

Graduate Student Committee report to the CASCA Board November 2006

I. Current Membership of the Graduate Student Committee

The current members of the graduate student committee and their university affiliations are:

Rachel Friesen, Chair (University of Victoria)
Pamela Klaassen, Secretary (McMaster University)
Mohadesse Azimlu, Education Committee Rep. (University of Waterloo)
Kevin Brown (University of Western Ontario)
Saul Davis (University of British Columbia)
Sunne Dong (York University)
Louise Edwards (L'Université Laval)
Pascal Elahi (Queen's University)
Colin Folsom (Royal Military College/ Queen's University)
Marjorie Gonzalez (McGill University)
Sukhpreet Guram (University of Calgary)
Catherine Lovekin (Saint Mary's University)
Sean McGee (University of Waterloo)
Fernando Pena (University of Toronto)
Delphine Quievy (Université de Montréal)
Theresa Wiegert (University of Manitoba)

As of May of 2006, Rachel Friesen and Pamela Klaassen took over as the new Committee Chair and Secretary, respectively. At the 2006 CASCA meeting in Calgary, Alyssa Moldowan (U. Calgary) stepped down as the graduate student representative to the Education Committee. We would like to thank Alyssa for her work, and also thank Mohadesse Azimlu for volunteering to take over the position. We welcome Fernando Pena, Colin Folsom and Sukhpreet Guram to the committee, and thank our outgoing members, Alyssa and Rodrigo Fernandez (U. Toronto). We note that RMC is now represented for the first time on our committee.

II. The 2006 Graduate Student Workshop, Calgary

The CASCA Graduate Student Workshop was held prior to the start of the annual CASCA meeting on Thursday, June 1. The theme for this year's workshop was *Jobs In and Out of Astronomy*. The graduate students at the University of Calgary, including GSC member Christy Bredeson, did a fantastic job organizing the workshop, which highlighted employment prospects for graduate students in astrophysics. Sessions focused on defining the skill sets that graduate students require in order to be successful in astronomy, as well as exploring those gained which are applicable to other fields, notably teaching. Workshop turnout was high, with many of the students who attended CASCA also attending some or all of the day's events.

After the workshop the Annual General Meeting was held. Several issues were addressed, which will be discussed in more detail below.

III. Planning for the 2006 Graduate Student Workshop in Kingston, Ontario

Preparations for next year's Graduate Student Workshop are underway by the local Queen's and RMC graduate students. The 2007 workshop theme is "Astronomy through the Ages: A Grad Student's Perspective". The format will be a set of talks in the morning with a set of workshops in the afternoon. The talks will focus on the history of astronomy as well as current hot topics. The workshop topics in the afternoon will contain some variety, possibly including presenting to the public, scientific writing, supporting roles in astronomy, and astro-photography.

Since the Graduate Student Workshop has become a traditional component of the annual CASCA meetings, there was discussion at the AGM about the possibility of including a workshop budget requirement into the Guide to Hosting a CASCA Annual General Meeting. The graduate student workshop is currently mentioned in the guidelines as follows: "*Although the Graduate Student workshop is financially separate from the CASCA meeting, note that CASCA Graduate Student committee may need help to establish a budget for their workshop.*" The workshop has traditionally been free to attend, with the LOC of each meeting generously contributing some funding and/or a room and light refreshments. There have been, however, very different funding experiences in past years for those students attempting to plan the workshop. The committee would like to find a way to guarantee the inclusion of the workshop as part of the annual CASCA meeting with some minimum level of support.

IV. Student Awards

The Graduate Student Committee first awarded student-voted awards to top student poster and talk contributions at the 2005 CASCA meeting held in Montreal. We again awarded prizes this year, and congratulate Helen Kirk (U. Victoria) for winning the award for best talk for her contribution titled 'Star Formation in the Perseus Molecular Cloud'. We also congratulate Steven Bickerton (McMaster U.) and Anudeep Kanwar (U. Victoria) for winning the best poster prizes for their contributions, 'An Observational KBO Surface Density Limit from 40 Hz Photometry' and 'The Size Evolution of Disk Galaxies in the CFHTLS', respectively.

There was some debate at the AGM regarding the best method for determining the award winners, with concerns voiced that popular vote may introduce bias into the selection. The difficulty, however, in finding enough evaluators committed to viewing all student talks or posters during the meeting led us to the popular vote decision. The growing numbers of student contributions, as well as the parallel sessions, make this option more difficult (although we are very pleased with the number of students who presented their work in Calgary). The committee will revisit this discussion prior to the 2007 CASCA meeting in Kingston.

There was also some discussion of whether it would be possible to make the student-voted awards a monetary prize. At the Montreal meeting, the budget for the student-run workshop was large enough to cover the workshop necessities and additionally provide for \$100 prizes for the student awards. Unfortunately, there was no room in the Calgary workshop budget for this purpose. Since it is advisable to have awards which are consistent in value, it would be necessary to have a funding commitment, perhaps through the LOC and their funding of the graduate student workshop, to repeat Montreal's awards. Regardless, we will continue to recognize student presentations, as we feel that these awards are a recognition

of excellent student contributions to the CASCA meetings by their peers, and complement those presented by the general membership.

V. Graduate Student Involvement with the Coalition for Canadian Astronomy

Past Committee Chair (and current U. Laval representative) Louise Edwards will be travelling to Ottawa November 21-23, 2006 to participate in several days of meetings with Members of Parliament, Ministerial staff and Government Officials as part of the Coalition for Canadian Astronomy's efforts to secure funding for the Long Range Plan. We are very pleased to be represented in these meetings, and look forward to future involvement with the Coalition.

VI. Web Pages

The GSC currently has a webpage hosted at McMaster. It is, however, extremely out of date. We have traditionally had a student volunteer host the webpage at their home institution, but this requires the home address to change as students graduate. The GSC will discuss in the upcoming months the purpose of the GSC webpage, including whether we feel a web presence is important, what information we would like to have available, and how best to host the page.