

Canadian Astronomical Society Société Canadienne d'Astronomie

Meeting of the Board of Directors via videoconference

Minutes for May. 4, 2021

Present:

Sara Ellison (President)
Samar Safi-Harb (Vice President)
Judith Irwin (Secretary)
Lewis Knee (Treasurer)
Laura Parker (Director)
Étienne Artigau (Director)
Ivana Damjanov (Director)
Nicole St-Louis (Director)
Rob Thacker (Past President)

1. Adoption of Agenda

Motion to adopt the agenda was moved by Laura and seconded by Étienne. Passed.

2. Approval of minutes of the April 19, 2021 Board meeting

Moved by Ivana and seconded by Nicole. Passed.

3. Action Item List [Judith]

Judith went over the Action Item list and updated it, with input from the Board.

4. President's Report [Sara]

The federal budget has been announced. The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) did not appear explicitly. Kristine Spekkens (Canadian Science Director for the SKA) speaks weekly with Luc Simard (Director General of HAA) on SKA matters.

The most relevant component in the budget is a piece about the 'digital economy' and national computing strategy. This is a possible link to SKA because 1/3 of the budget request for SKA includes an SKA regional data centres.

Canada currently has a provisional contract to supply the correlator for the SKA. However, if Canada has not made a commitment by July, Canada will likely lose the contract.

On April 22, the Coalition for Canadian Astronomy (CCA) met with the Chief Science Advisor's office. This was a first. The Chief Science Advisor's role is a responsive one, i.e. they do not lobby and are not pro-active, but wait for requests for science advice. From the Office of the Chief Science Advisor, those in attendance were Gary Slater, Researcher in Residence, and Alexandre Bourque-Viens, Senior Policy Advisor.

Alison Sills, who is the astronomy representative of the CAP/NSERC (Canadian Association of Physicists/Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada) Liaison Committee got the LRP onto the most recent agenda. There were two main objectives: to raise awareness about the LRP to NSERC, and to alert the CAP community to our priorities and recommendations.

The New Digital Research Infrastructure Organization (NDRIO): there has now been a call for 4 director positions and they have already been posted on the CASCA email exploder. Townhalls are also being prepared. Either Catherine Lovekin, Chair of CASCA's CDC (Computation and Data Committee) or another member of the CDC will be present at each of these townhalls.

5. Secretary's Report [Judith]

The Secretary's Report is the same as the report that will be presented at the March 13 AGM (Annual General Meeting) Business meeting, except for some minor updates. The final report will be posted on the CASCA website. In addition, at the Business Meeting, Judith will present a series of powerpoint slides in remembrance of the Canadian astronomers who have recently passed away, and ask for one minute of silence.

6. Treasurer's Report [Lewis]

The Treasurer's Report will also be presented at the AGM Business meeting as well as posted to CASCA's website. In summary, CASCA's financial position is quite strong.

Our administrator, Jessica Marsano, and webmaster, Don Hutton, have both performed extremely well.

There was some discussion about CASCA's regular funding for the Westar Lectureship because the Lectureship itself has been suspended due to COVID. Lewis will check on this issue.

7. Committee business, reports and matters arising [Samar]

Committee reports

Note that committee reports can be viewed in their entirety on the CASCA website:

https://casca.ca/?page_id=59

(An exception is the JCSA report, since the JCSA's meeting was after this board meeting and their report needs to be approved by the CSA before going public.)

Sustainability Committee: Conversion from ad-hoc to Standing Committee

The Board reviewed the document submitted by the Sustainability Committee in which they proposed a conversion to a Standing Committee. This has been a very active committee, especially with respect to the planning of the virtual AGMs. They have sent a letter to NSERC requesting that NSERC take into account the carbon footprint of its scientists. They are also communicating with the leadership of NDRIO in an attempt to understand the possible carbon footprint of a large computing facility.

There was some discussion that revolved around a) that CASCA committees should not be independent entities that act apart from the Board, and b) that there is the potential for CASCA to 'contradict itself'. Regarding the latter, for example, the CASCA by-laws imply that CASCA AGMs should ideally be held in person and not virtually, unless it cannot be avoided.

The points were also made that CASCA is an evolving society and that many members feel very passionately about this issue.

Motion to convert the Sustainability Committee from an ad-hoc committee to a standing committee. Moved by Samar, Seconded by Laura, passed.

The Sustainability Committee has asked for amendments to their ToR. “To advise the LCRIC regarding implementation of LRP recommendations” and “to provide resources to the Canadian astronomical community for the establishment of sustainable best practices in professional activities.”

A motion to accept these amendments was made by Samar and seconded by Nicole. Passed.

Post-Doctoral Fellow (PDF) Committee: ToR and conversion from ad-hoc to Standing Committee

The Board reviewed the document submitted by the PDF Committee summarizing their activities and arguing for conversion to a standing committee. Of note is the impact of COVID on post-docs. The CANVAS talks have been quite successful. The LRP made nine recommendations specifically regarding postdocs in Canada, and advocacy for this group is very important.

Moved by Samar and seconded by Lewis to convert the PDF Committee to a standing committee. Passed.

The current committee chair is Toby Bown, who will step down and Tyrone Woods will assume the role of chair.

Equity and Inclusivity Committee (EIC)

The EIC received feedback about the course led by Hilding Nielson. They also provided feedback on the land acknowledgement and made requests for guidance and clarifications on their new role as we move into the LRP implementation era. Additional input was provided by Samar through consultation with local Indigenous colleagues and then passed on to the OOC (AGM Online Organizing Committee). The EIC would also like to see a more modern feel to the CASCA website. They are keen to update the CASCA mission and code of ethics statement, and develop a values statement.

The EIC would like to move on LRP recommendations. The Board suggests that the EIC, LCRIC and the Board meeting to discuss this. A meeting post-AGM will be arranged between these 3 bodies.

LCRIC (Long-Range-Plan Community Recommendations Implementation Committee)

See Section 9 below.

EPO (Education and Public Outreach)

The EPO is a very active committee and are planning a plenary EPO session at the upcoming AGM. They are advertising the Hogg lecture by Andrea Ghez, widely. The EPO is also working on upcoming solar eclipses in 2021 and 2024. Eclipse glasses are being sent to northern communities with information translated into local languages.

They have asked whether Westar funds can be used for EPO-related purposes other than the lectureship. Laura will look into this.

Sharon Morsink, the National Outreach Coordinator for the IAU, is coming to the end of her term. See the CNC Meeting of the IAU (point #4) for more information.

The EPO would like to have a ‘social media intern’. No funding from the Board is being requested at this point in time.

Consistency amongst Committees

Samar noted that there are no clear guidelines for committees around updating memberships and making public statements (which came up in committees reports or requests). Similarly, while committees have Terms of References, some being updated with the LRP implementation era, not every committee is clear on their mandate. The board discussed this. We should not have different committees determining their membership in different ways. Similarly, no CASCA committee should make public statements on behalf of the Board without approval. If there are links in CASCA committees webpages, there should be a disclaimer indicating that the linked website is not necessarily expressing a CASCA position.

Samar will write a guidelines document to be given to all new chairs so that everyone is clear and uniform on these issues. Given the time limit, further discussion among the board on this document and membership practice will take place at the next Board meeting.

Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Graduate Students Committee(GSC) [with Rob]

The Board discussed the ToR of the GSC, but are not yet ready to vote on it. There was some discussion about the word, “advocacy”, because it departs from the ToRs of other committees. There is also mention of “inclusion/exclusion” which falls under the purview of the EIC.

Rob has prepared a mandate for the committee which has eight points. The Board reviewed this mandate.

Moved by Laura and seconded by Nicole to accept the mandate prepared by Rob. Passed.

The Board suggests that Kristine (Chair of the EIC), Rob (Past President) and Carter Rhea (Chair of the GSC) meet to further discuss the ToR for this committee.

Note that this PDF committee had a couple of questions that we did not get to, but will be addressed as we move forward with LRP implementation and discussions with the LCRIC.

GAC (Ground-based Astronomy Committee)

The GAC offered the Canadian Telescope Seminar (CaTS) series and provided an update on a suite of ground-based facilities. The current chair (Stefi Baum) will step down after the AGM because her term is completed. Samar will soon be meeting with a potential new chair. The GAC would like direction on how to be most useful in the light of the new LCRIC. The Board is deferring this until after the new chair is appointed.

CATAC (CASCA/ACURA TMT Advisory Committee)

Please see the report on the CASCA website. There will be a Thirty-Meter-Telescope (TMT) town hall session at AGM, so many updates will be discussed there.

AACS (ACURA Advisory Council on the SKA)

The SKA (Square Kilometre Array) did not appear in the federal budget, as noted above. The third council meeting is in June, when Canada is supposed to inform as to where it stands. Canada has already lost its voice at the governance table; it is just an 'observer'. If a commitment is not forthcoming soon, then Canada stands to lose a contract for the correlator, worth tens of millions of dollars.

CDC (Computation and Data Committee)

In response to NDRIO's call, the committee submitted three white papers.

Awards Committee

A new chair is required. In the overall makeup of the committee, it is important to have a native French speaker who could read French theses. A new award targetting PDFs may be a good addition. The Board will return to this at a later date.

Heritage Committee

Although some terms are up, the current members are willing to extend their membership on the committee. This committee contributed to the AGM's 50th anniversary, e.g. through preparing short obituary notices for more than half of the 44 or so CASCA Charter Members who have now passed on.

JCSA (Joint Committee on Space Astronomy)

The JCSA did not submit a report by the time of this board meeting, but sent an update by email. They have a meeting on May 7 or 8, so a report will come afterwards. Everyone had agreed to the ToRs.

Annual General Meeting (AGM) Matters [Samar]

To date, 448 individuals have registered for the upcoming 2021 AGM. This is the largest number of registrants ever recorded for a CASCA AGM.

For the 2022 AGM, hosted at the University of Waterloo, the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Chair is Will Percival and Donna Hayes is the administrative lead. James Taylor is the SOC Chair. They will run a hybrid meeting (in-person plus virtual). This is the first time that a CASCA AGM will be hybrid. They are working on the logo and making it a contest among the graduate and undergraduate students. Local hotels have already been booked.

The Board discussed the balance between in-person and virtual attendance, possible fees, and what opportunities may be available to each group. It could be best to have pricing the same for in-person versus virtual and that opportunities for talks and posters be the same, if possible.

The budget is difficult to address because it isn't clear how many people would opt to come in person as opposed to remain virtual. There are 'best practices' for hybrid meetings that the organizers should familiarize themselves with. We can also do a poll after the 2021 AGM to ask participants which option they would choose (see next subsection).

Samar will pass on Board feedback to Donna and will, suggesting a stronger statement on the virtual aspect of the meeting and suggesting that the virtual and in-person fees be equal.

The 2023 CASCA AGM meeting dates for Penticton have been fixed to be June 12 -15 and the meeting is planned to be in-person.

AGM Guidelines

Samar has gone through the current guidelines, “Guide to Hosting a CASCA Annual General Meeting”, line by line. This item is not meant to be completed today, but feedback and discussion today are important.

Updates are required to ensure that EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) is more fully incorporated into the selection of SOC/LOC/Invited Speakers and throughout the document. The fee schedule should be expressed as percentages, rather than fixed amounts, as follows:

Full Member: 100%

Grad. Student Member: 40%

Non-Member: 150%

Grad. Student Non-Member: 60%

Undergraduate: 20%

Retiree/RASC: 30%

Consideration is also needed regarding sponsorship packages and to ensure that the code of conduct is adhered to. We also need to discuss/clarify the balance between Scientific Sessions and Community Sessions going forward, Indigenous session planning, and the meeting formats (in the online environment). The Board agrees with these update and discussions that need to happen.

Further discussion centered around the nature and focus of future meetings. Currently, we have virtual in 2020 and 2021, hybrid in 2022, and in-person in 2023. We do not wish to change these because discussions have already begun with the LOCs and those hosting the meetings need to feel comfortable with the format that has been agreed to.

However, there are important issues regarding the nature of future meetings: in-person, hybrid, or virtual? What is the right balance between science and community sessions, now that there are more community sessions. What might be limited? should the number of invited speakers be limited in favour of CASCA members? These decisions need to be made going forward and should be highlighted in the guidelines. We want to ensure community engagement, keeping EDI in focus.

It is time to seek the input of the community on this issue. We need to send a survey to the community, whose questions are vetted through the Scientific Organizing Committees and the EIC.

8. Director’s reports [All]

No Director’s reports were tabled at this meeting.

9. LRP Discussion [All]

The LCRIC is requesting guidance from the board as to which of the recommendations in the LRP should be addressed first. The LRP has 89 recommendations for the next decade.

Sara prepared a summary of points that could be addressed in the coming year, for presentation at the LRP session at the AGM next week. Here is a list of options on which the Board could play a leading role:

#41, 47 provide indigenous training for membership and the Board
#55 minimize travel for casca events/meetings
#69 advocate for NSERC to broaden its Postdoctoral Fellowships program
#72 closer consultation with ACURA
#73 committee oversight of community/societal recommendations
#81 establish a committee to advocate for Postdocs

Several other LRP recommendations were discussed, but the Board was happy with the above list.

10. Nominations to the nominating committee [Thacker]

Stephanie Coté and Renée Hložek have both agreed to remain on this committee. Lewis will nominate them at the upcoming AGM Business meeting.

11. Student poster awards [All]

The Board must judge the student posters. Dennis will generate a spreadsheet of student posters for us. The total number of posters is approximately 250. Student numbers are somewhere between 150 and 200. A discussion ensued as to the length of time it will take to have two people review each poster and what the best way was to ensure that all students posters are fairly judged in a timely fashion. We will split up the number of posters into groups with two Board members looking at each and providing a score. Those with the highest score can be looked at again in order to obtain agreement on the winner. Laura will coordinate with Dennis in order to make a spreadsheet which assigns posters to board members. Deadline for the Board is Thursday at the end of the day.

Student Talks: something similar is to be done for student talks to ensure that two Board members are present for each student talk. There are fewer of these. Laura and Ivana will organize these.

12. Any other business

No other business.

13. Adjourn

Moved by Étienne and seconded by Samar. Passed.

Canadian National Committee (CNC) of the IAU

Meeting of the Board of Directors, May 4, 2021

1. Adoption of the agenda

Moved by Lewis and seconded by Ivana. Passed.

2. Approval of the minutes from Dec 2020

Moved by Lewis and seconded by Laura. Passed.

3. President's update [Sara]

Dark and Quiet Skies

IAU has produced a report on dark and quiet skies, which it aims to bring to the attention of the UN's Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). The lead Canadian delegate to COPUOS is Michel Doyon, of Global Affairs Canada. Sara was contacted by the IAU to reach out to the Canadian delegation to express our commitment to this subject and support the report.

In tandem with this, Aaron Boley has been in touch with Colleen Mapendere (Deputy Director - Space Policy and Regulatory Affairs at Global Affairs Canada) and a representative of the CSA.

Aaron approached Elinor and Colleen with the document that they had produced on mega-constellations (this document was in response to the CSA's public call for input, and is now on astro-ph). The result of that was that Sam Lawler and Aaron Boley are giving a 1-hour briefing to Global Affairs Canada on May 18.

The RASC is also working on similar public statement about dark and quiet skies, with a particular focus on satellite constellations.

NRC Review

Sara completed the annual performance review for NRC in March. This is a written survey that we have to do every year. As of last year, NRC also does email follow-up. Sara worked on this review with Terrie Romano of NRC. NRC was particularly interested in our involvement in sustainability and indigenous matters.

Finance Committee

Gregg Wade has agreed to stand for nomination to the IAU finance committee. The current member, JJ Kavelaars, will nominate him.

4. Outreach matters [Sara]

Sharon Morsink has been acting as Canada's National outreach Coordinator to the IAU.

She was successful in an IAU application to send a telescope to Tuktoyaktuk. This telescope has now arrive in Tuktoyaktuk but has not yet been used because of the long daylight hours now in the north.

Sharon's term expires in August of this year. We have been contacted by the IAU to identify a replacement for her as well as a 'vice-coordinator' so that there will be two people, nationally. Sharon took this to the EPO committee. No one has volunteered yet so Sharon has agreed to continue in this role until a replacement can be found.

5. Membership [Judith – by email]

Regular Membership

We sent a note out on the CASCA exploder asking for interest in becoming IAU members, on Oct. 13, 2020 with a deadline of Nov. 2, 2020. The Board approved and put forward three names for Individual Membership. They were:

Allison Man

Robert Nelson

Mubdi Rahman

All three have been accepted as individual members and their names are on the IAU membership list.

Honourary membership

We called for nominations via the CASCA exploder on Dec. 18, 2020 and received one nomination, namely Richard Huziak.

The Board approved this nomination and put forward his name to the IAU General Secretary on Feb. 4, 2021, receiving an acknowledgement on the same day.

The decision on Honorary members will be included in the Business meeting to take place August 2021.

6. Any other business

No other business.

7. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Samar and seconded by Ivana. Passed.