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For immediate release

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The Astronomy Club of Asheville (ACA) will be awarding a Universe Explorer Grant later this year. Nominations are open to middle-graders and high schoolers currently studying in North Carolina's 11 westernmost counties. Anyone may suggest a grantee, but students curious about astronomy are encouraged to nominate themselves. The deadline is the end of the day on December 22, 2025.

The winner will receive a suite of rewards aimed at turbocharging a young person's interest in space science. These include:

- An astronomical telescope in good working order
- Expert mentoring in the use of the telescope
- A 2-year student membership in the ACA, which includes a subscription to *Reflector*, a quarterly journal published by the Astronomical League
- The choice of a recommended astronomy guidebook, such as *Know the Stars*, *Explore the Universe*, or *Nightwatch*
- A two-person pass to a Dark Sky Astronomy Night at PARI, the Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute, located in Transylvania County

To apply for an ACA Universe Explorer Grant, answer the following questions in an email to inquiry@AstroAsheville.org

- Student's name?
- Your name, if nominating a student? Relationship to student?
- School name?
- In 250-500 words: Why should the nominee be awarded a Universe Explorer Grant? What are some aspects of astronomy that spark the nominee's imagination and curiosity?

The ACA is an all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization that traces its roots to 1981, when a few enthusiasts formed the Starfax Association and started gathering in one member's office. The club

experienced rapid growth in the early 2000s and now has an average membership of approximately 250 people. Meetings are open to the public, via Zoom or in-person at the University of North Carolina at Asheville's (UNCA) Reuter Center at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month except January and July. These gatherings typically feature a guest expert presenting their work in a field such as astrophysics, planetary science, astrophotography, or visual observing. When the southern Appalachian weather permits, the ACA holds public stargazes at various locales, including the club's dark-sky site, *Grassland Mountain Observatory* in Madison County, and joint venture *Lookout Observatory* on the UNCA campus. The ACA consistently ranks high on the NASA Night Sky Network's national list of astronomy outreach presenters. The club also funds the annual Carolyn Keefe Scholarship, supporting undergraduates studying physics or astronomy at UNCA. The ACA's nationally recognized website, astroasheville.org, is continuously updated with resources such as astronomical occurrences, local observing conditions, astrophotography by club members, lighting guidelines, equipment for loan or purchase, as well as details on upcoming presentations and stargazes.



Stargaze at Lookout Observatory - Photo by Alan Davis