May 2026



Dr. Dana K. Baylis-Aguirre



Academic position: Postdoc at New Mexico Tech

Scientific keywords: Evolved stars – circumstellar environments – AGB stars – Mira Variables – pulsating variable stars – stellar atmospheres – stellar evolution.

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:

In five words, Carl Sagan captured one of humanity's most profound truths: "We are made of starstuff." We can take starlight from multiple telescopes and weave it together to create luminous tapestries of each star we observe. These tapestries of woven starlight transform faint points of light into entire worlds, unveiling the unique, dynamic lives of stars and the hidden stories their light carries across the cosmos.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I have a slightly unusual perspective on this question. I knew I wanted to be an astrophysicist when I was 4 years old and I looked at Betelgeuse and the Orion Nebula through a telescope for the first time. What helped me achieve my dream, was simply never ever giving up. No matter how many times I failed or struggled, I just kept showing up. I did have a lot of anxiety about not making it, so looking back, I would tell myself it's ok to look into therapy or other methods to help me manage how anxious I was.

Emma Bordier



Academic position: Postdoc at I. Physics Institute, Cologne

Scientific keywords: Formation of massive stars – multiple stellar systems – dynamical binary interactions – infrared and submillimetre astronomy – high-angular resolution techniques – interferometry – high-contrast imaging

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would tell my younger self to chase her dreams and, whenever possible, stay aware of the systemic barriers ahead, but not let them paralyze her. To my slightly less younger self, I would say: you do not need to feel ready before stepping forward. Being ready usually comes after you jump. I chose interferometry and massive stars without really knowing what I was getting into but somehow it worked out. With that advice, I would have done the same thing, but worried a lot less. I would also remind myself to speak up sooner, ask the "stupid" questions at conferences, and apply for opportunities before feeling 100% qualified (cause this never comes). Confidence grows by doing, not by waiting. Seeing "imperfect" role models and hearing "this happened to me too" would have helped immensely, it turns self-doubt from a personal flaw into a shared, structural experience, which is so much easier to push back against. And in that sense, I would normalize failure and stop being scared of it.

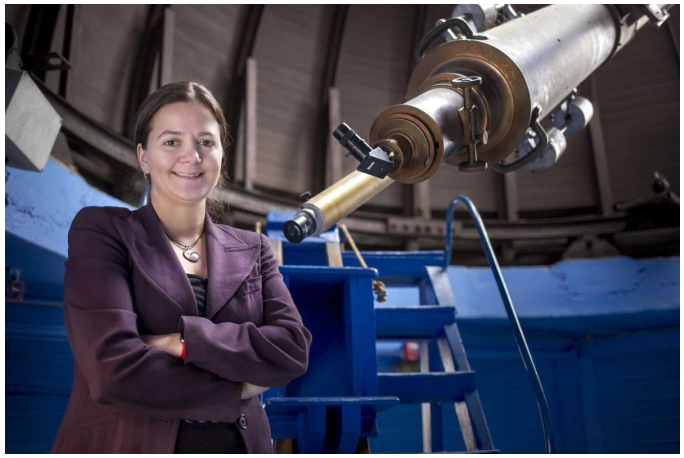
Amira Bouikni



Academic position: PhD student at the Paris Observatory

Scientific keywords: Planetary formation – protoplanetary discs – detection and characterisation of young exoplanets – instrumentation

Dr. Tabby Boyajian



Academic position: Professor of Astrophysics at Louisiana State University

Scientific keywords: Fundamental properties of stars – exoplanets

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

People will judge you no matter what you do, so do something you are passionate about.

Isabelle Codron



Academic position: PhD student at the University of Exeter

Scientific keywords: Planet formation – planet-disc interaction – star-disc interaction

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
The spatial scales we can probe with interferometry, along with today's improved sensitivity, make it such a unique way to investigate space! I love that my work allows me to image sub-millarcsecond features in protoplanetary discs. I just find it all so exciting.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
Looking back to the start of my PhD, I'd tell myself to back myself more, believe in myself more, and trust my gut more.

Akke Corporaal



Academic position: Postdoctoral fellow at ESO Chile

Scientific keywords: circumstellar dust – planet forming discs – post-AGB stars – binaries – star-disc interaction – infrared interferometry

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would give my younger self the advice to embrace change and keep her mind open toward the future, because non-linearity can broaden one's horizons in many aspects. Being anxious and doubtful of the next steps, especially if it involves changes, is part of the journey and can bring so many opportunities in both life and work. I would advice her to keep in mind that some decisions have a timeline, and an opportunity could be missed if one delays taking next exciting steps.

Michelle J. Creech-Eakman



Academic position: Professor of Physics and Project Scientist for the MROI

Scientific keywords: Stellar evolution – variable stars – AGB stars – instrumentation – detectors – optics – overall performance metrics and sensitivity

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

When you are in the thick of an investigation, or a design, or building something, it's easy to get discouraged and believe that it's not going to work out. The reality is that perseverance nearly always wins at the end of the day, so just stick with it and try again.

Françoise Delplancke-Ströbele



Academic position: System Engineer at ESO, Germany

Scientific keywords: VLTI – system engineering – adaptive optics – laser guide stars – instrumentation

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would tell my younger self to not hesitate to ask others for help or advice, and to not fear errors or mistakes: you will learn a lot from them. If you are thrown in the water, look for swimming lessons as soon as possible. There is no shame to admit "I do not know... yet. I'll learn it'". And most of all, enjoy yourself.

Antonia Drescher



Academic position: Postdoctoral Fellow at IPAG, Grenoble

Scientific keywords: Young stellar systems – planet formation – protoplanetary disks – black holes – galactic center – interferometry

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
I'm fascinated by the incredible resolution of infrared interferometry, which makes it possible to follow the motions of stars and hot gas around the massive black hole in the center of our Galaxy. These measurements allow us to test if Einstein's theory of general relativity is correct. I'm also fascinated by being able to resolve the innermost regions of young stars, enabling us to study the birth environment of planets and investigate the origin of the diversity of exoplanets discovered so far.

Ashley Elliott



Academic position: PhD candidate at Louisiana State University

Scientific keywords: Exoplanets – star-planet connection – fundamental stellar parameters – infrared interferometry

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
Infrared interferometry is such an incredible technique which allows us to precisely measure stars, image surface features, and more. The advances of this field has allowed us to obtain information about stars that before was only able to be done through the use of models.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell myself to trust myself and to advocate for my own needs and boundaries. Its okay to say no, to set a boundary, or to ask for help if I need it.

Arianna Foschi



Academic position: Postdoc researcher in the LIRA group (Galactic Center section) of the Observatoire de Paris

Scientific keywords: Black hole physics – galactic center – sagittarius A* – GRAVITY – stellar motion – S-stars

The fascinating aspect of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:

What is most fascinating to me, relatively to my job, is the fact that thanks to infrared interferometry applied to the GRAVITY(+) instrument at the VLT we are able to observe very clearly objects that are incredibly far away from us. Monitoring stellar motion around a supermassive black hole like the one at the center of the Milky Way with the current precision, was only a dream a couple of decades ago. With the development of IR interferometry and the GRAVITY instrument, we are now observing and studying these objects, opening new way to study compact objects in the universe.

Abigail J. Frost



Academic position: Operations staff astronomer at ESO Chile

Scientific keywords: Massive stars – star formation – multiplicity – binaries

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:

In my work studying multiple star systems which go through interactions, spectrointerferometry in particular can be the key to working out what is happening in a complex system. The combination of spectral information (even low spectral resolutions of 4000 when compared to dedicated spectrographs) with the milliarcsecond spatial resolution can allow you to determine exactly where any observed emission lines are coming from, which spectroscopy alone cannot do, meaning it can really be the deciding factor on what is actually happening in a system.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would tell my younger self to not doubt their own abilities so much. Ignore those who try to make you feel stupid because of their own insecurities! Asking questions, making mistakes and talking to people are integral to learning, so don't be afraid!

Noura Ibrahim



Academic position: PhD candidate at the University of Michigan

Scientific keywords: Young stellar objects – protoplanetary disks – inner discs – imaging – star and planet formation

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
The speed at which this field is improving is so fascinating to me. Going from modeling YSOs with only two telescopes 20 years ago, to now being able to reconstruct sharp, detailed images of the very inner AU of planet-forming disks is a huge feat. It seems like the more answers we find, the more questions we get, which is very typical of discovery-driven work, and it is thrilling to get to be a part of that.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would advice my younger self to not be afraid to reach out to people outside my institution. The people I have met have been so friendly and eager to help, especially the women. Now I am very proud of my network, and I have made lifelong friends and collaborators across the world, and I owe a lot of my success to them. In reaching out, I also realized how well I've been trained that I can answer questions and offer the help that I was once given, which is very rewarding.

Heidi Korhonen



Academic position: Head of the technical departments at MPIA, Germany

Scientific keywords: Optical and near-infrared instrumentation – stars: atmospheres; magnetic field – planets and satellites: detection – planet-star interactions

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
I have always been fascinated by the possibility of studying astronomical objects in detail - both with high spectral and spatial resolution. I started my career by studying cool "sunspots" on other stars than the Sun. When I was doing my PhD, it was always my dream that we could one day image these fascinating features on the surface of distant stars, not only on the Sun. I am very proud of having been part of the team that in the end made this leap possible using long-baseline infrared interferometry.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell my younger self to never give up and to not be afraid of taking risks.

Evgenia Koumpia



Academic position: System astronomer at ALMA, Chile

Scientific keywords: Accretion disks – massive stars – star formation – stellar evolution – stellar mass loss – interferometry

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

Looking back, I would tell my younger self not to close doors before they even have a chance to open. I often decided in advance that I was "not good enough" for certain positions, institutes, or opportunities, and therefore never applied. In hindsight, I realise that I was the wrong person to make that judgment.

What I have learned is that it is not your job to decide whether you belong somewhere. That decision should be left to selection committees, peers, and the broader community. Applying is not a statement of entitlement; it is an invitation to be evaluated. Confidence would have come sooner if I had understood that feeling uncertain does not mean being unqualified.

I would say: "Don't close doors for yourself by deciding you're not good enough. Applying is not claiming you belong, it's letting others decide. And for the inevitable rejections along the way: One committee's "no" can be another's enthusiastic "yes". Keep putting yourself out there".

Manon Lallement



Academic position: Postdoc at the Institut de Planétologie et Astrophysique de Grenoble

Scientific keywords: Instrumentation – nulling interferometry – photonics – exoplanet detection and characterisation

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:

On a practical level, I genuinely enjoy building and aligning interferometers. You assemble complex optical paths piece by piece, and when the fringes finally appear and everything locks into place, it's incredibly satisfying. There is something deeply rewarding about turning a conceptual design into a working instrument that pushes the limits of precision. On a scientific level, the astrophysical return is just as thrilling. What I love is this combination: hands-on experimental work that feels almost playful, paired with the ability to address some of the most fundamental and diverse questions in astrophysics.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now? I would tell her to follow her enthusiasm without overthinking it. I would tell myself to take those feelings seriously because they were a very strong and reliable compass. I would also remind myself how important the people I met along the way would become. The community, researchers, engineers, and teachers gave me even more reasons to stay in this field: their generosity with their time and ideas, their passion when they talk about their work, and their openness to discuss made a deep impression on me.

Claire Lykou



Academic position: Research fellow, Konkoly Observatory

Scientific keywords: Eruptive stars – protoplanetary disks – planet formation – mass loss - AGB stars – planetary nebulae – white dwarfs – debris disks

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would advice my younger self to be more bold and keep submitting ideas as proposals for the (now) new instruments. Five years ago I made a decision to slightly change research fields, which was kind of intimidating initially but it shouldn't be as I get to apply the same methods/ideas to this new field, but I also gained a lot from the switch. And overall while developing my career, I should have not been afraid to engage with the (male majority) community and to speak up. Perhaps it would have helped me to maybe join some confidence boosting lessons, to be able to "sell" my work and ideas better to the community.

Magdalena Otulakowska-Hypka



Academic position: Assistant professor at A. Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Scientific keywords: Binaries – close binaries – cataclysmic variables – symbiotic stars – novae – compact objects – transients

Anna Francesca Pala



Academic position: Staff astronomer at ESO, Germany

Scientific keywords: Binary stars – binary evolution – white dwarfs – cataclysmic variables

Claudia Paladini



Academic position: Staff Astronomer at ESO Chile

Scientific keywords: Stars – mass-loss – evolved stars – stellar winds – convection – binary stars – dust – high angular resolution

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would tell my younger self to not be afraid to be an outsider. Some of the most meaningful steps in my career came from following curiosity rather than fitting into an established path. I did things because they felt right and interesting, even when they didn't match expectations. I would tell my younger self that when this hurts, it is not because of who you are, but because change is often met with resistance.

Léa Planquart



Academic position: Postdoc at Chalmers University of Technology

Scientific keywords: Binary systems – evolved stars – binary interactions

Sylvie Robbe-Dubois



Academic position: Associate Professor at University Côte d'Azur

Scientific keywords: High Angular Resolution – instrumentation –stellar interferometry

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
The technique of stellar interferometry relies on advanced technology and regularly evolves with new instrumental developments. The projects are long, ambitious, and often involve demanding phases where progress can be slow. Taking part in the full process of on-site integration, from the assembly to the validation under real observing conditions, is both challenging and rewarding. After some laborious periods, the moment when the effort pays off and the instrument finally works as expected brings a great sense of achievement.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell my younger self to persevere through challenges, be open to exploring new technologies, stay patient, accept her own limits, recognize her strengths, and refuse to be treated unfairly.

Marie M. Rodríguez S.



Academic position: PhD candidate at Universidad de Chile

Scientific keywords: Protoplanetary disks – planet formation – infrared interferometry – high-angular-resolution techniques – disk substructures – planet–disk interactions – submillimetre interferometry

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

I would tell my younger self that uncertainty is not a weakness, and that needing time to understand things deeply is not a sign of being behind. What would have helped me most is trusting that confidence grows through interaction, with data, with ideas, and with people, rather than from having everything figured out in advance. Being more visible does not require being the loudest voice in the room, but allowing myself to take space, ask questions, and share work even when it feels unfinished. Seeking out mentors and peers who value curiosity, patience, and perspective would have helped me feel more grounded and determined earlier on.

Gail Schaefer



Academic position: Director of the CHARA Array of Georgia State University

Scientific keywords: Binary stars – orbits – pre-main sequence stars – optical interferometry

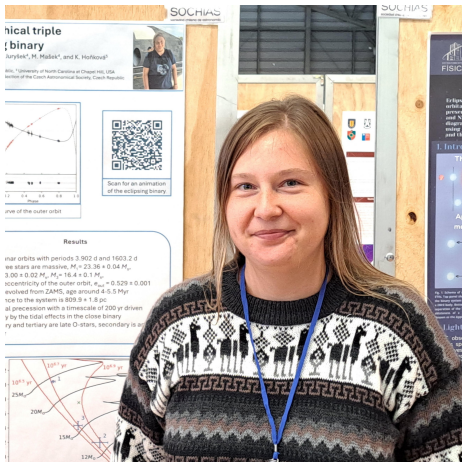
The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:

I always find it amazing to see fringes in real time - especially given the technical requirements, precision, and stability needed to bring light together to record interference patterns. It is fascinating that we can use interferometry to see what the surfaces of stars look like up close.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?

Believe in yourself that you can explore a career path in science, even if you feel uncertain about whether you meet the societal expectations of what it means to be a scientist.

Jana Švrčková



Academic position: PhD candidate at Astronomical Institute of Charles University

Scientific keywords: Hot stars – binaries and multiple systems – optical interferometry – spectroscopy – photometry

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell my younger self to not be afraid to ask questions and to ask for help/advice if you need it. This is actually something that I still need to remind myself all the time.

Macarena Torres Concha



Academic position: Student of Astronomy in Chile

Scientific keywords: Carbon stars – AGB stars – evolved stellar populations – stellar atmospheres and dynamics – circumstellar envelopes – mass loss and stellar winds – dust formation – optical/infrared long-baseline interferometry – high-angular-resolution astronomy

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
Being able to study the atmospheres and circumstellar environments of evolved stars at such high angular resolution offers a unique and powerful perspective on stellar evolution and mass-loss processes.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
Looking back three years, I would tell my younger self to trust her scientific intuition and not to underestimate the value of her own ideas. Seeking mentorship early, asking questions without fear, and making one's work visible, are essential steps toward building confidence. I have learned that uncertainty is part of the scientific process, and that perseverance, combined with a supportive community, is what ultimately allows growth and belonging in the field.

Sydney Vach



Academic position: PhD candidate at ESO Germany and UniSQ

Scientific keywords: Planet formation and evolution – exoplanet demographics – exoplanet atmospheres

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
Optical/infrared interferometry allows us to take the next step in viewing young planetary systems as an entire system as it allows us to start bridging the gap between the inner and outer regions of newly born planetary systems.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell my younger self to not listen to the professors that told you that you had to have perfect grades in order to pursue science.

Jynessa Valladon



Academic position: Postgraduate Researcher at San Diego State University

Scientific keywords: Binary stars – orbital modelling – long-baseline interferometry – stellar masses – star clusters – moving groups – stellar ages – stellar evolution

The fascinating aspects of optical/infrared interferometry in my work:
In my research modelling a binary star's orbit, the interferometric observations were crucial for determining the inclination of the system and measuring the masses of both components. Seeing a simple concept from my textbooks (the double-slit experiment) translate into a powerful astronomical tool has been truly rewarding.

What advice would you give your younger self, given the knowledge that you have now?
I would tell my younger self that having a less common background, in my case being a Latin American woman and a first-generation student, was never a reason to question my belonging, because science benefits from different perspectives. Needing help and asking questions are not indicators of inadequacy, and it is okay if things do not come as easily as they seem to for others. Recognising earlier that my background and the resilience I developed by persisting through challenging moments were strengths, not obstacles, would have helped me feel more confident navigating academic spaces.