

Report from the Equity and Inclusivity Committee

14 May 2018

Membership

The committee has grown by two members: Margaret Ikape, a PhD student at the University of Toronto, has joined. We have also added a postdoctoral fellow, Emmanuel Fonseca, who is currently at McGill.

Climate Survey

The climate survey data will be studied by Kristine Spekkens and Brenda Matthews, who have signed NDAs with the CASCA Board. A preliminary analysis of the data will be presented at the CASCA meeting in a few weeks, but as yet, we have not examined the data in detail. There was interest in the committee presenting our preliminary results during the Business meeting at CASCA, but we have adhered to our original plan of using a poster up for the duration of the meeting, given the preliminary nature of what we will show and the chance for people to peruse the data themselves during the poster sessions. The poster was submitted for the EPO session. At the bottom, we have noted again the suggestion that the Board create a category for these sorts of presentations.

Demographics Survey

The demographic survey we originally developed and had ready to go is effectively in limbo. The way previous surveys were done was to request that department chairs give us the numbers of men and women at various career stages. By consultation with the community, we have become aware that the chairs are most likely to universally reject our request to assign their staff into binary categories of men and women. The reasons are two-fold: this information is regarded as private, so they would likely ask each individual whether or not it was acceptable that they be included in the poll, and they are also completely uncomfortable with assigning a gender. This makes it clear that even generating sex-disaggregated (which is really what we have been working with to date) data is going to be a challenge.

We have come up with an interim plan for how to proceed given the society's need to generate some current picture of the binary gender split for the purposes of the LRP and the SKA memorandum to cabinet. This involves getting lists of the current members of departments separated by level, and we can then use software to which we have access to assign a probability of gender based on names. This is not ideal and will have some uncertainties associated with it, but it is a means of proceeding in the short term.

In the longer term, it is clear that polling departments is not the way to capture an accurate picture of the gender breakdown in our community. The better method would involve self-declaration on the part of all individuals, likely as part of a profile to which they and only they have access. This again highlights the importance of the member

profile pages that have been down for some time on the CASCA site. A more sophisticated profile (with a private component) would fit the requirements of self-reporting for not just gender, but many of the other factors requested by the governments gender-based analysis + (GBA+) methodology: physical disability, Indigenous status, visible minorities, age, year of PhD etc.. We can't poll for these in any reasonable way, but if they are self-declared, then it should be possible to aggregate this information from CASCA profiles at any given time, making snapshots of current demographics of the community possible. The updating of the profile could be linked to online payments to ensure that people update their information. Note that the key to making this successful will be being very clear about why we are requesting this information. We should have an option for "prefer not to say" if we request information like this, but we should be clear that if everyone uses this option, it will be the same as having no information to give to government or other funding bodies that request it.

Note that the suggested path forward above means that we would poll only CASCA members in our assembly of the current population of astronomers in Canada since we would have no means to extend this to non-members of CASCA.

The EIC considers the demographics survey to be its highest priority at the current time.

We note that the EIC survey was being undertaken on behalf of both CASCA and ACURA and the latter have traditionally not requested any information on gender. Asking for the names of members in the department should enable us to assemble the information ACURA needs easily, but in the case of the U Vic department, the chair was not sure whether he would be able to give out student names (despite the obvious counter-argument that they are on the website).

Update on NSERC statistics

NSERC continues to hold back sex dis-aggregated numbers in discovery grants. The person in charge of gender diversity at NSERC did not know that the CAP liaison committee was given sex dis-aggregated results. NSERC is clearly not going to release those data. NSERC's EDI person is going to be visiting every department. If the CASCA Board wants to pursue this information further, then a more heavy handed approach may be needed: e.g., access to information request and then pursue the analysis ourselves.

Proposed initiatives (unchanged from previous report)

1 Ethics statement

The AAS has introduced a very extensive ethics statement that now outlines more clearly what is unacceptable behaviour. CASCA could follow their lead and author a more detailed ethics statement as many societies are now doing.

2 White paper for the LRP

The committee discussed summarizing findings of the climate and demographics survey and presenting new initiatives in a white paper to the LRP.

3 National mentoring program

The committee has discussed the merits of mentoring programs in the context of providing individuals with a resource outside their own institutions. This would enable people to have a senior person to whom they could turn with questions about professional development, standards of behaviour and for assistance if they don't know where to turn locally. We noted that some people would not be appropriate to be mentors and there were questions as to how to handle that scenario. We know for instance that CANTAC retains a no-fly list of people not used to evaluate proposals. With regard to the mentoring issue, it became apparent in discussion of the "Astronomy Allies" (astronomyallies.com) that what we really need is a "go to" list of people as much as a "no fly" list. The allies have a vetting process and only people who pass this vetting can be listed as allies. Once listed, these people are considered individuals to whom issues of harassment and bullying can be brought. It was noted that when such a system was set up for mentoring in Australia, the organizers deliberately made the process look complicated so that people understood that they would not necessarily be assigned. This was a mechanism used to avoid including people who should not have been mentors.

4 Recruitment of people for Astronomy Allies

Regardless of the mentoring program status, it would be useful for Canada for more Canadians to be Astronomy Allies.

5 Pleiades Style Grant system and Athena Swan accreditation

These programs were discussed several times by the EIC. There are polling questions on the climate survey about both of these programs, and a cursory look at the responses shows that > 55% of respondents are in favor of CASCA working to implement these. In both cases, negative responses were < 13% although this leaves quite a few people who are ambivalent or unsure.

Followup: CASCA presentations on EIC issues

In our previous Board report, the EIC suggested that CASCA create another category of presentations, such as "Community Initiatives and Demographics" that would allow CASCA members to present a second poster presentation in a non-science category. These types of presentations, that provide insight or analysis of the CASCA/ Canadian/astronomical community, could then be a second poster presentation for authors, in addition to science ones. It is better that presentations in this category not be folded under EPO, since they are really community based and cover very different ground than EPO.