

HELENA RICHIE

PROFILE

I am a senior undergraduate student at the University of Pittsburgh double majoring in Physics & Astronomy and Mathematics. My research interests include observational astronomy and exoplanet detection. I am the lead undergraduate of STEPUP, an observational astronomy group that conducts observations at the Allegheny Observatory to detect exoplanets.

CONTACT

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EDUCATION

University of Pittsburgh

Expected Graduation: April 2020
B.S. in Physics & Astronomy (Graduate School Prep Track, Honors Degree);
B.S. in Mathematics

RESEARCH

2018 - Present

Measuring the Cosmological Evolution of Heavy Elements in the Universe

Mentors: Professor Sandhya Rao and Professor David Turnshek

Our goal is to compile a database of existing measurements of the metallicities of absorption systems with background quasars distributed throughout the universe. With this, we will perform an analysis to determine if the calculated cosmic mean neutral-gas-phase metallicity of the Universe suffers from a systematic error due to observations of a biased sample of absorption-line systems.

2016 - Present

Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh (STEPUP)

Position: Lead Undergraduate

Mentor: Professor Michael Wood-Vasey

Website: pitt.edu/~stepup/index.html

STEPUP is an undergraduate research group lead by Helena Richie with the goal of discovering new exoplanets using transit photometry. STEPUP uses the 16" Keeler telescope based out of the Allegheny Observatory in Pittsburgh, PA to conduct observations of exoplanet transits and processes/analyzes transit data with their custom pipeline, STEPUP Image Analysis, written by Helena Richie. Currently, STEPUP is focusing its efforts on contributing data to the Transiting Extrasolar Survey Satellite (TESS) collaboration as members of the TESS Follow-up Observing Program.

2016 - Present

STEPUP Image Analysis (SIA)**Mentors:** Professor Michael Wood-Vasey and Professor David Turnshek**Project GitHub:** https://github.com/helenarichie/STEPUP_image_analysis_II

SIA is an image analysis pipeline that was developed in 2017 to extract light curves from STEPUP's photometric data using differential photometry. SIA has since been expanded for general use at the Allegheny Observatory. SIA functions in three main steps, which include instrumental signature correction, plate-solving, and differential aperture photometry to produce light curves and other data on the observed system. Example output files, a user manual, and more information can be found on SIA's GitHub.

PUBLICATIONS

2019

*The 2018 Dwarf Nova Outburst of AG Draconis (submitted)***Journal:** The Journal of the American Association of Variable Star Observers (JAAVSO)

Abstract: Symbiotic binary AG Draconis (AG Dra) has an well-established outburst behavior based on an extensive observational history. Usually, the system undergoes a 9–15 yr period of quiescence with a constant average energy emitted, during which the system's orbital period of ~550 d can be seen at shorter wavelengths (particularly in the U-band) as well as a shorter period of ~355 d thought to be due to pulsations of the cool component. After a quiescent period, the marker of an active period is usually a major (cool) outburst of up to $V = 8.4$ mag, followed by a series of minor (hot) outbursts repeating at a period of approximately 1 y. However, in 2016 April after a 9-year period of quiescence AG Dra exhibited unusual behavior: it began an active phase with a minor outburst followed by two more minor outbursts repeating at an interval of ~1 y. We present R-band observations of AG Dra's 2018 April minor outburst, an analysis of the outburst mechanism, and reports on the system's activity levels following the time of its next expected outburst. By considering the brightening and cooling times, the scale of the outburst, and its temperature evolution we have determined that this outburst was of dwarf nova nature.

Link: <http://www.pitt.edu/~stepup/Publications.html>**PRESENTATIONS**

2019

235th Meeting of the American Astronomical Society

Poster; Honolulu, HI

"The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Image Analysis and Contributions to NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) Mission"

2019

The 2019 Quadrennial Physics Congress (PhysCon)

Poster; Providence, RI

"The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Image Analysis and Contributions to NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) Mission"

2019

Duquesne 2019 Undergraduate Research Symposium

Poster; Duquesne University, PA

"Measuring the Cosmological Evolution of Heavy Elements in the Universe"

2019

Emerging Researchers in Exoplanet Science V

Poster; Cornell University, NY

"The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Image Analysis and Contributions to NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) Mission"

PRESENTATIONS (CONT'D)

- 2019 ***Conference for Undergraduate Women in Physics 2019***
 Poster; The College of New Jersey, NJ
 "The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Contributions to NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) Mission"
- 2018 ***Department of Physics & Astronomy Undergraduate Poster Session***
 Poster; University of Pittsburgh, PA
 "The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Image Analysis and Contributions to NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) Mission"
- 2018 ***Duquesne 2018 Undergraduate Research Symposium***
 Poster; Duquesne University, PA
 "The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: Extended Observation of 2018 Outburst of Symbiotic Binary AG Draconis"
- 2018 ***Emerging Researchers in Exoplanet Science IV***
 Poster; The Pennsylvania State University, PA
 "The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: Extended Observation of 2018 Outburst of Symbiotic Binary AG Draconis"
- 2017 ***American Association of Physics Teachers Northeast Meeting***
 Poster; Syracuse University, NY
 "The Survey of Transiting Extrasolar Planets at the University of Pittsburgh: STEPUP Image Analysis"

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2019 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Fall 2019 Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Research Poster
- 2019 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Summer 2019
- 2019 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Spring 2019
- 2018 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Summer 2018
- 2018 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Summer 2018
- 2017 NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Fall 2017
- 2017 AAPT Northeastern Meeting Outstanding Research Poster Award

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVIES

- 2016 - Present **Pitt Women's Volleyball Club**
Member
Fundraising Chair
 Membership requires semesterly tryouts, attendance of two practices per week, and attendance of 3-5 tournaments a semester.
 Selected to attend the National Collegiate Volleyball Federation national tournament in Kansas City, MO (2017), St. Louis, MO (2018), Denver, CO (2019), and Kansas City, MO (2020).
- 2016 - Present **Society of Physics Students**
Member
 Membership consists of attending weekly meetings that consist of student networking events, giving oral research presentations, and participating in mentorship programs.
 Selected to attend the Society of Physics Students 2016 Quadrennial Physics Congress (PhysCon) in San Francisco, CA
 Selected to attend the Society of Physics Students 2019 Quadrennial Physics Congress (PhysCon) in Providence, RI

OUTREACH

- 2019 **Mentor for Pitt Society of Physics Students Mentoring sUpporting, and cOnnecting studeNts (MUON)**
 Mentoring program that connects new students in Pitt's Physics & Astronomy Department with upperclassmen majors who are responsible for sharing information and advice about their experiences in physics, allowing them to more successfully navigate their undergraduate physics careers.
- 2018 **Norwin Senior High School's Science Alumni Day**
 Yearly event where Norwin High School alumni return to give presentations about their studies and work/research in STEM fields.
- 2016 - Present **Adopt-A-Physicist**
 Program through the AIP, APS, and AAPT where physics students and professionals are assigned to groups of high school students and use group forums to share information and answer questions about careers in physics.

SKILLS

- Programming **Python; LaTeX**
- Tools & Software **Git; Mathematica**