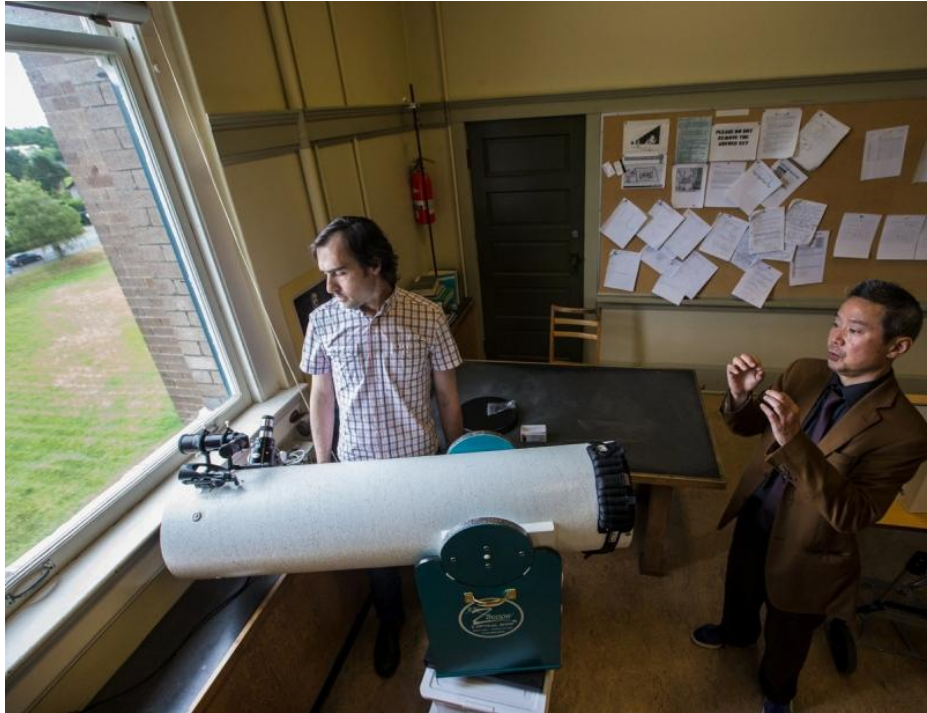


# Teachers launch district's first high school astronomy course

JEFF BELL / TIMES COLONIST

JUNE 21, 2017 06:00 AM



*Vic High teachers Jonathan Geehan, left, and Clayton Uyeda have teamed up to offer the district's first astronomy course, and hope to eventually have a rooftop observatory. Photograph By DARREN STONE, Times Colonist*

If all goes according to plan, Victoria High School will have its own rooftop observatory in the not-too-distant future.

But first, the Greater Victoria School District's only astronomy course has to get off the ground in September at the Fernwood site.

Still, teachers Clayton Uyeda and Jonathan Geehan have a spot for the observatory already chosen, just outside a fourth-floor office window.

"We'd be above some of the artificial lights, the light pollution," Uyeda said.

Both Uyeda and Geehan are math and physics teachers and they are teaming up to offer the course, which already has about 20 students registered. There is room for up to 10 more.

Uyeda said he tried to find other high-school astronomy courses in Canada as part of his preparations, but none turned up.

Geehan, who has a master's degree in astronomy from the University of Victoria, said the city is a prime place to have astronomy in high school.

Along with UVic's astronomy program, there is the Victoria location of the National Research Council's Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics on Little Saanich Mountain, he said.

"Victoria has probably got one of the highest concentrations of professional astronomers in western Canada, for sure, between the institute and the university," Geehan said. "There's just so much available here."

Uyeda said he and Geehan are already working with local experts.

The Vic High course will be listed as a Grade 11 offering and will be open to anyone who has completed Science 10, Geehan said. He said some Grade 12 students might also be interested. "Probably once it gets going and it starts fitting into the regular schedule, it will mostly be Grade 11s."

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, of which Uyeda and Geehan are both members, has provided the school with a second-hand Dobsonian telescope.

Some members are also willing to help students with the specialized discipline of astrophotography — taking pictures of what is observed. "That would be so powerful, I think," Uyeda said.

In addition to those contributions, \$10,000 has been donated for the course by an alumnus who wishes to remain anonymous.

The donation was made in honour of the late Barry Turner, a Vic High graduate who overcame vision problems to become an accomplished astronomer.

Uyeda said astronomy's influence on the world has cut a wide swath, and its underpinnings are actually in the field of philosophy. He said astronomy has been a key to human development, and helped lead to developments such as agriculture and navigation.

The astronomy course has been approved by the Greater Victoria school board, along with courses in yoga for mindfulness, travel languages and political science. All are scheduled to start in September.

Yoga for mindfulness is broken down into five units that will give students instruction in forms of yoga such as hatha and vinyasa, as well as meditation.

There will also be a focus on nutrition and the history of yoga.

Travel languages will cover the basics of Spanish, French and Italian, and look at phrases that are useful for travellers, while political science will delve into such areas as theories of politics and politics in a range of nations.

[jwbell@timescolonist.com](mailto:jwbell@timescolonist.com)

© Copyright Times Colonist