

Report from the Equity and Inclusivity Committee

21 December 2017; updated 4 January 2018

Membership

The committee still needs to augment its membership by two members. We have decided to include a PDF and a graduate student. The process of identifying these individuals has been slow. Chelsea Sharon was asked to join as a PDF, but she will not be able to complete even a year term, so we will ask someone else. We aim to get this sorted out first thing in the new year. The number of members will then be 6, including the Board representative.

Climate Survey

The climate survey was launched and executed in Nov/Dec. The close of the survey is today, and the response is on order of 150 members of CASCA. Issues with the survey in execution were many. The company commissioned to produce the survey (infopoll) were difficult to deal with, a situation not helped by changes requested from the committee members to the textual content after the survey was drafted. Many of the amendments needed, however, were necessitated by the typos and errors introduced by the infopoll staff. It seems apparent they were retyping in the survey content too much of the time, instead of cutting and pasting which would have avoided a lot of errors (like spelling “oui” as “qui”, for instance). They charged us for the time they needed to fix their own mistakes, which alone suggests CASCA should not do business with this company again. Other lessons learned is that we need to mock up an html version ourselves, since this was clearly a more effective means of proofreading than a document. The release of the survey was also plagued with some issues. The survey http site was not secure, which lead to concerns raised among the community, particularly at U of T. It is regrettable that this detail was not noticed by the committee as the survey drafts were prepared. Again, infopoll was inflexible on this issue, and as I have remarked to one community member, really they should have raised this with us, since they are in the business of running surveys and were fully aware of the content.

Before the survey data are analyzed, we will inform the Board of which committee members will be interacting with the data. We aim to complete analysis of the data by end 2018, and we hope to present preliminary results at CASCA in May 2018.

Demographics Survey

We remain committed to restarting demographics surveys for CASCA. We have had discussions about the demographics survey and how to evolve the earlier structure to be sensitive to more than a binary gender structure. This survey will be undertaken in early 2018, with a view of doing it every 2 years.

Update on NSERC statistics

The EIC has had numerous discussions regarding obtaining gender based data on NSERC applications and success rates in astronomy. These data have not been forthcoming. NSERC has released various summaries of information regarding recent allocations, but none of the datasets are broken down as we need to see them. There are no statistics done in the NSERC analysis. Julie H-L and Kristine S. have undertaken analysis of the data from recent successful applicants, utilizing a program that assigns likely gender based on names. The plots created are interesting and suggestive that grants going to female applicants are lower in value than those to their male counterparts. We feel that these plots make it worthwhile to continue to press NSERC on this issue.

We think the best way to achieve this is to continue to press CAP to push for statistical analysis, which is something they want to do anyway. What we really want is a breakdown within the physics grouping as well. In the meantime, Julie is going to add the 2017 results into her own analysis and improve the statistics there.

Proposed initiatives

1 Ethics statement

The AAS has introduced a very extensive ethics statement that now outlines more clearly what is unacceptable behavior. 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 behavior 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.