#IamPhysSci - Corey Beard, Ph.D., Physics & Astronomy

Beard uses a powerful tool to navigate the cosmos: questions.

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Lucas Van Wyk Joel
UCI Physical Sciences Communications



"I feel like I've learned how to learn really, really well," Beard said of his years in the UC Irvine Department of Physics & Astronomy.

Picture Credit:
Lucas Van Wyk Joel

“What’s up there?”

It’s a question that Corey Beard, who’s about to graduate with his Ph.D. in astrophysics from the UC Irvine Department of Physics & Astronomy, remembers asking about the night sky since he was a little boy growing up in Southern California.

The question guided him all the way to the AP Physics class he took in high school that, in hindsight, changed his life. His teacher, Mr. Jacquot, inspired Beard to go on to study physics in college at UCLA. “I just really enjoyed the work,” Beard said while sitting in front of some computer monitors in his department’s remote observation room – a room on the second floor of Frederick Reines Hall that lets researchers observe the night sky using telescopes like the two University of California-administered Keck telescopes in Hawaii.

As a doctoral student in UCI Professor Paul Robertson’s group, Beard has, over the past six years, asked more questions about the cosmos, including “How do planets evolve?” or “Is there life in the universe?” They’re questions that led him and Robertson to publish a study in *The Astronomical Journal* describing the galaxy TOI-1136, which they discovered has planets that could be prime observation targets for the recently-launched James Webb Space Telescope because the composition of their atmospheres by bear signs of life.

Beard’s research appeared in media outlets like The Late Show with Stephen Colbert , and none of it would’ve been possible, Beard explained, without the support of the UCI physics community that surrounded him over the last several years – particularly during the pandemic. “I’m extremely grateful to my community of people here,” said Beard, who plans to find work in the private sector upon graduating. “They’re all wonderful people.”

For those finding their way through the cosmos, Beard has some advice: “I hope you’re asking questions, and wondering what the heck’s up there,” he said. “Is it a star, is it a black hole, is it aliens? Let the question guide you.”

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