

May 19, 2008

**RE: Report to CASCA for the Joint Committee on Space Astronomy**

Dear CASCA,

This yearly JCSA chair's report covers the period from July 2007 - May 2008 (the present Chair's term). The JCSA received two new members and a new chair this term. The voting members are:

- **Matt Dobbs (Chair)** - Term 2006-2008  
Department of Physics, McGill University
- **Patrick Côté** - Term 2006-2008 (outgoing member)  
National Research Council of Canada, Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics
- **René Doyon** - Term 2006-2009  
Department of Physics, Université de Montréal
- **Mark Halpern** - Term 2006-2009  
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of British Columbia
- **Robert Rutledge** - Term 2007-2010  
Department of Physics, McGill University
- **Ludovic van Waerbeke** - Term 2007-2010  
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of British Columbia

The committee met twice by telephone and twice in person (December 2008 at McGill/CSA and May 2008 at HIA) during this period. Our committee addressed a number of issues, outlined below.

The committee discussed the issue of appointing a new chair. It feels that the present strategy of appointing a new chair every year is bad for continuity. It recommended extending the present chair's term for one year (the chair abstained from this discussion), to improve continuity. Without objection, the committee thinks the present chair has done quite a good job. For the future, it feels that chairs should be appointed with an eye for a 2 year term. The committee and chair are open to CASCA's suggestions in this regard. Doyon and Halpern are not available/willing to serve as chair.

**Summary and issues of relevance to CASCA**

The **resignation of Mr. Boisvert as CSA president is a disappointing development**. We hope Hon. Prentice acts quickly to move beyond interim appointments to a stable appointment that is viable for the long term.

We're looking forward to an important era for Canadian space astronomy. The **Herschel/Planck missions** are planned for launch within the year, putting considerable Canadian technology and effort in space—and bringing an impressive spectrum of science home for the Canadian community to harvest. The committee sees a **golden opportunity to capitalize on the education and outreach possibilities** these missions will provide to strengthen the image of space astronomy with the general public and our elected officials. This is an opportunity for the CSA, CASCA, and space astronomers to “give back” to Canadian tax payers—sharing the new view of the cosmos these instruments will provide. This will serve to build confidence and good will with tax-payers and elected officials. This coincides nicely with the International Year of Astronomy (IYA).

The CSA and academic communities have reason to be proud of the sub-mm maps the BLAST balloon payload is producing from their 2006/7 Antarctic flight, the successful completion of the FUSE mission, and the ongoing success of MOST. **The route for missions like these to fund their post-launch analysis efforts remains a minefield**. We encourage CSA to enter into serious dialogue with NSERC about this—and for CASCA and JCSA to keep putting the pressure on. We regard the Space Sciences Enhancement Program (SSEP) as an encouraging step in this direction—we recommend substantial

growth for this program. Recently, CSA raised the possibility of funding NSERC CREATE-like centers to facilitate analysis. We strongly support any transparent, fair initiative that addresses this void. We encourage the CSA to remain in close consultation with its science advisory committees in defining the details of these programs. Most important, this issue needs to be addressed quickly.

The most important accomplishment for the CSA during this period was the **release of several Announcements of Opportunity**. The AOs appeared slightly delayed from their anticipated release date, and the review and notification of the results is taking longer than expected. Nevertheless, **we feel the move towards this predictable, transparent process is a substantial step forward**. The CSA is recovering from its image of having “odd” and non-transparent means of selecting missions—hopefully this image is a thing of the past. The agency and community needs this stability for a healthy and proactive development. It is equally important that the review and selection processes are carried out in a timely and transparent manner—this being the first year for these AOs, the CSA should be diligent about this.

We **commend the CSA on its efforts to engage the space astronomy community** through its appearance at CASCA annual conferences in the form of town hall meetings. It is very important that the community sees and interacts with the “face” of the agency—its program scientists and directors.

The low point of this year was certainly the cost overruns for the JWST mission. We remain very concerned about management of this project. As a committee the JCSA felt it was kept poorly informed on these developments and was asked for feedback on very short notice with little information provided.

The CASCA Long Range Plan midterm review stated [The JCSA] "membership is weighted toward principal and co-investigators on CSA-sponsored missions.... there is a need to develop effective links with the broader astronomy community as well. Broader representation by astronomers on the JCSA membership would be the preferred option". The present membership provides the representation recommended in the midterm review.

A more complete summary of the JCSA’s activities in this period is provided in the attached recommendations from the December JCSA meeting.

The JCSA Committee (Ludo Van Waerbeke was absent)  
Matt Dobbs (Chair) <Matt.Dobbs@McGill.ca>  
Mark Halpern  
Robert Rutledge  
Rene Doyon  
Patrick Cote