

EC WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN IN ASTRONOMY (*LES FEMMES DANS L'ASTRONOMIE*)

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As part of the IAU General Assembly, the Women in Astronomy Meeting (WAM) was held during lunchtime in the spectacular Skyline Terrace on Monday 21 July and was attended by 180 IAU delegates. The main goal of the WAM lunch was to review the status of women in astronomy and to plan strategies and recommend actions to improve the environment for all astronomers. The event was booked out, showing a very encouraging level of interest in the status of women in astronomy. The meeting was attended by the IAU Executive, including the current President, the Presidents elect for this and the next General Assembly, several holders of the position of General Secretary and many senior astronomers, including Directors of observatories and Presidents of professional bodies, as well as many students and young astronomers.

The keynote speaker of the working lunch was Dr Andrea Dupree from the CfA, who reported on the "Women in Astronomy II" meeting held in Pasadena in late June this year (www.aas.org/čswa/WIA2003.html). Her summary of that meeting reported that women are not represented at highest levels; women do not receive the top honors and prizes; the number of women in astronomy positions is not increasing at a rate commensurate with the availability of qualified female students; that "the playing field must be leveled" in hiring and rewards (as gender bias is alive and well in our society - even if it is unconscious); and that astronomy is challenging, creative, and exciting! The conclusion is that for scientific excellence, we cannot afford to lose the intellectual power of 50% of the gene pool.

All WAM participants received a flyer with a subset of the percentage of women IAU members (www.iau.org/Organization/member/mship_statist.html), a summary of the 1992 Baltimore Charter (www.stsci.edu/stsci/meetings/WiA/BaltoCharter.html), and seven suggested issues for discussion including career paths & recruitment issues, role models & mentors, child care & family priorities. Each of the 18 tables had a scribe who took notes during a 40 minute discussion to report back to the meeting in a plenary session. Some of the recurring issues discussed included:

- Data - the collection of hard statistics on the status of women in astronomy is essential. While various studies have been conducted in the USA and Europe, there has been no worldwide coordinated collection of data. It is essential that we compile a uniform set of statistics.
- There are some countries (e.g. France, Italy) which have specific programs to provide permanent jobs for young astronomers, particularly women. Other nations could benefit from such schemes.
- Cultural differences exist - clearly no one approach works for all situations.
- Role models are vital. Mentoring is extremely important at all career path levels.

- Family support and flexible working conditions are essential.

One of the primary goals of the WAM was to establish an IAU Working Group on the Status of Women in Astronomy. While the number of women studying science at an undergraduate level worldwide continues to rise, work still needs to be done to formulate strategies for action to address the under representation of women in both astronomy and science beyond the student years. A recent study of astronomers in the USA (Urry, Status 2000) shows that women make up 25% of the graduate student population, 15% of the postdoctoral and assistant professor level, and just 5% of the professors within the field of astronomy. Astronomy has a high public appeal and women represent half of society's intellectual capital, yet the average fraction of women with astronomy positions is about 10% worldwide. Notwithstanding recent efforts to improve the status of women in astronomy (such as the Baltimore Charter), many women astronomers still feel themselves to be at a gender-based disadvantage. Networking has proved to be a very positive resource, but without a formal structure such efforts remain fragmented and too dependent upon individual initiative. An IAU Working Group on the Status of Women in Astronomy will provide visibility, continuity, and the benefits of an official forum, as well as offer a public record of matters and statistics that are at present largely anecdotal. It will act as a federation of national Women in Astronomy organizations, creating links and facilitating information exchanges worldwide.

We were delighted to be able to report that the proposal to establish a Working Group was approved by the IAU Executive a few days prior to the WAM. The aims of the Working Group will be to monitor the status of women in astronomy and recommend future actions that will improve the environment for all astronomers; liaise with committees and working groups on women in astronomy that are part of various national societies; be responsible for organizing formal Working Group sessions at future IAU General Assemblies; organize international follow-up meeting to the Baltimore and Pasadena Women in Astronomy meetings; ensure that women in non-western countries are well represented in the international community; maintain a list of international women who are willing to be on SOCs, serve on peer review panels, and such, as well as provide lists of potential colloquium/conference speakers; and to establish and maintain a comprehensive database of statistics of women in astronomy and coordinate the global collection of such statistics, and work to provide a useful network for women in astronomy.

The IAU Executive have appointed Dr Anne Green as the Chair of the Working Group. An Executive Committee of the Working Group, which will contain about 15 members, is being established. The Executive Committee will include astronomers from a broad geographic and discipline base. In addition, the Working Group will include a much larger group of participating members, open to all astronomers who are actively working towards improving the status of women in astronomy. This Working Group will be open and inclusive in every way possible and so your input and suggestions are most welcome. A major part of the work will be to identify volunteers in all countries to act as the collectors of statistics on the status of women in astronomy in their country.

We are greatly encouraged by the support and enthusiasm from participants at the WAM lunch and anticipate success with our Working Group objectives. Finally we would like to thank the Astronomical Society of Australia and the US National Committee for the IAU for their sponsorship of the WAM lunch and the support and contributions of the 36 members of the WAM working group who helped prepare the meeting.

Anne Green & Sarah Maddison.
Co-Chairs of the Working Group