

CASCA EPO Committee | December 2020 Report

Submitted by Nathalie Ouellette (Chair) on behalf of the EPO Committee

This report covers the activities of CASCA's Education and Public Outreach (EPO) Committee over the period from June 1 to December 1 2020. The committee met (online) twice during this period of time: July 6th 2020 and October 21st 2020.

1. Current Membership

Chair: Nathalie Ouellette (2019-2022), Université de Montréal

Frédérique Baron (2019-2022) Université de Montréal

Mike Chen (2020-2023) University of Victoria

Robert Cockcroft (2014-2023) University of Western Ontario, **Chair of Westar Lecture**

Subcommittee

Viraja Khatu (2020-2021) University of Western Ontario, **GSC Representative**

Phil Langill (2014-2023) Rothney Astrophysical Observatory/University of Calgary

Sharon Morsink (2016-2021) University of Alberta, **IAU Representative**

Laura Parker (2020-2023) McMaster University, **Board Representative**

Jesse Rogerson (2020-2023) York University, **Chair of Social Media Subcommittee**

Nienke van der Marel (2019-2022) NRC-HAA

Christa Van Laerhoven (2020-2023) University of British Columbia

ex-officio: Julie Bolduc-Duval, Discover the Universe

ex-officio: Leslie Sage, CASCA Press Officer

2. Changes to the membership

The following committee members had terms that came to an end and chose not to renew their memberships: **Kelly Lepo**, **Pierre Chastenay**. We thank them for their hard work and look forward to collaborating with them again in the future!

The following committee members had terms that came to an end and chose to renew their membership: **Robert Cockcroft**, **Phil Langill**, **Sharon Morsink** (only for an extra year).

Mike Chen, former GSC Representative on the committee, had his one-year term come to an end. He was replaced by **Viraja Kathu**.

Suresh Sivanandam, former Board Representative on the committee, had his term come to an end. He was replaced by **Laura Parker**.

Former EPO Committee Chair **Phil Langill** stepped down from his role. After gauging interest in the position amongst committee members, the committee named **Nathalie Ouellette** as the next Chair during the Summer 2020 meeting on July 6th. We thank Phil for his hard work as Chair over the last few years!

Julie Bolduc-Duval expressed an interest in making room for a new member by stepping down after over a decade of service to the committee. After consultation with the CASCA

Board, and given Julie's key role in the Canadian EPO landscape as Director of *Discover the Universe*, we opted to create a non-voting ex-officio position for her. We are grateful to be able to keep Julie and her valuable wisdom around in this new role.

Given the changes in our membership, the committee decided to solicit interested candidates among CASCA members to fill three open positions. A call was sent out via the CASCA exploder in early September. We received a dozen notices of interest, which led us to opt for a ranked vote by which we would select our new members. Those who showed interest in joining were asked to submit a short (200 word max.) blurb about themselves and their EPO interests. Eight candidates submitted blurbs and were considered in the membership election. The following members were elected to join the EPO Committee for a 3-year long term: **Mike Chen** (who was previously the GSC representative on the committee), **Jesse Rogerson** and **Christa van Laerhoven**. The other candidates who were not selected were encouraged to try joining the EPO Committee in the following years as positions opened up, and to collaborate with committee members as opportunities arose.

3. Committee activities

a. Discover the Universe nominated for the SWCC's People's Choice Award

Discover the Universe's website was nominated for a People's Choice Award by the Science Writers and Communicators of Canada association for Favourite Science Website, along with 9 other websites. This was in part due to the success of DU's *Astro at Home/Astro à la maison* program which featured daily astronomy presentations for kids in both English and French at the start of the pandemic.

An announcement was sent out to CASCA members to encourage them to vote for DU in October 2020. Results were announced in November. Unfortunately, DU did not win, but the wider science communication community in Canada expressed great enthusiasm and appreciation for DU and their collaborators. This nomination brought great visibility to the organisation.

b. NSERC Science Communication Skills Grant, AstroComm Workshop

A proposal led by Nathalie with support from Julie on behalf of CASCA was submitted to this new NSERC pilot program in June 2020 for an online catalogue of astronomy resources and a series of in person or virtual workshops to train physicists and astronomers to communicate astronomy with the general public.

Unfortunately, we did not receive this \$20,000 grant. Nathalie received the results as well as comments from NSERC in October 2020 and was informed that 21 successful proposals were selected out of 104 submitted proposals. Comments received from the selection committee were encouraging. Based on the profiles of the proposals that were successful, it is very possible that CASCA's proposal was disadvantaged because 1) its target audience of astronomers and physicists was too narrow and 2) there wasn't enough emphasis placed on a virtual alternative for the workshops, given that they would have to be delivered by September 2021 while the global pandemic will still be ongoing. Nevertheless, the CASCA EPO Committee is interested in applying again with support from the CASCA Board if there is another call next year.

In the meantime, the Director of the *Centre de recherche en astrophysique du Québec* (CRAQ) Pierre Bergeron approached Nathalie and Julie with an offer to support a

scaled-down version of what was initially proposed to NSERC in lieu of the CRAQ Summer School. We thus plan to organise the **AstroComm Workshop in June 2021** which will cover topics such as visuals for presentations, public speaking for different audiences, science writing, social media use, media interviews and activities for K-12 students in an interactive format. A first announcement will be made in the upcoming edition of Cassiopeia.

c. Social media

CASCA has accounts on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A few individuals handle these accounts sporadically, but their use and reach are quite limited. Given the importance of social media in science communication these days, we decided to create a **Social Media Subcommittee** which will be chaired by Jesse Rogerson. See below for their report.

d. Online EPO initiatives across the community

Canadian astronomers and institutions across the country have continued their valiant efforts to organise and deliver EPO activities online given the current COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that, after a notable surge of popularity for these events in the Spring, it has become increasingly difficult to attract large audiences given the general public's Zoom-fatigue and the increased competition stemming from the larger number of online events and activities.

In an attempt to gauge the number of online initiatives organised by CASCA members, we created a public document distributed via the CASCA mailing list which allows people to add their activities:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17WjDoER37vnJtIX0u7NyiiHtL1EIS8yaQYWc5ubMq_Y/

This document may also become a resource to develop content for CASCA social media channels as events organised by our members could be advertised on these channels. It is likely that the document will have to be recirculated throughout the community periodically to keep it up to date. Our committee will discuss how to best do this during our next meeting.

e. 2024 Solar Eclipse

Several members of our committee have been contacted by the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) to inform us that a Task Force is being created for the 2024 Solar Eclipse which will be taking place across North America on April 8 2024. This eclipse's path of totality will be crossing parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince-Edward-Island, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. Nathalie will be meeting with RASC President Randy Atwood who is leading the Eclipse Task Force in the next few months to get CASCA and Canadian astronomers plugged into this initiative

f. Community-wide EPO activities survey

Given that the University of Calgary, who has graciously hosted our annual survey form

for the last few years, has expressed a desire to see this survey hosted elsewhere, we are exploring different platforms to host the survey. An email will be sent to the CASCA membership before the end of the year in order to collect information on the community's EPO activities in 2020.

4. Subcommittee reports

a. CASCA Westar Lectureship Subcommittee

Chair: Rob Cockcroft

Members: Frédérique Baron, Nienke van der Marel

Prior to the pandemic, three talks were planned, but they are now on hold. During our last committee meeting, we discussed the possibility of organising virtual talks with the selected remote communities. Given the lower cost of virtual visits, this could lead to an expanded Astronomer-Community/Classroom matchmaking program that could be carried forward even after sanitary measures and travel restrictions have been lifted. Discussions on the topic are ongoing.

b. IAU activities

Lead: Sharon Morsink

A remote community, Tuktoyatuk in the Northwest Territories, will be receiving a telescope through an IAU program. COVID-19 has made shipping things internationally, but our committee is working on facilitating the delivery of the telescope.

c. Discover the Universe

Lead: Julie Bolduc-Duval

Following the rush and success of Astro at Home during the lockdown in Spring 2020, *Discover the Universe* came back to its main mission and programs to help K-12 teachers and educators with astronomy teaching. We have many initiatives on the way to develop new resources for teachers on varied subjects such as black holes, climate change and astronomy through the arts. New partnerships are being formed with educators and scientists across Canada and even beyond our borders. In November, we presented our online astronomy workshop to over 300 elementary and middle school teachers.

d. Social Media Subcommittee

Chair: Jesse Rogerson

Members: Mike Chen, Nienke van der Marel, Christa Van Laerhoven

This subcommittee met for the first time on November 19 2020. The following topics were discussed:

- A census of current social media platforms used by CASCA and whether new platforms should be included
- Current account names and whether they should be changed

- CASCA's and the EPO Committee's goals in using social media
- The different audiences (age, language, cultural background) CASCA hopes to reach through social media and what platforms to use to reach them
- An initial draft of a Communications Plan to be elaborated during the next meeting and on the CASCA EPO Slack channel

5. Member activities

This list of activities is non-exhaustive and was self-reported by EPO Committee members.

a. Hume Cronyn Memorial Observatory (Western University)

Reported by Viraja Khatu

The Hume Cronyn Memorial Observatory at The University of Western Ontario has been hosting virtual outreach events since May 2020. There are themed Virtual Public Nights hosted on a monthly basis that include short talks by Western graduate students, historical displays of the Observatory, News Bursts (short segments on astronomy news), Astronomical Research Stories highlighting research by astronomy graduate students across Canada, and live feeds through the 10-inch refractor telescope at the Observatory. These public nights are jointly hosted by the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Western, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada London Centre, and the Institute for Earth & Space Exploration. In addition, there is a virtual educational program called 'Exploring the Stars' consisting of short talks, interactive online activities, and telescope live feeds for school and scout groups. These educational events are led by astronomy graduate teaching assistants at Western.

b. Institute for Research on Exoplanets (Université de Montréal)

Reported by Nathalie Ouellette

Our team has started a new online series called "La petite école de l'espace" in French for children aged 3 to 8 years old. This 30-minute long show includes space-themed stories, reading and activity suggestions for families and answering questions submitted by children. Children can tune in live during a YouTube Live broadcast, or can watch the videos after the fact on iREx's YouTube channel:

<http://www.youtube.com/exoplanetes>.

The first edition was on July 11 2020. About 200 families tuned in live and the video has accumulated 2700 views in total as of December 2 2020. The second edition was on September 22 2020. About 1200 families tuned in live, and the video has accumulated 5300 views in total. The third edition will take place on December 12 2020. We have been thrilled by the public's response to this new series and look forward to continuing this initiative in 2021!

We also organised our first virtual Grande conférence de l'iREx on November 10 2020. This annual public talk hosts a world-class researcher so they can share their research related to exoplanets and the search for alien life. This year, our speaker was Dr. Clara Sousa-Silva (Harvard), one of the co-authors of the Nature discovery paper of phosphine on Venus. The 30-minute long talk and subsequent 30-minute long Q&A was attended by about 180 people during the YouTube Live/Facebook Live event. The video has accumulated 1500 views in total.