

THE USE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION AND EXCHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

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In recent years, access to electronic mail has become generalized within the astronomical community. Its speed makes it the ideal medium to inform about advances in research, instrumentation and computing, or to organize collaborations, courses and meetings. We should make the most of this opportunity for the benefit of astronomical research and teaching in our region, lest we be left behind, especially in view of the raising cost of journals and air travel. Here we present an electronic newsletter, ALA (*Astronomy in Latin America*), aimed at making our work better known, fostering faster communication of valuable information and further stimulating collaborative projects.

The newsletter will publish short articles on research, reports on existing and planned resources in the region (such as instruments, telescopes, observing campaigns, teaching, computer programmes, etc), as well as news (on meetings, colloquia, schools, jobs). It could also be used to request data, computer programmes or any kind of help needed for research and teaching. Contributions will be welcome in Spanish, Portuguese or English. The format we choose is LaTeX, now commonly used, because it allows the inclusion of mathematical formulae and provides an elegant printed output.

We are not proposing a mail exploder, to avoid excessive mail load for the users (as in discussion lists and in usenet newsgroups) but propose that the distribution will be done through the editors. However, to keep flexibility and speed, contributions are not restricted to traditional papers and need not be refereed. They could be summaries of research results, reports on work in progress, description of projects, news, etc. Of course, clarity and accuracy are expected. Research articles should provide the necessary bibliographical references. All contributions should specify where further information can be obtained (an e-mail address, an anonymous ftp site and/or a web page).

Besides distribution by e-mail, the newsletter will be accessible on the World Wide Web at the URLs <http://www.inaoep.mx/~eenens/ala/> and <http://webhead.com/~sergio/ala/> with links to other sources of astronomical information in Latin America and the world.

ACTIVITIES OF THE ASTRONOMY CLUB OF NITERÓI IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

Martín Makler and staff¹

Our purpose, rather than learning more about astronomy, is to popularize this science for the public in general, mainly for the economically disadvantaged. For this reason since its creation in 1992 the Astronomy Club of Niterói has developed all sorts of educational activities both formal and informal. In the area of informal education, we developed exposition materials as models and stands, to make presentations in schools, public places and at various cultural events. Recently we held an exhibition in the bus terminal of Niterói, an area through which around 300 000 people circulate per day and more than 1500 signed our visitors' book. We also presented our work at several meetings and congresses such as the X and XI SNEF (National Symposium on Physics Teaching, in Londrina and Niterói), and the 46th Annual Meeting of The Brazilian Association for the Advancement of Science. At our headquarters we organize holiday introductory courses in astronomy, lectures, and debates. The most amazing experiences were probably the activities that were prepared for the street kids: at first with 10 youthful offenders from the FEEM (a government reformatory). They showed so much interest during the course that we presented more than what we had planned. The second challenge was a meeting in the Quintino complex (a shelter for street kids, drug dealers, drug addicted, and so on). At first it was extremely difficult to deal with this public but after some time they developed real interests in the project. In relation to formal education our main goal is to improve the quality of public education. Many of the members of our staff are teaching assistants in astronomy, which means that they can give refreshing courses for primary teachers, which was done in many schools in our state. Another activity is to go to the classroom and give a lecture directly to the children. As many of the textbooks have serious misconceptions we developed class notes and methodology to be applied in primary schools. We try to use the simplest and least expensive materials as most public schools have serious problems of lack of money. In all aspects of our educational program we noticed a lot of interest and very good reception from the students, teachers and from the public in general.

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