

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CASCA BOARD OF THE CASCA AWARDS COMMITTEE 2005-2006

Submitted by Stephanie Cote, Chair

The CASCA Awards Committee consisted this year of Stephanie Cote (Chair; HIA, 2003-2006), David Guenther (St Mary's, 2003-2006), John Landstreet (UWO, 2004-2007), and Howard Yee (U of Toronto, 2004-2007). All of the committee's discussions were done via numerous emails.

Awards

This year the task of the Committee was to choose the Carlyle S. Beals Prize and the J.S. Plaskett Medal winner. Both awards will be presented at the Society's annual meeting in Calgary in June 2006.

1) The Beals Award: the Committee received four nominations this year from four truly outstanding candidates. After much discussion, the committee selected Georges Michaud (Professor of Physics Emeritus at Universite de Montreal) for the Award for his lifetime contribution to stellar astrophysics.

2) Plaskett Medal: The Committee received this year again an impressive and record-breaking crop of PhD theses, both in quantity and in quality. Eight PhD theses from six Universities were nominated for the Prize. Several of them were outstanding and fully deserving of the Prize. In the end, the committee selected Lauren MacArthur (UBC) for the 2006 Plaskett Award for her dissertation entitled "Stellar Populations in Spiral Galaxies, broadband versus spectroscopic viewpoints".

The Committee has the following recommendations:

1) In view of the ever-increasing number of theses nominated for the Plaskett Award, the committee would like to propose to change the rule that only one thesis might be nominated per department, instead of two. In the last two years the committee has had to read 7 and 8 theses for the Prize. This amounts to an unusually heavy reading load, compared to any other astronomical committee (this year for example it amounted to more than 1800 pages, just for the Plaskett Prize). Even if the theses were first separated by half to be read by half of the committee for a first-round selection, in the end it would still come to a large number of theses to evaluate. This year two departments submitted two theses. Instead each department should decide what is the best thesis to nominate.

2) The Committee would like to propose that for the Beals prize nomination there is a limit to the number of letters of recommendation to be accepted (say, three). In the last years, some nominators have followed the guidelines closely and only submitted one letter from the two CASCA members nominators, but others have asked numerous other people world-wide to send letters of support. The Committee feels that this prize should not become a contest for the nominators to garner as much international support as possible for their nominee by getting as many letters as possible. It is helpful of course

for the Committee to receive letters of support from world-famous astronomers, but it should be fair for all nominees, and therefore a clear guideline should be given.

On Other Matters:

The Awards committee was asked by the CASCA board to look into how the society could promote Canadian astronomers for national cross-disciplinary and international awards so that more of them can be considered for these awards.

The idea of promoting Canadian astronomers for external awards is really excellent, especially since many institutions give no attention to this issue. However, the selection of nominees and the preparation of nominations for each award takes a lot of time and effort, and the Committee feels it does not have this time nor the expertise to learn about the intricacies of each award. In view of our already very heavy reading load, we cannot take a pro-active role with this issue.

We propose, as a first step, that CASCA creates a webpage identifying all the suitable awards for astronomers, with basic info and useful links. Note that there are also numerous student awards that should be advertised as well.

Possibly another webpage could be created listing scientists with a summary of their research (extracted from successful nserc gsc17 grant applications for example), to expose interesting science not only to the public but to CAP and other organizations in search of Nobel nominees and such.

If the Casca Board feels strongly that the society should take a more proactive role then we suggest that another committee is created, specifically to look at nominations for AAS prizes and others etc.