Using the Astronomy Forum

Getting There: From the main course home page, click on the "Blackboard" button. You will then be on the 'Blackboard Instructions' page. There you will find detailed instructions as well as a link to Blackboard^{TM} where the forum is located.

Logging on When you try to "Login" to Blackboard^{TM}, you will be asked for your 'user name' and 'password'. These will be the same ones that you use to access your VCU email. Once you are logged on, you will get a "Welcome" page with a list of "My Courses". Select the link for this course. Once you have the Blackboard course home page, click on the button labeled "Discussion" to go to the forum.

Reading: A list of messages is given on the opening page of the forum. After each title comes the author's name, and the date of posting. Click on a title to read the message. Any responses to that message will be listed and you can read those by clicking on their titles also. When you are through reading a message, click the "OK" button.

Posting a New Topic: Click on the "Add New Thread" button, which is found at the top of the opening page. A form will come up with blanks for subject and message.

Responding to a Message: If you are commenting on a message that has already been posted, please, please click on the "Reply" button, which may be found at the lower right of the message.

Message Content: The messages should be **original**, should be about the content of this course and should be addressed to the class as a whole. Messages that are not related to the content of this course or are addressed to specific individuals will be deleted. As you read the notes, lots of things should seem strange to you. Ask about them (Be sure to mention which part of which module you are referring to.). If you see a message from someone who is confused about something that you think you have figured out, respond to their message. Do not worry about being wrong. You will not lose any points and I will insert my own responses to correct any mistakes.

Duplicated Messages: Sometimes your message will be posted more than once by mistake. Those duplicates will be deleted.

All-purpose Responses: Responses such as "I don't know," "Cool," "Read the notes," and any others that do not specifically address a question will be deleted. However, it is OK to say that you do not know an answer or you think something is cool, if you also give some information about what it is that you do not know or what it is that you think is "cool". At the very least, your answer should indicate that you read the question. Similarly, it is OK to thank someone for answering your question, so long as your thanks are related to the question and indicate why you found their answer helpful. A response that is just "Thank you." will be deleted.

Frequently Asked Questions: Because new people are joining the forum all the time and do not usually read all of the earlier postings, the same questions tend to get asked over and over. Please check the list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) before you post on the forum. Questions that are on that list will be deleted from the forum. The starting FAQ list is based on questions asked in previous semesters. When a new question has been asked and answered several times, it will be added to the FAQ list, so be sure to check the list frequently.

Unattributed Copies (Plagiarism): It is OK to copy material from the internet or other sources so long as you indicate where it came from. For internet material, just cut and paste the web location (including the http:// part at the beginning) into your forum posting. The forum will turn that into a direct link to the website. It is extremely easy to tell when something has been copied from the internet (just type part of it into Google). Copies that are not attributed to their sources will be deleted from the forum. Similarly, exact duplicates of other people's posts will be deleted.

Objectionable Messages: One strict rule is that **messages attacking individuals or groups are not permitted**. If you see such a message, notify me (rhgowdy@vcu.edu) at once. The offending message will be deleted and repeated offenses of this nature will result in the offending student being denied access to the forum.

Grading: Each qualified message that is not deleted (for being off-topic, offensive, or duplicated) earns points added to your quiz total whether it is a question or an answer and whether it is right or wrong. Each message adds 7 points to your total quiz score. Each in-class quiz is worth 100 points. To calculate the quiz average:

1. Add up all the quiz grades to get the quiz total.
2. Add the forum message points to the quiz total.
3. Divide the result by the number of quizzes.
4. If the result is more than 100, enter it as 100.

Qualifying for Credit Contributions must satisfy two conditions to qualify for credit:

1. Only your first 10 contributions to a given forum on any calendar date earn credit.
2. Only contributions made before midnight on Dec 4 receive credit. Contributions during the final exam period do not receive credit.