

Astronomy Dept. UCSC
1156 High Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95064
September, 2008

Dear incoming first year grads,

I hope you're having an enjoyable summer. All of us in the Santa Cruz astronomy department are looking forward to your arrival this coming fall. I am writing to you as the current graduate student computing "czar" to give you a heads-up about the computing environment you will experience as a first year.

You will be using computers both for class work and for research, and our department is committed to providing you with access to the necessary computing resources. The department provides you with a thin client computer on the "Astro Network" in your office for the first two years here at Santa Cruz, which should be fine for your basic computing requirements (email, internet, etc.) as well as for running medium size computations (IDL, IRAF, Mathematica, Python, and various other software packages are installed on the system). I have constructed a very basic web site that has answers to common questions (<http://UCSCastronetnetwork.wikidot.com>).

When you have found a more permanent advisor (hopefully sometime in your first two years), they typically obtain a desktop computer on the "NICS" network for you. Your advisor will pay for the computing fees associated with this network. This will likely be the computer that you write your thesis on.

Although it is not required, many grads have found that having their own laptop is useful. As an astronomy graduate student at Santa Cruz, you will be giving presentations in class and at meetings. You may also want to be connected while traveling to conferences, etc. Apple or PC laptops would both be fine – get what you are more comfortable with. For the typical task you might do on your laptop such as giving presentations, reading your email, working on documents and reading papers you probably don't need the latest and greatest super powerful mobile workstation. You will want to have a laptop with wireless of course. Configure your computer to have X-Windows on it such that you can easily access the on-campus UNIX resources. If you primarily use Linux, setting up a Windows dual-boot is recommended because it will reliably interface with projectors.

Best wishes,
Neil Miller
Grad Computing Czar