WELCOME TO 8.286!

OVERVIEW:
INFLATIONARY COSMOLOGY — IS OUR UNIVERSE PART OF A MULTIVERSE?
Course Staff

Lecturer: Me (Alan Guth), guth@ctp.mit.edu.
Teaching Assistant: Bruno Scheihing, bscheihi@mit.edu.
Required Textbook #2

Three “In-Class” Quizzes: 66%
The quizzes will tentatively be on the following dates:
   Wednesday, September 30, 2020
   Wednesday, October 28, 2020
   Wednesday, December 2, 2020
If you have a problem of any kind with any of these dates, you should email me (Alan Guth) as soon as possible.

Problem Sets: 34% No final exam.

Alternative Grading Scheme: In previous years, the division was 75% on quizzes, 25% on homework. If your average is higher by the previous weighting, then that will be your grade.
About 1 problem set per week, nine altogether, mostly due on Fridays at 5:00 pm Boston time.

The problem sets will not all be worth the same number of points. Your grade will be the total number of points you earn, compared to the maximum possible. That is, problem sets with more points will count a little more than the others.
The lowest* problem set will be dropped, but I strongly encourage you to do all of them.

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However: I understand that you are all have very overfilled lives. That’s what MIT students are like! So, to encourage you to do all the problem sets, I will be very generous with extensions. If you are having an unusually busy week (or if you are sick, have a family crisis, or have a fight with your brother), just send me an email describing the situation, and ask me for an extension.
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* Since the problem sets will have unequal weights, the one that will be dropped will be the one that increases your grade the most.
If the solutions are posted before you turn in your problem set, you are on your honor not to look at the solutions, or discuss the problems with anyone who has (other than me or the other course staff), until you have turned it in.
Some of the problem sets will offer additional problems for extra credit. We will keep track of the extra credit grades separately.

At the end of the course I will consult with Bruno Scheihing to set grade cuts based solely on the regular coursework. We will try to make sure that the grade cuts are reasonable with respect to this data set.

Then the extra credit grades will be added, allowing the grades to change upwards accordingly.

Finally, we will look at each student’s grades individually, and we might decide to give a higher grade to some students who are slightly below a borderline. Students whose grades have improved significantly during the term, and students whose average has been pushed down by single low grade, will be the ones most likely to be boosted.
I regard the problem sets primarily as an educational experience, rather than a mechanism of evaluation.

Your are encouraged — even strongly encouraged — to work on the homework in groups. I will be setting up a Class Contact webpage to help you find each other. But, you are each expected to write up your own solutions, even if you found those solutions as a group project.

8.286 Problem Solutions from previous years are strictly off limits, but other sources — textbooks, webpages — are okay, as long as you rewrite the solution in your own words.

A homework problem that appears to be copied from another student, from a previous year’s solution, or copied from some other source without rewording might be given zero credit. Except in blatant cases, the first time you will be given a chance to redo it.

Remember that this homework policy does not apply to other classes.
Expect a Questionnaire

By tomorrow morning, I hope to have emailed a short questionnaire to each of you. Please fill it out within 24 hours and email it back to me.

One question will be about your time zone, and your available times for office hours.

Another will be about the class contact list.

Another will be about your working conditions at your present location: a place to work, quietness, internet access, etc.

I will also ask if there is anything else that I should know to understand your situation.