

Planetary Wonderings

May Focus: GALEX

By Mary-Frances Bartels, NASA Solar System Ambassador

Happy 6th anniversary, GALEX! What is GALEX? It is NASA's GALaxy Evolution eXplorer mission, and it is studying galaxies beyond the Milky Way through its sensitive ultraviolet telescope, the only such far-ultraviolet detector in space. The mission studies the shape, brightness, size, and distance of galaxies across 10 billion years of cosmic history, giving scientists a wealth of data to help better understand the origins of the universe. GALEX compliments the Spitzer Space Telescope, mentioned briefly in several previous columns, which sees in the infrared area of the spectrum. Because each telescope sees a different part of the spectrum, using both telescopes to study the same areas of the sky gives scientists a fuller "picture" of what is there and what might be happening in the given area of interest.

Launched on April 28, 2003 GALEX was originally scheduled for a 29 month mission. It is a collaboration between the US, France, and Korea, and has imaged more than a half-billion objects across two-thirds of the sky. Highlights over the past six years include detecting star formation in unexpected regions of the universe and spotting Mira, a fast-moving older red giant star, which is helping astronomers better understand star lifecycles.

GALEX was recently featured as one of the telescopes showcased in NASA's *Around the World in 80 Telescopes* program in support of the International Year of Astronomy. Its data archive is available to the public on web at <http://galex.stsci.edu/GR4/>.

Lastly, GALEX's guest investigator program allows astronomers who are not part of the GALEX team to use this resource. New proposals are considered each year.

Resource of the Month: Do you enjoy decorating your desktop? Check out <http://www.spacewallpapers.net/> for an excellent collection of space-themed wallpaper.

Activity of the Month: Study the different shapes of galaxies by making a galaxy mobile. This fun activity is geared towards elementary-aged students. Instructions may be found at http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/en/kids/galex_make1.shtml.

Suggestions, questions, corrections, and comments about "Planetary Wonderings" are welcomed and may be directed to stargazer @ keeplookingup.net (remove spaces). Past columns may be found at www.KeepLookingUp.net (click on "Planetary Wonderings" on the right side of opening screen) and at <http://www.freelists.org/archives/astronomyed/> (columns from Jan. 2007 to the present).

Remember to *keep looking up!*

Sources (not already mentioned in the article):

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/galex/20090428.html

<http://www.galex.caltech.edu/about/overview.html>