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IAU Division G, Stars and Stellar Physics Newsletter Special Edition

I try to keep these concise, but there is a lot happening this time of year for the IAU divisions, so I am supplementing the recent newsletter with another.

IAU Symposium 361 announcement: Massive stars near and far

First, please be aware of IAU Symposium 361: “Massive stars near and far.” This is being held in Ireland from 18 to 22 May, 2020. The conference details may be found at: <https://www.massivestars2020.ie/>. In addition to the symposium itself, there will be a short Massive Stars Summer School (<https://www.summerschool2020.space>) the week before (May 13-15). Abstracts for the symposium should be submitted by Dec. 15, and a lower registration fee applies if it is received before February 14.

Vatican workshop announcement: The history of stellar astrophysics

The Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo (near Rome) announces a week-long workshop on the history of stellar astrophysics: Astrophysics in the Light of History. The dates will be 28 September to 3 October 2020.

The workshop is for graduate students currently enrolled in PhD or masters’ programs doing research in observational or theoretical astrophysics, or in some cases, researching topics in the history of astronomy. There will be a limit of approximately 24 participants. The workshop will include lectures on the history of astrophysics from five faculty astronomers, student research projects in the Vatican Observatory library followed by short student talks, and visits to cultural and historical sites at the Vatican Observatory and in the region of Castel Gandolfo. The language of the workshop will be English.

Students should apply on-line at <http://www.vaticanobservatory.va/content/specolavaticana/en/workshop/astrophysics-in-the-light-of-history-workshop.html> by the deadline of 10 February 2020. The registration fee will be 260 euros.

For more information, please contact Paul Mueller S.J. at pmueller@specola.va.

How are IAU symposia selected?

I have received many e-mails in response to the last Newsletter, all wanting to know how the IAU goes about selecting symposia from the proposals received. Here is my own experience, based on being involved for 10+ years in the process (Comm. 29 Steering Committee, C29 VP, Div. G SC, Div. G VP, and now president).

First we ask proposers to submit Letters of Intent (LoIs). They are not required, but they help to gauge how many final proposals will be received, and in what fields, and also with the hope that proposers with similar topics will join forces.

The proposals themselves are due December 15, and they include a list of the SOC (Scientific Organizing Committee) co-chairs and members and their affiliations; a summary of the subject of the meeting; and then details to justify the subject and to lay out a rough program and potential speakers.

Each successful proposal is assigned a coordinating division that takes some responsibility for helping the final program meet IAU goals of gender and geographic diversity. Those divisions ask proposers to send a draft of the proposal to them by about November 15, well in advance of the deadline for submission. That allows the coordinating division to provide constructive feedback to the proposers so that their proposals can be modified. That feedback is oriented toward the selection criteria and process.

Once the proposals are received by the IAU, they are in charge of the Assistant General Secretary (AGS), who oversees the selection process. The proposals are sent to the nine IAU division presidents (DPs), together with the selection criteria and a spreadsheet to record grades. The divisions have a couple of months to do their grading. Each DP has flexibility in how they go about the grading. In Division G we have consistently involved all the division's officers (DP, VP, SC members), plus the presidents of commissions that are under Division G. That is a significant number of people.

A practical problem all the divisions face is that we are expected to grade all the proposals received, no matter the subject. In 2018 the DPs tried to deal with this problem by holding a group session to come up with an overall recommended symposium program for 2020 while we were together in Rome at the IAU's Executive Committee meeting.

The grades then go to the AGS and a program is presented to the Executive Committee for approval.

The selection has an extra dimension for the General Assemblies. There are both symposia (six of them), plus an assortment of Focus Meetings of various lengths, and so the final program is based on the grading, but also the need to fit everything together.

All of this is complicated, and I will tell you that the selection process involves a great deal of work by the divisions. At the same time, the symposium selection is a primary reason for the divisions to exist and represents our main contribution to the running of the IAU. Some of the questions asked during grading include:

- How diverse is the SOC in terms of gender and geography? As an international institution, a prime goal of the IAU is bringing together people from many different countries.
- How about the proposed program? Are the potential speakers diverse as well?
- Is the subject timely and relevant to a symposium? Not all IAU meetings are necessarily strictly scientific because we now include educators, engineers, outreach professionals, etc. But the same standards of quality apply.
- Have there been other similar meetings recently?

- If the proposed meeting is part of an ongoing series, is it relevant or necessary for the IAU to sponsor it?

I hope this helps.

Losses from our ranks of stellar astronomers

I report, with sadness, the recent passing of two individuals:

Giles Fontaine, Canada: <https://www.iau.org/administration/membership/individual/4399/>

Leronim Mihaila, Romania:

<https://www.iau.org/administration/membership/individual/3354/>

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