Contribution ID: **57** Type: **Oral Presentation**

O49 - JUST LOOK UP: ASTRONOMY NIGHTS AS A MODEL FOR EXPERIENTIAL SCIENCE

Wednesday, 25 November 2026 14:15 (15 minutes)

For nearly three decades, Astronomy Night at the Philippine Science High School (PSHS) Main Campus has been an overnight observational astronomy event integrated into the school's Earth Science program. Though never mandated by curriculum, it has run almost without interruption, missing only two years during the pandemic. Each year, students spend a night mapping the sky and using telescopes to view celestial bodies. The night closes with the same ritual every time: a short narration of how people before them once looked up at the same sky and wondered, then the whole batch lying together on the school field, looking up in silence. Reflections gathered from batches of roughly 240 students year on year reveal a consistent pattern. While the night is structured around learning, what stays with students is its least instructional moment: lying on the field, looking up. It produces curiosity, wonder, and reflection on scale and place, often as students' first experience under a genuinely dark sky.

In recent years, PSHS has translated core elements of this design (field-lying observation, telescope use, and an accessible sky-watching lecture) into a shorter, one-time program for visiting school groups. The translation necessarily strips away what a 30-year curricular program offers that a single evening cannot: instructional depth, repeated exposure, and a trained peer-mentor pipeline. What appears to survive the translation is the awe response itself. Visiting students, most with far less astronomy background than PSHS's own, seem to respond to the same invitation to look up with comparable curiosity and wonder. This suggests the mechanism may not depend on prior knowledge, only on an open, unhurried invitation to notice.

We present this translation as a case study in design portability: what a program built for one institution's specific conditions retains, and loses, when adapted for institutions without that history. We argue the field-lying moment functions as curiosity made physically visible, an immediate and universally legible prompt in the night sky itself. That makes it a low-barrier, highly replicable model for planetariums, science centers, and outreach programs seeking to diversify and extend their audience reach, regardless of their own institutional depth or resources.

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Session Classification: Contributor Session

Track Classification: Communicating Astronomy with the Public