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Astronomical opportunities for HBU's

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More than two decades after the birth of South Africa's democracy we find ourselves in an exciting era for astronomy in South Africa. The MeerKAT and SALT telescopes are producing world class science, the number of astronomers in the country are steadily growing, government funding is significant, and hundreds of students are finding opportunities within the broad scientific and technical disciplines associated with flagship astronomy projects. However, there is still a clear gap between those universities that are active beneficiaries of South Africa's investment in astronomy, and the many other universities in the country. At a glance it is evident that South Africa's Historically Black Universities (HBUs) have not reaped large benefit from the astronomy field. Partly due to the pressing need for transformation within the astronomy field, students from Physics Departments at HBUs often feed into human capital development programmes, taking potential skills away from their home institutions. There is thus a clear need to build stronger partnerships between the astronomy community and South Africa's HBUs, both in order to more effectively transform the demographics of the field, and to build scientific human capacity that remains at and benefits those institutions. The Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) has been working with the University of Zululand for several years to explore how astronomy could bring benefit to the university, primarily through the Physics Department. Initiatives include capacity development workshops; small telescope, robotic telescope and Virtual Observatory training; astronomy outreach; and the potential development of new telescope site which would have a combined research, training and community development purpose. The long term perspective is that such initiatives can be replicated in HBUs in South Africa and universities across the African continent, where there may be active Physics departments, but minimal astronomy activities.

Apply to be considered for a student award (Yes / No)?

No

Level for award (Hons, MSc, PhD, N/A)?

No

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