

April 15, 2009

Dr. Ken Ford, Chair, NAC

Dr. Jack Burns, Chair NSC

Dear Ken and Jack,

This note reports on the meeting of the Astrophysics Subcommittee held on April 8, 2009.

The Committee heard a presentation by Doug Hudgins about a new proposed Exoplanet Analysis Group (ExoPAG). Draft terms of reference were provided, based partly on similar groups that have long operated successfully in other divisions. An executive committee, chaired by James Kasting of APS, will convene periodic meetings of the exoplanet community on specific tactical issues to provide an ongoing community forum to help implement the scientific program. Similar proposals may be brought forward in the future for the other Astrophysics themes.

We endorse the proposal to establish this body. Although the terms of reference provided to us are imperfect, the Committee feels they are adequate as a starting point. The Committee feels that is important that the EXOPAG takes clear charges from APS, and reports to APS. For our part, APS undertakes to provide clear oversight for this new function, including periodic evaluations of its success.

The Committee heard a presentation by Edward Wright, PI of the Wide Field Infrared Survey Explorer, proposing an extension of mission duration. It seems probable that enough cryogen will remain after the main survey, which will cover the entire sky, to allow a significant second epoch survey. With the current launch date, the main mission of WISE will be over by the time of the next Senior Review next Spring, hence the need for special consideration.

The Committee is impressed and endorses the science case for a WISE extended mission. The extended mission adds significantly to overall survey quality. The science case is broad and meritorious, including AGN, asteroid physics, variable stars and supernovae. We will review the situation again at a future meeting, after WISE is on orbit.

Jon Morse reviewed the current activities of the Division. He reminded us of his interest in seeking the Committee's advice about proposals to change funding programs to better promote the development of the profession, in particular about new types of Fellowship programs. To keep attention on this issue, our Committee has established a Study Group to report back to our committee at our next meeting. The group may consider proposed new programs for instrumentation and senior fellowships, although the committee felt that consideration of the latter issue is

perhaps best deferred for the time being, in light of studies underway by Astro2010 on the state of the profession. The group will be chaired by Nick Suntzeff.-- Other members include Kathryn Flanagan, John Huchra, James Kasting, Fred Lo, Ron Polidan, and James Rhoads.

We agreed to hold the dates July 13/14 for our next meeting, although in the light of your subsequent decision to cancel the "Jamboree", we will likely change plans. Depending the issues arising, we may be able to make do with a teleconference before the next NAC meeting.

As always we are grateful to our presenters (E. L. Wright, D. Hudgins, J. Morse, E. Weiler) for taking the time and effort to inform our committee, and to NASA staff (especially in this instance, Eric Smith) for their professional and courteous assistance.

Your sincerely,

Craig Hogan

Chair, Astrophysics Subcommittee