

Check out Mars from IU Kokomo Observatory

November 3, 2005

KOKOMO, Ind.—The IU Kokomo Observatory will be open from 7–10 p.m. on Friday, November 4, and Saturday, November 5, for free viewings of the planet Mars in opposition to Earth. The public can view the phenomenon through the Observatory's 14-inch telescope and through smaller instruments set up around the Observatory by members of the Kokomo Astronomy Club. Admission is free.

During opposition, celestial bodies come into relatively close positions, standing “opposite” in their individual orbits around the sun. Earth-Mars opposition happens every 2.1 years, allowing great close-up views of the Red Planet.

This year, Mars will cruise within 43 million miles of Earth. That's not as close as in 2003, when the neighboring planets came in opposition at approximately 35 million miles from each other. But, it is the closest that Earth and Mars will be for next 15 years, said Associate Professor of Physics Rick Steldt, Ph.D., and will still provide a greater vantage point for observations.

This year, Mars will appear much higher above Earth's horizon than it did during the last opposition. “There should be less turbulence (from Earth's atmosphere), and it could actually be a clearer view than in 2003,” Steldt said. IU Kokomo's heated Observatory dome offers a comfortable viewing space, he added.

If the sky over Kokomo is overcast at 7 p.m. on either November 4 or 5—“if you can't see any stars because of clouds”—that evening's session will be canceled, Steldt said.