

Opening Remarks

Workshop “40 Years of X-ray Astronomy” in honor of Evan Pugh Gordon Garmire’s 70th Birthday June 14-15, 2007

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Good morning and welcome to all. I’m delighted to be here and to have the opportunity to help honor Gordon Garmire and recognize his many contributions and accomplishments on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

Gordon has played a pivotal role in the transformation of the Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics since his arrival from Caltech in 1980. At that time, the Department had only a handful of faculty, a few research grants, and some empty labs. Together with his close colleagues John Nousek and David Burrows, Gordon filled empty labs with advanced mirror and detector development instrumentation and with a vibrant group of students, engineers and research associates. They renovated a huge vacuum tube in the subbasement of the old Physics building, transforming it into one of the world’s largest X-ray calibration facilities. Graduate students launched a series of rocket flights for in-space tests of the latest detectors.

With researchers at MIT, Gordon’s group won a coveted opportunity: the principal detector for NASA’s Great Observatory in X-ray astronomy, originally known as the AXAF CCD Imaging Spectrometer. Committed to the AXAF project throughout his 27 years at Penn State, Gordon steered the effort through complex technological and management paths to launch in 1999. In the 8 years of Chandra’s mission, he has led a remarkably fruitful science team producing 150 papers covering the full range of astrophysical targets, from Jupiter to the deep extragalactic field for cosmology. In the meantime, his team spun off a related effort developing instruments and operating the wonderfully successful Swift gamma-ray burst mission.

Gordon Garmire’s accomplishments are not all evident from his public achievements. He has played a quiet but crucial role in the rapid growth and improvement of the Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics. He helped recruit a Department Head – France Cordova – a faculty member who became a Department Head – Peter Meszaros, and a slew of excellent young faculty over the past two decades. His character helped set a mood of congeniality and self-confidence in the growing Department. In 1985, Penn State awarded Gordon an Evan Pugh Professorship, the highest faculty title in the University. The University has only 23 active Evan Pugh Professors, scholars who have “displayed the courage to pioneer in his or her field, the discipline to remain at the forefront of research, and the generosity of spirit to share these accomplishments with students”.

The Eberly College of Science and Penn State University join you, his students, colleagues, and friends, to honor the talent, accomplishments, and character of Gordon P. Garmire. It is my great pleasure to congratulate him on his 70th birthday, and to open this workshop on “40 Years of X-ray Astronomy”.