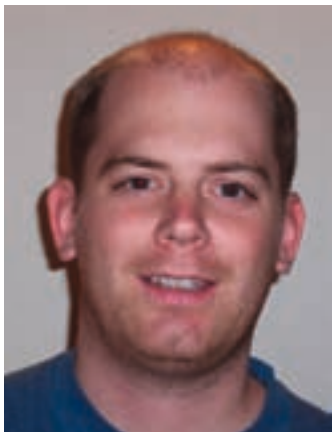
Fellows at ESO



Steffen Mieske

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My fascination with astronomy started very early in life. At the age of 14, I wrote a 200-page science fiction novel – which nobody except my best friend and I has ever read. At about the same time, I made a very daring bet with the same friend regarding our future professions, the stake being 100 Deutsche Mark. He bet that he would become a boarding-school teacher, and I bet I would become an astronomer. Both of us have won the bet.

At Bonn University I studied physics between 1996 and 2001, and my fascination for astronomy continued. During the last year of my undergraduate studies I spent 10 months in Chile at the Astronomical Institute of the Pontificia Universidad Católica. I pursued my Ph.D. work at Bonn University between 2002 and 2005, supervised by Michael Hilker and Klaas S. de Boer. During this time I spent another 22 months at Universidad Católica, my Chilean thesis advisor being Leopoldo Infante. Back in Germany, three days before Christmas 2004 I was notified of being selected as an ESO fellow. What a nice present! I started my fellowship in August 2005.

My scientific interests focus on extragalactic globular clusters and dwarf galaxies. I am particularly interested in the transition region between these classes of objects, represented by the so-called 'ultracompact dwarf galaxies'. Furthermore, I study the peculiar velocity field in the nearby Universe and the faint end of the galaxy luminosity function.

For my functional duties, I am assigned to the User Support Department, where I support service mode runs for WFI, Feros and VIMOS. While working for ESO I have gained invaluable insights into many aspects of running the world's most advanced ground-based observatory. Personally, I have been very much impressed by the momentum gained for the E-ELT development since I started at ESO two years ago. I am looking forward to an exciting last year of my fellowship.

Julia Scharwächter

While observing stellar constellations in minus-degree German winter nights, I became interested in the physical background of night-sky phenomena. When I discovered that "astrophysicist" could also be a profession, I decided to study physics at the University of Cologne, where later I did my diploma and Ph.D. theses in astrophysics, supervised by Prof. Dr. Andreas Eckart. For my diploma thesis I used multiparticle simulations to model the dynamics of a quasar host galaxy. This aroused my curiosity about host galaxies of active galactic nuclei, the evolution and dynamics of which has since then been my main research area. As Ph.D. project, which was partly supported by a scholarship of the German National Merit Foundation, I extended my work on multiparticle modelling of quasar host galaxies and became acquainted with the reduction of a complementary set of near-infrared images and spectra.

Having completed my Ph.D. without any practical observing experience, I was eager to find a postdoc position which would involve observational tasks. The ESO fellowship in Chile was my first choice and has more than fulfilled my expectations. Since my first days in Chile in May 2005 I have been fascinated by the combination of research and functional work in a multinational environment. As for the functional part, I am assigned to La Silla science operations, where I work as a support astronomer at the NTT and, since July 2007, as the first instrument scientist for SOFI. The expertise among my colleagues and the continuous interaction with visiting astronomers provide a unique opportunity to learn about different research areas and observational techniques, as well as to advance one's own research projects with new ideas. In addition, I very much enjoy living in Chile, every now and then stealing a glance at the Andes or by night at Orion upside down.

Julia Scharwächter