

New Planets Shouldn't Rock Your World

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Don't be scared, if you think you'll have to memorize the potentially growing number of planets.

The proposal [astronomers presented Wednesday](#) to the International Astronomical Union (IAU) that would change the definitions of planets and add three planets to our solar system is nothing to get concerned over, says UAB physics professor Perry Gerakines, Ph.D.

"It may end up that we have hundreds of planets in the solar system with this new definition," Gerakines said. That shouldn't scare schoolchildren all over the world. What will happen, if the proposal is adopted, is that the way we talk about planets will change. "Instead of just talking about planets, we'll be talking about types of planets," he said.

Gerakines is a member of the IAU but did not attend the Prague Conference. He reminds people who would panic over the changing definition of planets that 500 years ago, it was widely thought that the Earth was the center of the universe and that planets were merely "wandering stars." The word "world" once meant "universe" until it was found by Galileo that planets were similar to Earth. Nowadays, we know of many "worlds" such as ours.

"That's the nature of science," Gerakines said. "Science is about adapting our thinking according to what we observe in the universe."

Source: University of Alabama at Birmingham

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