

DIVISION XII
COMMISSION 55

**COMMUNICATING
ASTRONOMY WITH THE
PUBLIC**
*(COMMUNIQUER L'ASTRONOMIE
(AVEC LE PUBLIC*

PRESIDENT
VICE-PRESIDENT
PAST PRESIDENT
ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Lars Lindberg Christensen
Pedro Russo
Ian Robson
Kimberly Kowal Arcand,
Richard Tresch Fienberg,
Carolina Ödman-Govender,
Kazuhiro Sekiguchi,
Pete Wheeler, Jin Zhu.

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1. Introduction

A good fraction of the Commission 55 (C55) Organizing Committee met in Beijing in August at the XXVIII IAU General Assembly, where C55 organized Special Session 14 (SpS14) entitled “Communicating Astronomy with the Public for Scientists.” During our C55 business meeting, and again during an impromptu gathering a few days later, we discussed changes in the IAU’s organizational and programmatic structure and how these changes might affect C55. This report summarizes key points and offers some ideas about what we’re calling “C55 v2.0.” For background and reference, see the C55 website at <http://www.communicatingastronomy.org>.

2. Ancient History

IAU Commission 55 had its origins in a conference entitled “Communicating Astronomy to the Public,” held in Washington, DC, in October 2003. This “CAP” meeting was a successor to a more general one, “Communicating Astronomy,” held in Tenerife, Canary Islands, in February 2002. Both meetings brought together an international group of “producers” of astronomical information (research scientists), “public information officers” (communications coordinators and/or spokespersons affiliated with research institutions, funding agencies, space missions, etc.), and “mediators” (science journalists and popular writers; staffers from museums, planetariums, and national parks; operators of commercial websites focused on astronomy; and science educators).

Following the 2003 conference in Washington an IAU Working Group was set up to coordinate further work on three outcomes from the meeting: the Washington Charter for Communicating Astronomy with the Public (note the intentional change of preposition, from “to” to “with”), an online repository of astronomy-communication resources (now

the Virtual Astronomy Multimedia Project, or VAMP), and a series of every-other-year CAP conferences. At the XXVI IAU General Assembly in Prague in August 2006, the working group became Commission 55, “Communicating Astronomy with the Public,” under Division XII, “Union-Wide Activities.” Members of C55 and attendees at the CAP 2005 and CAP 2007 conferences took many leadership roles in planning, coordinating, and executing the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA 2009).

3. Recent History

The enormous impact of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA 2009) led the IAU to recognize the importance not only of scientific research, but also of science outreach, to the health of the profession. To build on the success of IYA 2009, the IAU adopted a strategic plan that resulted in the establishment of two new institutions: the Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD), based at the South African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town and led by Kevin Govender, and the Office for Astronomy Outreach (OAO), based at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan in Tokyo and led originally by Sarah Reed, now by Sze-leung Cheung. The OAD has set up three task forces to “drive global activities using astronomy as a tool to stimulate development.” Task Force 3 (TF3), “Astronomy for the Public,” will “drive activities related to communicating astronomy with the public” and is led by chair Ian Robson (UK) and vice-chair Carolina Ödman-Govender (South Africa/EU). Several people active in C55 are members of OAD TF3.

In Beijing, to further align the structure of the IAU with its strategic plan and to better match the organization of the Union to the activities of its national and individual members, attendees at the General Assembly approved a sweeping reorganization that replaced the earlier 12 divisions with 9 new ones. C55 now exists within Division C, “Education, Outreach, and Heritage.” The president of Division C is Mary Kay Hemenway (USA), and the vice-president is Hakim Malasan (Indonesia).

4. IAU Commission 55, v1.0

C55 was originally organized with this rationale: *It is the responsibility of every practicing astronomer to play some role in explaining the interest and value of science to our real employers, the taxpayers of the world.*

Here is C55’s original mission statement:

- To encourage and enable a much larger fraction of the astronomical community to take an active role in explaining what we do (and why) to our fellow citizens.
- To act as an international, impartial coordinating entity that furthers the recognition of outreach and public communication on all levels in astronomy.

- To encourage international collaborations on outreach and public communication.
- To endorse standards, best practices, and requirements for public communication.

Going into the XXVIII IAU General Assembly, C55 had the following working groups:

- Washington Charter (Chair: Dennis Crabtree)
- VAMP – Virtual Astronomy Multimedia Project (Chair: Adrienne Gauthier)
- Best Practices (Chair: Lars Lindberg Christensen)
- CAP Journal (Chair: Pedro Russo)
- New Ways of Communicating Astronomy with the Public (Chair: Michael West)
- CAP Conferences (Chair: Ian Robson)

5. IAU Commission 55, v2.0

The outcome of our discussions at the C55 business meeting in Beijing and the informal discussions is that, despite the creation of OAD and OAO, we feel that Commission 55 still has an important role to play in the IAU. Our rationale and mission statement remain unchanged, but in light of the new division structure, the OAD (especially TF3), and the OAO, we'll need to revise our approach to conducting activities in support of that mission.

The following ideas were formed:

- C55 should be a “think tank” that unites the global astronomy communication community and seeds initiatives to explore new ways to communicate astronomy with the public.
- C55 should focus more on community initiatives and new trends and less on implementing projects, as implementation naturally falls to the OAO and OAD Task Force 3. (Task Force 3 is a panel of experts to advise the OAD and will not be implementing projects.)
- C55 should further the development and improvement of astronomy communication at all levels throughout the world, through stimulating, gathering, and exchanging ideas and practices.

6. C55 Working Groups

Our recommendations for C55 working groups account for the following inputs:

- The IAU has asked that the Editor-in-Chief position for the CAP Journal be moved to the OAO.
- C55 would like to retain responsibility for organizing the CAP conferences.
- Some of C55's earlier working groups have been almost inactive.
- Some of C55's earlier working groups have migrated to other commissions or outside the IAU.
- It was decided to move the Division II working group Communicating Heliophysics to C55.
- The IAU will accept associate member recommendations from commissions (see below).

6.1. *The Working Groups for the 2012-2015 term are listed below:*

6.2. *WG Communicating Astronomy with the Public Journal (CAPj)*

Chair: Sarah Reed (Editor in Chief, CAPj)

Mission: To publish a free (to readers) peer-reviewed journal for astronomy communicators.

Deliverables: 3 issues of CAPjournal per year

6.3. *WG Communicating Astronomy with the Public Conferences*

Chair: Ian Robson

Mission: To regularly convene producers of astronomical information, public information officers, and mediators worldwide for the interchange of ideas and practices.

Deliverables: An international conference at least every 2 years (including sessions during IAU General Assemblies, where applicable).

6.4. *WG Washington Charter for Communicating Astronomy with the Public*

Chair: Dennis Crabtree

Mission: To promote the importance of astronomy outreach and communication by disseminating information about the Washington Charter and to seek endorsements from funding agencies, observatory directors, department heads and deans, and other employers of astronomers.

Deliverables: At least 10 new institutional and/or individual endorsements of the Washington Charter, and some follow-up with previous endorsers to identify/address any problems that may have arisen.

6.5. *WG Outreach Professionalization & Accreditation*

Chair: Rick Fienberg

Mission: To bring a sense of professionalism and professional respect to the field of astronomy communication, to advocate for our needs as professional communicators, and to serve as a means for information sharing and networking.

Deliverables: A procedure to handle requests for IAU associate membership (presumably including several levels of accreditation) and methods/standards/requirements for achieving accreditation.

6.6. *WG Public Outreach Information Management*

Chair: Lars Lindberg Christensen

Mission: To act as a facilitator enabling the small outreach information management community to gather around a common technical framework optimizing the synergy in the community

Deliverables:

- Describe one possible standard for EPO content management systems.
- Decide on standards for astronomy EPO products metadata.
- Write a CAPj article. (Submissions will follow the standard procedure for accepting articles. Proposed articles should be discussed and agreed with the Editor in Chief)
- Bringing the major players in EPO information management together in an informal network.
- Arrange the first workshop for this network.
- Possibly incorporate Mohammad Heydari-Malayeri's online dictionary into a C55 resource.

6.7. *WG New Media*

Chair: Pamela Gay

Mission: To nurture a professional astronomy culture that utilizes social media to disseminate science effectively.

Deliverables:

- Review one social media channel and its effectiveness per issue of CAPj. (Submissions will follow the standard procedure for accepting articles. Proposed articles should be discussed and agreed with the Editor in Chief)
- Create and publish a map of which social media can be accessed where in the world (depending on the target audiences).
- Publish success stories of efficient social media usage.
- Publish discussions on ways to use social media to create professional development experiences for people at underserved universities (e.g., seminars in Second Life, Google hangouts).
- Publish information about best practices in research dissemination on wiki pages.
- Creating an IAU record of social media accounts of professional astronomers (as part of the already existing members' profiles).

- Astro Comm Journal Club? (Twitter, to be adapted from scicommjc.wordpress.com.)

6.8. *WG New Ways of Communicating Astronomy with the Public*

Chair: Michael West

Mission: To facilitate sharing of diverse and effective new ways to communicate astronomy with the public, with a focus on creative alternatives to press releases, public lectures, print and broadcast media, and other traditional ways of bringing astronomy to a wide audience. The WG will serve as a clearinghouse and network for the worldwide community of astronomy communicators to engage the public in distinctly new ways by thinking outside the box.

Deliverables:

- Creation of a New Ways of Communicating Astronomy with the Public Facebook page (or similar social networking engine) where science communicators can join freely to exchange ideas and ask questions about new ways of communicating astronomy with diverse audiences.

- Engage in proactive efforts to inform astronomy communicators around the world of the existence and activities of the New Ways of Communicating Astronomy with the Public WG, with the goal of creating a large and vibrant network of members. Ways to promote this WG and its activities will include creating a new blog, promoting the activities of the WG at national and international conferences, and organizing New Ways sessions as part of the future CAP meetings and/or as separate conferences outside of the CAP meetings.

- Articles will be written regularly for the CAP Journal, Astronomy Education Review, and other similar journals, highlighting noteworthy new methods and assessing their successes and failures. (Submissions will follow the standard procedure for accepting articles. Proposed articles should be discussed and agreed with the Editor in Chief)

6.9. *WG Communicating Heliophysics*

Chair: Carine Briand

Mission: Promote the outreach activities of the heliophysics community and encourage our people to participate in the activities of C55.

Deliverables: One article/year on heliophysics outreach in CAPj (submissions will follow the standard procedure for accepting articles, and proposed articles should be discussed and agreed with the Editor in Chief); attendance by at least one WG member at every CAP meeting; possible/desirable: maintenance of a robust WG website with resources for heliophysics outreach

7. How to Join C55 and/or Become an IAU Associate Member

Once the new divisions and commissions are in place and current individual IAU members have chosen which ones they'll belong to, how do additional people join C55? They contact the president of C55. The leadership of C55 will need to come up with policies and procedures to guide the commission's response. The final decision rests with the C55 president, who, in the case of approval, then passes the new member's information along to the IAU Secretariat.

New members of C55 do *not* have to be regular individual IAU members, that is, they do not have to be PhD astronomers who apply to their national committee for nomination and get elected at the next triennial General Assembly. They can instead become associate members of the IAU via C55, or, more accurately, associates of IAU C55. As Vivien Reuter of the IAU Secretariat explains, the category of "consultant" was recently

changed to “associate member” and was established to enable nonmembers of the IAU to participate in the activities of commissions and working groups. Most associates are astronomers who for some reason have simply neglected to become IAU members; the rest are people working in related fields and mainly associated with outreach and educational activities. Qualified associate members are encouraged to apply for full membership at the next triennial opportunity; note that associate members do not have the right to vote at IAU General Assemblies, whereas full members do. IAU General Secretary Thierry Montmerle adds that associate status should not be considered permanent, but linked to a well-defined activity within the IAU, as long as it lasts, and that responsibility for maintaining or dropping this status rests with the relevant commission. Put another way, associate status is not an honorific — associate members are expected to be active in the commission that admits them into the IAU.

8. General Guidelines for C55 Administration

Substantial references to the commissions, including their roles, responsibilities, and functions, can be found on the IAU website (<http://www.iau.org>), under the ADMINISTRATION menu, Statutes & Rules, under the links to Statutes, Bye-Laws, and Working Rules. Questions should be addressed to the IAU General Secretary and/or IAU Head of Administration.