

2020 NCRAL AFFILIATE RECRUITMENT MINI GRANT

Twin City Amateur Astronomers, \$250

Following very successful activities with the inaugural NCRAL *Membership Recruitment & Retention* Mini Grant in 2019 (see the Autumn 2019 and Winter 2020 issues of ***Northern Lights*** for complete details), the Twin City Amateur Astronomers again applied for an NCRAL Mini Grant. This time, however, the focus was on affiliate recruitment. Following discussions with the fledgling Illinois State University Astronomy Club (ISUAC) in Normal, Illinois, the TCAA (Bloomington-Normal, Illinois) worked out an agreement upon which the grant application was based. With reception of the 2020 NCRAL mini grant, the TCAA will now establish a formal long-term mentorship with the ISUAC in an effort to help student members become competent “sidewalk amateur astronomers,” dedicated AL observers, and active NCRAL members.

The ISUAC formed in about five years ago. Since then, the club’s members have spent nearly all of their time on campus and under the dome of the ISU Planetarium. Being in the center of a large urban campus, much of the ISUAC members’ time has been spent struggling to find meaningful projects directly related to astronomy. None of the ISUAC members can be called amateur astronomers in the fullest sense of the words. Few have any meaningful observing experience, and none has any significant observing prowess. None know how to use a telescope properly. Most student members (about 20) have limited or no transportation making access to a dark sky difficult and infrequent. Still, the membership’s interest in astronomy remains high. The ISUAC is a perfect candidate for recruitment into the AL and, by default, NCRAL.

The TCAA has several highly competent observers, including AL Master Observers. All will serve as resources in this project. The TCAA will work with the ISU Planetarium director to develop ISUAC members into competent amateur astronomers, some of whom might go on to give sky lectures in the Planetarium following initial training.

The ISU Planetarium has several on-campus telescopic resources that are underutilized (1 portable 8-inch Dobsonian telescope, 2 portable C8 telescopes, 2 portable 10" Odyssey telescopes, solar filters, and a high-end H α filter for use with a C8). ISUAC members will be trained to use these instruments and be taught how to conduct “sidewalk amateur astronomy” activities (both daytime and nighttime) on the ISU campus. ISU has a student population of over 20,000 students, the vast majority of whom live on or very near the pedestrian campus.

The \$250 grant from NCRAL will be used to provide for the following:

- A small “get to know one another” social that would include refreshments.
- Material resources (e.g., solar glasses, star maps, accessories for existing telescopes, etc.) for giving away or use during sidewalk astronomy events on campus.
- Printed fliers, brochures, etc. for use to publicize sidewalk astronomy events and well as Astronomy Day displays.
- Payment of one-half the ISUAC’s first-year membership in the Astronomical League (\$5.00 annually per member plus a \$10.00 society fee = \$110/2 = \$55). The other half will be covered by the TCAA.

Benchmarks for success of this mini grant are the following:

- The ISUAC will join the AL by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year (May 2021).
- The ISUAC members will present periodic (at least monthly) sidewalk amateur astronomy programs on campus during the warmer autumn and spring months.
- The TCAA membership will regularly interface with the ISUAC for training, including observing from rural locals.

