



## Reaching for the Stars

*As scientific research continues to flourish and expand at the UTPA, Dr. Hyun-chul Lee brings a new discipline – and a passion for the stars for his students.*

# BEYOND THE UNIVERSE

His discipline is big and his plans are bigger. Dr. Hyun-chul Lee studies the stars, or more specifically, he studies galaxies. His plans are to grow the discipline of astronomy at the UTPA.

After five years of post-doctoral research at Washington State University under a large grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Lee then brought his passion for astronomy to South Texas.

With his NASA grant funds, he has access to the use of the Hubble Space Telescope, working with Dr. John Blakeslee of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory in Canada, Dr. Young-Wook Lee of Yonsei University in Korea and Dr. Joseph Jensen at Utah Valley University to determine the chemical composition and star formation history of certain galaxies.

His NASA funding was supplemented in 2009 and 2010 by grants from the Space Telescope Science Institute, again to explore galaxies.

Since his arrival at UTPA in 2009, he has attracted more than 700 students a year into his introductory classes – enough to warrant the creation of an astronomy minor. The rapid growth of the program

has led to hopes of creating a major in astronomy and, eventually, a graduate program.

As part of these ambitious plans, Lee hopes to build an observatory for students to use in their research. Owing to the light pollution on campus, he is hoping to create an observatory with remotely operating and robotically controlled telescopes located at the Moore Field Air Base north of Mission. Students and researchers would be able to control the telescopes from their computers at home or on campus.

Helping Lee in his efforts are undergraduate research students like Juan Guzman, who was once an art major but, after taking an astronomy course, changed his academic focus.

“I think many of them are interested in astronomy because they are curious,” Lee said of his students. “Things all people want to know: ‘Where did we come from?’ ‘Why are we here?’ ‘What is the history of our home planet?’”

As long as there are questions to be answered and mysteries of the universe to be solved, Lee will continue his quest. ■