

## Canadian Astronomical Society Société Canadienne d'Astronomie Office of the President Bureau du Président

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To: Samir Boughaba
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CC: Ainsley McFarlane
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NSERC, Mathematical, Environmental and Physical Sciences Division

Isabelle Blain, NSERC, Vice-President of Research Grants and Scholarships

Janet Walden NSERC, Acting President

Victoria, June 13, 2013

## Dear Dr. Boughaba,

thank you for your response to the letter, sent on May 16 2013 on behalf of CASCA, in which I expressed concern about the absence of Canadian astronomers in the 2012-13 Physics 1505 evaluation panel. The issue was discussed by the CASCA membership during the Annual Meeting recently held in Vancouver. The following represents the views of the community on the subject.

We fully understand the difficulties associated with the selection of panel members, and I know from experience that it is not always possible to meet every requirement. However, CASCA counts within its members 300 professional astronomers in tenure or tenure-track positions. While not as large as others, the community is nevertheless large and diverse enough that selecting at least a few Canadian representatives should be possible. As I mentioned in my previous letter, for all of CASCA's committees as well as national telescope and time allocation committees, finding suitable Canadian members, while a challenge, has never been an insolvable problem. Indeed, even in the case of NSERC's 1505 review panel, it is only recently that the number of Canadian representatives has declined – in spite of the fact that the size of the community has not changed appreciably.

In your letter, you stress the need to balance "expertise breadth, continuous institutional representation, simultaneous institutional representation, capacity to review the application in two official languages, gender representation, etc." However, the astronomy component of the 2012-2013 Physics evaluation panel (appended at the end of this letter) in not scientifically unbiased, has no female representation, and with the exception of one member, only includes US institutions. This raises the question as to whether entirely sacrificing Canadian representation did indeed lead to a balanced and well rounded committee.

But of even greater concern to us is the fact that we could not find, in your letter, any indication that NSERC views the lack of Canadian representation to be an issue. Past panel co-chairs have indicated to us that the "in-depth orientation and mock review sessions" are not sufficient nor intended to familiarize the reviewers with the Canadian system. Likewise, the fact that Canadian referees are consulted is hardly a substitute for an in depth understanding of the structure, priorities, and workings of the Canadian astronomical community during the face-to-face deliberations.

I understand that at this time new panel members are being selected to replace those whose term has expired. I reiterate our strong view that Canadian astronomers must be represented. Ultimately, our goal is the same as NSERC's: to ensure a fair and balanced outcome that reflects the needs and priorities of the community. CASCA would be more than willing to work with and assist NSERC - for instance by suggesting names for consideration from within the Canadian community - to ensure that this goal is reached.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Ferrarese

**CASCA President** 

Addendum: Astronomy representation in the Physics 1505 Conference

Edmund Bertschinger (MIT, USA) Jean-Philippe Bernard (CESR, France) (Cornell University, USA) James Cordes (University of Texas, USA) Karl Gebhardt (University of Maryland, USA) Lee Mundy **Edward Wright** 

(UCLA, USA)

Theoretical cosmology Observational cosmology, dust Radio pulsars, neutron stars Galaxy dynamics, stellar populations

Galactic star formation Observational cosmology