	4940,35
Transportation	2400,00	581,00	1000,30	3981,30
Meals		3100,00	1008,00	4108,00
Office		130,35		130,35
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4000,00</b>	<b>4981,35</b>	<b>4178,65</b>	<b>13160,00</b>

As we requested in our original proposals, we have employed the ICTP grant to cover Accomodation ( 40% of the grant, 1600,00 EUR) & Transportation (60% of the grant, 2400,00 EUR) of a few students.

The IAU GRANT was used to cover the following items:

- Printer matters: 2 large posters in vynilic full color, paper for diplomas, pens, blockets of paper for notes, folders, ink for laser printer. TOTAL: 130,35 EUR.

- Meals 160 simple lunches for lecturers & students, 45 dinners (school dinner), 320 coffe breaks (2 coffee breaks per day, for 4 days served for about 45 students and lecturers). TOTAL 3100,00 EUR.
- Accomodation for 20 students in double rooms, for one week. TOTAL 1170,00 EUR.

The rest of the funds, from private donnors, the Mesoamerican Centre for Theoretical Physics, and Universidad del Valle were used to complete the other meals (brakefast) and accommodation of other students.

We request to the IAU that, the amount left (18,65 EUR ) will be used upon aproval of the IAU as a fund for future GUASA schools.

## **8. Copies of invoices/receipts**

Please find the copies of all the invoices/receipts attached to this document.