

IF WE ARE NOT SPECIAL, THEN WHY DO WE HAVE WAL*MART?

An Astronomical Quest

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Astronomical design will not help one find the remote control to the television, but it may help satiate one's curiosity about the universe in which we occupy an infinitesimal part. The project will consist of first obtaining a familiarity of Queen's Observatory and defining an "astronomical" task for the midterm presentations and then of secondly completing that task. The task chosen will not be astronomical in magnitude but will be astronomical in nature using observations of Kingston's night sky.

Are we special?

Is life a fluke?

Has human life happened before and will it happen again?

Is there life elsewhere in the universe?

What would that life look like?

Would they consider discount shopping to be important?

Would they look to the sky like we do or will they anytime in their development as a species?

If there is life out there, then we are aliens. Would contact be made in New Mexico, or will this contact only involve recognition that some sort of transmitted message was received?

The goal will not to be to provide specific answers to these questions but to make some investigation about them. Getting specific answers to the above questions would be an astronomical task in magnitude, but finding some aspect to investigate using Queen's Observatory is an astronomical project in nature.

IF WE ARE NOT SPECIAL, STUDENTS STILL CAN BE

By Warren Watson
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The above was one of several topics that I proposed for a first year project course during my short two-year stint as professor. The project that I, in the end, decided to use was not the astronomical task but was an aeronautical task. The project was called "If loons can fly then so can loonies." The students built a rubber-powered balsawood plane that could carry a loonie. I would have liked to have each student build their own plane but this was a group course. They followed my own course in aerodynamic design quite well, and most groups got a plane built from scratch that achieved the objective.

Copying was prevalent and there was always one student in a group that could be put in water and would float. As a professor, one is forced to turn a blind eye to copying and floating. I did not, and for my troubles, I got the added stress from this losing battle. Some students were really special and let's leave it at that.

Floater and workers get the same degree, on paper only. How much a final diploma is worth is solely all up to each individual student and not up to the perceived quality of the University. University is a good thing to those who do their own work, otherwise it is a waste of time and it takes people away from the trades. How many philosophers with a large student debt do we need? I would be happier with a university that produced philosopher plumbers, at least that way the trades would not be completely ignored.