

CASCA Awards Committee Report - June 2023

Members

The committee membership for the past year (2022-2023) consisted of:

- Vincent Hénault-Brunet (2021-2024), Saint Mary's University (Chair)
- Pauline Barmby (2022-2025), Western University
- Jayanne English (2020-2023), University of Manitoba
- Craig Heinke (2022-2025), University of Alberta
- Tracy Webb (2022-2025), McGill University

The term of one committee member (Jayanne English) ends on 30 June 2023. We would like to extend sincere thanks to Jayanne, who will rotate off the committee, for her engaged participation in the committee's activities over the last three years.

Interest from the CASCA membership should be solicited to fill the open spot on the Awards Committee and recruit one new member for 2023-2026.

Awards

The following prizes were awarded this year:

- J. S. Plaskett Medal: **Deborah Lokhorst**
- Martin Award for Mid-Career Achievement: **Erik Rosolowsky**
- Harvey B. Richer Medal for Early Career Research in Astronomy: **Kiyoshi Masui**
- R.M. Petrie Prize Lecture invitation for an outstanding astrophysicist: **You-Hua Chu**
- Qilak Award for Astronomy Communications, Public Education and Outreach: **Wilfred Buck**

Reflections and Suggestions

- This year, we received three nominations for the Martin Award, six for the Richer Medal, eight for the Plaskett Medal, and two for the Petrie Lecture. Aside from the Petrie Lecture, this was considered as a healthy number. For the Petrie Lecture, the two nominations were received after an extension of the original deadline (more on this below). As detailed in the December 2022 Awards Committee report, no new nominations were solicited from the CASCA membership for the 2023 Qilak Award during the 2022-2023 cycle, as the RASC and CASCA had previously coordinated to honour Wilfred Buck with the Qilak award in 2023.
- 35% of nominees for the different awards this year were women. Despite recent efforts by the Awards Committee to improve diversity and gender balance in the pool of nominees, this is somewhat lower than in some previous years (e.g. 42% of nominees were women in 2020-2021). In particular, we note that this year the imbalance was driven by a large majority of nominations for male candidates for the Plaskett Medal. This is a cause for concern, especially since the Plaskett nominees are (by definition) drawn from a younger demographic than the other awards. On a more positive note, gender balance among eventual winners of the Plaskett Medal has been good in recent history. Note that nominations for the Plaskett Medal are submitted by department chairs, and only one nomination per department is accepted. Therefore, for the Plaskett, it is more difficult for the Awards Committee and the Equity and Inclusivity Committee to actively encourage and solicit nominations from potential nominees, as has been suggested and done in the past for other awards. [The wording of future calls for nominations and of the guidelines for the Plaskett Medal nomination procedures could however be modified to further raise awareness and get a more diverse set of nominees.](#)
- The Awards Committee continues efforts targeted towards a more inclusive award selection process. Following on a recommendation from a previous year to provide diversity awareness training for Awards Committee members, the EIC Committee has discussed and recommended EDI training options for the Awards Committee. This year, it was agreed that the Awards Committee members would complete three

online training modules from the Toronto Initiative for Diversity and Excellence (TIDE; <https://www.toronto-tide.ca/education-modules/>) and consult associated resources. This is considered a first step. Going forward, a more comprehensive and active learning-oriented training on an annual basis would be desirable.

- As is often the case, deliberations were extremely difficult, with many outstanding and deserving nominations. In the past, because of this, the committee has sometimes felt compelled to mention other finalists in the prize announcement for the Plaskett Medal. We didn't follow this practice this year, not because there weren't many high-quality nominations for this award (quite the opposite), but because we felt that many outstanding nominations were received across the board, with close rankings for all the awards, and we didn't want to downplay the quality of nominees for other awards by only listing nominees/finalists for a specific award. *In future calls for nominations, renominations should be encouraged for all awards (when possible) so that high-quality nominees who were previously unsuccessful are considered again.* A recommendation from previous years was to automatically reconsider nomination packages for 2 or 3 years. In practice this may not be ideal because of the even/odd year aspect of many awards and because nominators may well want to update their package for the renomination.
- Similar to what had happened two years ago, the response to the call for nominations for the Petrie Lecture was underwhelming. Despite the relatively easy nomination process for this award, no nomination was received by the original deadline of January 15th. The deadline was extended to January 31st, by which two nominations were received. Part of the issue might have to do with the rather vague guidelines for the Petrie Prize Lecture nomination process, which simply state that "Nominations for the Petrie Lecture can be made by *submitting the name* of a nominee to the Awards Committee [...] and should originate from at least two CASCA members in good standing." *We recommend clarifying these guidelines by specifically requesting a joint letter of nomination signed by at least two members of CASCA in good standing, and possibly also the CV of the nominee (which along with the nomination letter would help to assess the nominations).* When the Petrie lectureship is awarded again two years from now, the Awards Committee members should be proactive in actively soliciting nominations well before the deadline.
- We found that nominators were sometimes discussing the "good astronomy community citizenry" of the candidates (outreach, departmental mentoring, etc.), along with occasionally mentioning their parental duties. *We debated whether we should be evaluating these aspects or not for a research award. The guidelines to nominators should perhaps be clarified.* We are not sure of the process to update the guidelines, but perhaps the CASCA Board should first reflect on this and/or ask the general membership. This may then be sent back to the awards committee for recommendations but we first thought it would be valuable to raise the dilemma we had.
- For the 2022-2023 cycle, a previous committee recommendation to move the deadline for nominations to mid-January was adopted to better accommodate end-of-semester and holiday schedules. While it is unclear if this positively affected the number of nominations received, it worked well and we recommend maintaining this schedule for future years. The slightly more compressed timeline still allows the Awards Committee to evaluate nominations in early winter, meet in late February or early March, and present choices to the CASCA Board in March. There is a risk that the resulting timeline is a bit short for the CASCA AGM LOC (who would benefit from some advanced information about the prize winners), especially if the AGM is held in May rather than June. *To mitigate this risk, it may be worth including the chair of the AGM LOC as an *ex officio* member of the Awards Committee. This was implemented in 2020-2021, but to our knowledge has not been done since then.*
- We finally relay an ongoing recommendation from previous years: the next time CASCA is able to endow a new award, this award should target postdoctoral scholars. The current array of awards given by CASCA is such that postdocs are left out (unless they are able to win the Richer Medal), even though a large fraction of published research in Canadian astronomy is produced by postdoctoral fellows. Such an award would bridge that gap and recognize a deserving postdoc's crucial contribution at a career stage where recognition can have a significant impact on their future career.