

04/11/2019 Meeting

Written by Barbara Geigle
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April 11, 2019, 7:30 pm, Penn State Berks Campus, Gaige 121

After our business meeting, our speaker will be Dr. Angie Wolfgang, Assistant Research Professor at Penn State University. Her talk is “Compositions of Extrasolar Planets: What Will We Learn from Our Next Planet Hunter?”

Thousands of extrasolar planets have been discovered, yet our quest to understand what they are like and how they formed is just beginning. A crucial aspect of this effort is to assess the possible compositions of these planets - that is, are they more rocky like Earth, or do they have significant layers of gas like Neptune or Uranus? A new planet hunter called the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is designed to address this question by discovering hundreds of sub-Neptune-sized planets that orbit stars relatively close to our Sun, and subsequently measuring precise masses for at least 50 of them. Dr. Wolfgang will discuss how we determine exoplanet compositions, what we know about them so far, and how our understanding may evolve thanks to TESS.