

Across the Cosmos July 2025: Vera Rubin and the Vatican Observatory Summer School

The Vera Rubin Observatory released astounding first-light images on June 23.¹ These images include: a stunning vista of 10 million galaxies, roughly 0.05% of the 20 billion galaxies anticipated during a 10-year Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST); 2,104 never-before-seen asteroids, with millions more expected during the first two years of the LSST; and a breath-taking view of the Trifid and Lagoon nebulae in Sagittarius. If you haven't seen these images yet, I strongly encourage you to explore the [website](#), and to check out the observatory's [Skyviewer app](#).² The application not only provides guided visual tours, but an [interactive sonification](#) that translates color and brightness into a mesmerizing soundscape!³

On June 28, CBS Sunday Morning aired a well-timed piece featuring well-renowned Br. Guy Consolmagno speaking about the [Vatican Observatory Summer School](#)⁴ (VOSS) and the broader work of the Vatican Observatory. Held every two years at the headquarters of the Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, the VOSS provides unique opportunities for advanced undergraduate and early graduate students to learn from experts in astronomy. The CBS piece was well-timed because Vera Rubin taught at the very first VOSS in 1986.

Since its inception, the VOSS has accepted talented students from around the world regardless of gender, cultural, ethnic, or religious identity. The only rules limiting attendance are that students must show evidence of likely success as professional astronomers, and no more than two students are accepted from any given nation. The challenge is choosing 25 students out of an applicant pool of as many as 200. Students get free tuition and enough financial support to ensure that every accepted student is able to attend. A majority of selected students come from developing countries. Thus far, more than 55 nations have been represented.

Like the Vatican Observatory, the VOSS program demonstrates a commitment to excellent science. It also enables cross-cultural and cross-national interactions. Roughly every ten years, the Vatican Observatory hosts a week-long gathering of past participants and alumni. These gatherings are devoted to research, science education, the dialog between science and culture, and social gatherings that promote the growth of collaborations and friendships across national and cultural boundaries. Although the theme for the next VOSS has yet to be set, I'd be willing to bet that science results from the Vera Rubin Observatory will feature prominently!

Until next month,

Grace

¹ <https://rubinobservatory.org/news/first-imagery-rubin>

² <https://skyviewer.app/>

³ <https://skyviewer.app/skysynth>

⁴ <https://www.vaticanobservatory.org/education/summer-school/>

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