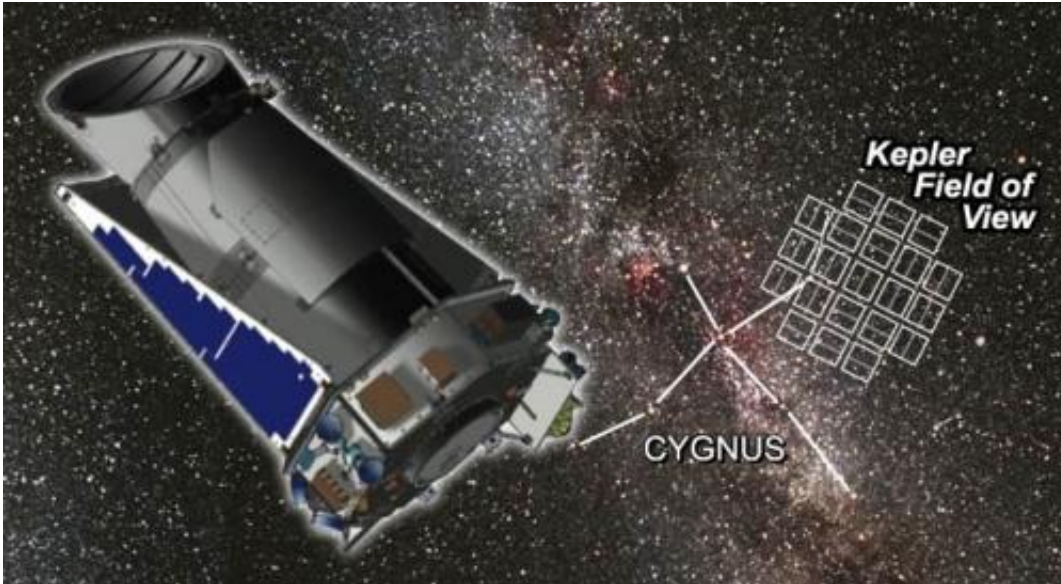


Kepler Mission extended to 2016

April 4 2012, By Nancy Atkinson



Artist concept of Kepler in space. Credit: NASA/JPL

With NASA's tight budget, there were concerns that some of the agency's most successful astrophysics missions might not be able to continue. Anxieties were rampant about one mission in particular, the very fruitful exoplanet-hunting Kepler mission, as several years of observations are required in order for Kepler to confirm a repeated orbit as a planet transits its star. But today, after a long awaited Senior Review of nine astrophysics missions, surprisingly all have received funding to continue at least through 2014, with several mission extensions, including Kepler.

“Ad Astra... Kepler mission extended through FY16! We are grateful & ecstatic!” the [@NASAKepler](#) Twitter account posted today.

Additionally, missions such as Hubble, Fermi and Swift will receive continued funding. The only mission that took a hit was the Spitzer infrared telescope, which – as of now — will be closed out in 2015, which is sooner than requested.

The Senior Review of missions takes place every two years, with the goal assisting NASA to optimize the scientific productivity of its operating missions during their extended phase. In the Review, missions are ranked as which are most successful; previous Senior Reviews led to the removal of funding for the weakest 10-20% of extended missions, some of which had partial instrument failures or significantly reduced capabilities.

But this year’s review found all the astrophysics mission to be successful.

“These nine missions comprise an extremely strong ensemble to enter the Senior Review process and we find that all are making very significant scientific contributions,” the Review committee [wrote in their report](#).

Here’s a rundown of the missions and how their funding was affected by the Senior Review:

- The Hubble Space Telescope will continue at the currently funded levels.
- Chandra will also continue at current levels, but its Guest Observer budget will actually be increased to account for decreases in Fiscal Year 2011.

- Fermi operations are extended through FY16, with a 10 percent per year reduction starting in FY14.
- Swift and [Kepler mission](#) operations are extended through FY16, including funding for data analysis.
- Planck will support one year extended operations of the Low Frequency Instrument (LFI).
- Spitzer's operations are extended through FY14 with closeout in FY15.
- U.S. science support of Suzaku is extended to March 2015.
- Funding for U.S. support of XMM-Newton is extended through March 2015.

NASA says that all FY15-FY16 decisions are for planning purposes and they will be revisited in the 2014 Senior Review.

More information: [Read more in the full report \(pdf\).](#)

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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