

JCSA Committee report to the CASCA board

20 May 2006

Current membership

Chair: David Naylor, University of Lethbridge, Naylor@uleth.ca

Paul Charbonneau Université de Montréal

Patric Côté Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics

Matt Dobbs McGill University

Marten van Kerkwijk University of Toronto

Samar Safi-Harb University of Manitoba

Ex-officio members:

Alain Berinstain (CSA)

Samir Boughaba (NSERC)

Jean Dupuis (CSA)

Greg Fahlman (HIA/NRC)

David Kendall (CSA)

Denis Laurin (CSA)

Peter Martin (CASCA)

The JCSA meets twice a year, once around the time of CASCA and once in Nov/Dec at St. Hubert. Ideally, the JCSA would meet before the CASCA board meets, however, due to conflicting conference schedules we are again out of sync. The JCSA will meet on June 4/5 2006, immediately following CASCA.

Review

JCSA telecons

During my time on the JCSA it quickly became clear that communication is one the challenges in trying to keep on top of continually shifting sands. I have taken a leaf from the CASCA board and instituted JCSA telecons at 2 month intervals. The minutes for these meetings are attached. Although not everyone is able to attend, the reports I have received from both JCSA and CSA staff have been positive.

AO Status

The CSA continues to move towards the implementation of Announcement of Opportunity (AO) as the principal route for new missions. Such schemes are common among the world's space agencies and have many advantages, perhaps the most important being that they are formally reviewed in an open and fair manner. The principal drawback is that, outside of micro/nano satellite missions, Canada can not go it alone, relying on collaborations with other space faring nations, which of course have their own, and different, AO deadlines. A second major hurdle is that AOs must be issued by public works Canada, which incurs a significant, and unknown, time delay.

The JCSA is still waiting for the release of a General AO for Space Astronomy (which would be for concept studies) and a Special Opportunities AO for Space Sciences (which would be for projects which are beyond the study phase). Currently there are 4 active AOs (planetary exploration, space science enhancement, support of analogue research network sites and analogue research studies – details can be found at <http://www.space.gc.ca/asc/eng/scientific/ao/current.asp>)

While the JCSA supports the move to an AO era, many details have yet to be worked out. Perhaps the most important being their frequency; more practical issues such as the format of the submissions, the evaluation metrics and the review process itself are still relatively unknown.

Unsolicited proposals

The AO model poses problems for unique time-limited opportunities that are not uncommon in space astronomy. During the last 6 months three such proposals have been brought to our attention and at least two others are in the wings. The JCSA has recommended to the CSA that

these proposals (which are of a high calibre) be sent out for external review. This review is currently in progress.

Project status

At the December JCSA meeting there were short presentations from the following list of ongoing missions: MOST, Planck HFI; JWST, UVIT, Planck LFI, Herschel SPIRE, FUSE, Herschel HIFI, BLAST and CADC. The status of these projects was discussed and recommendations were made. In addition several presentations on new projects were received, they are detailed in the minutes. With the AO release expected shortly, the JCSA made no recommendations regarding these missions.

Of the ongoing projects the JCSA recognized John Hutchings' role in the complex negotiations that surrounded preserving Canada's contributions to the JWST. The MOST project continues to provide unique, precision photometric data on a range of stars.

Canadian Space Astronomy Workshop: Creating Ideas for the Next Decade

Following the success of the short presentations made at the 2005 CASCA/CSA Town Hall meeting, and the fact that from the CSA's perspective the JWST mission is completed (!), the CSA proposed that a workshop be organized in the near future to plan new initiatives in Canadian Space Astronomy. I am pleased to report that this workshop will be held at St Hubert on Nov 23/24 2006 and would hasten to give recognition to the CSA for their visionary leadership. The CSA will publicize this workshop at the upcoming CASCA meeting.

Replacement members

Although it took much longer than it should have to restaff the JCSA, with the appointment of Matt Dobbs and Pat Cote the committee is now operating at capacity. Future replacements will be discussed at the upcoming JCSA meeting

Miscellaneous comments

There was no NSERC representation at the last JCSA meeting, which is of some concern (this was likely due to Kate Wilson's departure for the CFI). We continue to voice the opinion that a CSA public relations official regularly attend the CASCA annual meeting.

Respectfully submitted
David Naylor, Chair JCSA