

Q1 Name

Eric G. Hintz

Q2 Approximate number of years as a member of the [AAVSO](#)

I believe my original membership to the AAVSO was in 1998, so it is on the order of 25 years.

Q3 In 100 words or less, explain why you want to serve on the AAVSO Board of Directors.

As part of my job, I have the wonderful opportunity to work with high school students, undergraduates, and graduate students who love astronomy. In particular, they love to get their hands on the telescopes. I've used variable stars to train many of these students in astronomical research for over 25 years. I want to take the historic 112-year-old AAVSO organization, with its passionate membership, and find ways to bring that next generation on board. I want to see the AAVSO grow in membership and have a lot of the membership growth coming from that next generation.

Q4 Briefly describe your past and current contributions to the organization.

In the early days of my membership, I was primarily a user of data from the AAVSO website. Using data as part of projects to study pulsating variable stars. However, I am currently the head of the Short Period Pulsator observing section within the AAVSO. This means I promote the need for observations of pulsating stars from the instability strip, beta Cephei, white dwarfs, and a few others. As part of that position, I have been presenting a number of presentations per year to astronomy groups around the USA and occasional webinars.

Q5 In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of the AAVSO?

I believe the greatest strength of the AAVSO is the incredible passion that the members have for astronomy, and variable stars in particular. For some of us, studying the heavens is our paid job. But for a large amount of the AAVSO membership it is just a personal passion. They do it for the love of discovery. There is no greater strength than following what you are passionate about.

The other big strength I see is that what is called the American Association is really much more international. When I have given Webinars in the past, there have been large numbers of participants from all parts of the globe. This is a group with a shared fascination of variable stars, who come from many cultures. We share that love of studying variable stars without borders and just want to help each other explore the heavens. All are welcome in the AAVSO.

Q6 If elected to the Board, how would you help the AAVSO translate those strengths into opportunities?

In some ways the two strengths are closely related. We have people who just love variable star work. There is no organization in the world that sits so well at the interface between the amateur and professional worlds of astronomy. We have individual members, and the AAVSO itself, that

have incredible systems for acquiring high quality data that can be used to increase our understanding of a wide range of variable stars. I personally appreciate the data that has been generated by so many AAVSO members that has helped me in my professional career. But I would like to move part of the organization's efforts to a new direction. I want to have the passion we all have for variable stars directed toward helping students from perhaps Junior High level up to Graduate students, but not necessarily those pursuing astronomy as a career. We have vast amounts of data and know-how that can be used to excite young people about what we love so much. On the board I would work to develop programs to push the organization younger.

In fact, I was working on a high school competition based on AAVSO data and members. I had discussed this with Stella (former executive director) right before the pandemic. I received local NASA funds to work on this idea. We had the better part of a program developed before losing the student who was the driving force. The AAVSO has been doing a great job with providing support to astronomical societies, but maybe we need to support the schools a bit more.

Q7 In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges currently facing the AAVSO?

I think the biggest challenge right now is the huge amount of data that are being generated on variable stars by many current and future sky surveys. Some might think that at this point there is no place left for AAVSO members to contribute to our understanding of variable stars. This could be discouraging to potential new members. It might also impact people's desire to renew memberships. People want to know their contributions are important. We don't want them to lose their passion. There are follow-up observations that need done, but some new professional programs are coming that might take over some of that work as well. All this will present challenges to the AAVSO.

Another issue I think is getting a younger generation excited about variable stars, and how they can contribute at all stages of their lives. There are a lot of challenges to attracting people who have had a very different life experience or are at a much earlier stage. Some have grown-up without even seeing a reasonably dark sky. If you can't see the stars, how do you get excited about participating in a group like the AAVSO? Their sources of information are also much different. Without being able to attract younger members, the organization will just keep aging. We need to have a robust growing membership and I feel those members will be found from around college age people. I also feel that moving to a younger demographic will help the overall diversity within the organization.

Q8 If elected to the Board, how would you help the AAVSO effectively meet those challenges?

I think being on the board would allow me to help develop support for the membership since we have entered a time when so much data exists. I have a lot of experience with building robotic telescope configurations for research efforts. I have also worked with others in the development of new filter sets to target specific information from stars. My overall training includes an understanding of telescopes, mounts, camera systems, and filters. I believe I can help the board

provide the information members will need to continue to make major contributions to variable star research efforts and analysis, as the data stream changes. One place the AAVSO can help is showing where other filters, that aren't the same as the survey coverage, can contribute to data. Another place where we can push is to provide better support for those who wish to work on spectroscopic observations.

When answering the Q6 above I covered some of this answer. One of the challenges I see is the need to bring in new membership at a younger age. The goal of this is not to create a lot of professional astronomers. It is to share our passion with a new generation who will hopefully find a love of life-long learning, with astronomy being a part of that. On the board I would work to find ways to make this happen. I still want to push forward with the high school level competition, making use of AAVSO data and members.

Q9 Skills Background - Please check in the lower boxes every category that pertains to your background: X = experienced (X) = some experience

Professional Astronomy – actively involved with AAVSO or Observing Campaigns	Amateur Astronomy – actively involved with AAVSO	General Management Experience – includes organization management, HR, finances, project management	Financial Management Experience – includes Profit/Loss responsibility, investment knowledge	Fundraising Experience – includes participating in and/or managing major fundraising efforts, or success in applying for grants and contracts (e.g. with NASA, NSF, others)
X		X		X

Q10 What are the three most important skills/experiences that you would bring to Council?

- 1) Finance Skills: I think an important skill comes partly from me growing up in a family restaurant business. This provided an understanding of costs versus income and how to maximize efficiency. From a fairly young age I was part of discussions about the business. Now I'm the associate chair of the Department of Physics & Astronomy at Brigham Young University. A major component of that position also deals with budgets. I work with out budget assistant very closely to determine how to maximize the budget we are given by the university. Finally, I've been part of a number of funded grants that

require close monitoring of expenses. I think all those experiences together have trained me to be a wise steward of funding. This is an important skill for an organization like the AAVSO.

- 2) Leadership skills: There are a number of places where I've gained leadership skills. For the last 4 years I have been the associate chair of my department. This means working with the faculty and staff of the department to meet goals and working with the levels above in the university structure. One must have the ability to inspire those in the department, but also work with people far detached from your field. You must be able to talk to those with no understanding about your department to convey why what you do is important. I think that is a very valuable skill for being on the board of the AAVSO. In addition, I serve on the board of the Apache Point Observatory where each partner institution has an astronomer and an administrator on the board. I'm actually the administrative representative BYU, which has a lot of budget responsibilities. Working in both these positions also requires listening skills as difficult choices are made. In both cases there can be a lot of different viewpoints that all need to be part of the solutions. Both can also require making tough choices.
- 3) Years of Variable Star Research: At this point I have studying variable stars (and variable galaxies) for 36 years. It started as an undergraduate project at a time when undergraduates didn't really do research. Variable stars are the reason I picked my graduate school. I've done other types of research, but I always come back to variable stars. In particular, pulsating variable stars. They still are my passion and that seems to fit very well with the AAVSO. I should also note that this work has led to significant experience with small, robotic telescopes. I currently oversee the 6 campus robotic telescopes with have a range of cameras (CCD/CMOS), filters, and variable targets. While my primary research is pulsating variable stars, I also work on eclipsing systems, planetary transit follow-up, and even variations in active galaxies. Having the broad research background helps in understanding the different needs of each observing section. That is a valuable skill on the board. I'm also working with my new graduate student on bringing stellar modeling into my research. This might be a place to expand AAVSO offers for some members who might want a deeper understanding of the nature of stars.