

Whizzing asteroid turns rocket scientists' heads

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(Phys.org)—International leaders in asteroid and comet research are gathering at the University of Central Florida in Orlando Friday, Feb. 15, for a special "viewing party" that will climax with asteroid 2012 DA14 zipping between Earth and orbiting communication satellites (within 14,000 miles of Earth).

The asteroid, the size of a city block, will squeeze by Earth's atmosphere and the geostationary satellites orbiting the planet. It will be the closest fly by in history. To see animation [click here](#) .

Experts say there is no chance the asteroid will hit Earth—this time. But with more than 4,700 asteroids NASA has identified as potential threats to Earth, some as big as 16 football fields, these objects are getting a lot of attention.

Humberto Campins, a UCF physics professor who led the first team to discover [water ice](#) on an asteroid in 2010, says the asteroids provide clues to the early formation of the solar system and should interest the entire community because they can be hazards as well as resources.

Campins is working on NASA and [European Space Agency](#) missions launching in the next few years to recover asteroid samples

Should an asteroid be detected on a collision course with Earth, it will be critical to know its composition and structure in order to deflect it. The impact of a small asteroid like DA 14 would equal the destructive power

of an [atomic bomb](#). A larger asteroid could be catastrophic.

That's why Campins and the planetary scientists at UCF organized this free Viewing Party and invited leaders in this asteroid research to speak to the public about the reality and myths of these [ancient rocks](#) on Feb. 15. UCF and the Florida Space Institute are sponsoring this event.

Provided by University of Central Florida

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