

PRESS RELEASE: AAVSO Celebrates a New Resource for Future Astronomy Enthusiasts in the Hispanic Community

CAMBRIDGE, MA – OCTOBER 27, 2021 | The American Association of Variable Star Observers ([AAVSO](#)) launches an initiative to engage a growing community in their own language. "We are delighted to provide this new series in Spanish and engage more citizens in the wondrous world of variable stars," says Dr. Stella Kafka—director at AAVSO. This [Spanish-language Astronomy Webinar Series](#) will begin in January 2022. It aims to promote the accessibility of scientific knowledge by providing a space to learn about scientific concepts, facilitating discussions between presenters and participants, introducing positive role models, and building trust in the scientific method among minorities.

"I think this project is key to [AAVSO's] mission," says Sebastián Otero. Otero played a key role in organizing the webinar series and will also, as a native Spanish speaker, be hosting them. "The missions of AAVSO is 'to enable anyone, anywhere, to participate in scientific discovery through variable star astronomy,'" says Otero, "with this webinar series we are reaching out to individuals who may have been underrepresented in the AAVSO membership."

The Hispanic community is the fastest-growing group in the United States but it is also one of the most underrepresented in STEM fields. The [US census](#) states that the Hispanic population accounts for nearly 19% of the overall US population, yet less than 8% of the STEM workforce is Hispanic. The 2020 ["Hispanics & STEM report"](#) (HSR), co-authored by the [Hispanic Heritage Foundation](#), finds that the US education and workforce development systems are not adequately meeting the needs of multicultural individuals, particularly in Hispanic communities. Nearly 20% of Hispanic males dropped out of high school in 2008, citing language barriers. But the interest is there; HSR findings demonstrate that Hispanic students and non-Hispanic students express interest in STEM subjects at a similar rate (86% vs. 89%, respectively) and aspire to careers in STEM at a similar rate (47% vs. 50%, respectively). Yet Hispanic students do not pursue careers in STEM at the same rate. AAVSO believes the accessibility of scientific information in Spanish is a key step.

"If we want to attract diverse talent, we need to create pathways to science for all individuals, independent of their socioeconomic background or the language they speak," says Kafka,

“informal learning should be a lifelong process available to all; devoting time to continuing education and pursuit of knowledge should be a personal development journey, which should not be hampered by linguistic barriers.”

This series will premiere on January 8th, 1:00 pm CT. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), this series will be completely free to the public with a new webinar presented every second Saturday of each month through 2022. Webinars will be streamed through both Zoom and [Facebook](#) live. Participants are encouraged to comment with their questions throughout the series. Each installment will also be uploaded to AAVSO's [YouTube page](#) afterward.

About AAVSO

The American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO) is an international scientific and educational nonprofit organization of amateur and professional astronomers who are interested in stars that change in brightness—variable stars. Its mission is to enable anyone, anywhere, to participate in scientific discovery through variable star astronomy. For more information, visit www.aavso.org.

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