

Women in Astronomy Working Group

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TRIENNIAL REPORT 2018–2021

1. Introduction

The Executive Committee Working Group of Women in Astronomy was established at the XXV IAU General Assembly in Sydney, Australia (July 2003). An Organizing Committee (OC) manages the activities of the WG. OC membership is ratified by the IAU Executive Committee, usually at its General Assembly. Being an EC WG, its OC also includes an EC-representative, who acts as a liaison between the EC and the OC. The OC is expected to elect two Office Bearers (a Chair and Deputy Chair for three-year terms). The WG reports directly through the liaison person and/or the IAU General Secretary.

The mandate of the IAU Working Group of Women in Astronomy is to collect information, propose measures, and initiate actions in support of, or to advance equality of opportunity for achievement between women and men in astronomy, in the IAU and in the world at large. Since its foundation, the mandate of the WG has focused mostly onto two main areas of activities:

1. Monitoring the status of women in astronomy via collection of gender statistics (namely, the gender distribution at different career levels in different countries).

2. Organizing WG meetings and events at the IAU General Assemblies in the form of business meetings, coordinated women lunches (WAM, usually attended by 300+ participants), special events (mentoring sessions for young astronomers, topical lunch talks), resources permitting. These can be very time-consuming activities that not always can be supported.

2. Developments within the past triennium

Unfortunately, my unfamiliarity with the structure of the IAU resulted in a slow start to actions of the working group in the first year. This slow start was then compounded in the second year by the global pandemic contributing to the severe loss of my available volunteer time as domestic duties mounted. Although not nearly as productive as I had hoped to be, a few important activities have happened over the last 3 years.

In the 2015-2018 triennial report, former chair Primas described the important and ongoing activity of the WIA working group was participation in the “Gender Gap” project. The project spearheaded by the ICSU was designed to, more consistently, collect data on the participation of women in the mathematical and natural sciences across the world, expose evidence of a gender gap in career development and success in these fields and finally to make recommendations about how to reduce this gender gap. The final report of this project, “A Global Approach to the Gender Gap in Mathematical, Computing, and Natural Sciences: How to Measure It, How to Reduce It?”, was finalized in 2020 and is available in several language.

Following the release, a core group of partners in the report formed the Standing Committee for Gender Equality in Science (SCGES) to support partners in the implementation of the report’s recommendations and to strengthen the reach, collaboration and coordination of projects, activities and programs to support gender equity in the STEM fields. IAU has joined as a member of the committee, with the current IAU WIA chair and co-chair as representatives. The first meeting of the group was held (virtually) in Sept 2020 to set up the working group structure and SCGES website. By the second meeting, held in February 2021, the partnership of 12 groups had expanded to 15 members, strengthening the reach of the committee into the fields of medicine, geophysics and geography. The SCGES is an opportunity to share ideas, good practices and lessons learned with other societies and groups interested in gender equity in the STEM fields. The WIA plans to make the “Gender Gap in Science Project” report, its findings and recommendations a focal point of the now postponed until 2022, General Assembly meeting in Busan, Korea.

The WiA organizing committee has discussed holding three 1.5 hour sessions at the General Assembly meeting. The first sessions will focus on the Gender Gap report highlighting important takeaways with at least 30 minutes of the session focused on what should come next given the outcomes of the report. The second session will focus on woman and intersectional identities of marginalized status. We will identify speakers who can speak to the specific, distinct concerns of women in racial minorities within astronomy, women who are part of the LGBTQ+ community and women with physical and cognitive disabilities. The third session will be a follow-on from the second session that pulls together the speaker information, but focuses on both distinct and common strategies that can be employed to address these concerns. In this session, attendees will be asked to identify the institutional and cultural changes (especially those that can be implemented through the IAU and other international groups) to address the concerns identified in the second session. Groups will work in teams to produce short position papers that will be the basis of the final IAU WiA report. There will be a short presentation at the start of the session introducing the goals for the session and setting up the working groups.

It seems that a new system for identifying the working group membership was put into place in 2018, before the tenure of the current chairs. This open process resulted in more than 170 IAU members expressing an interest in the working group. While this demonstrates the interest in gender equity concerns across the IAU membership, it has been daunting to sort out just what it means to have that many working group members. As chair, I was caught quite off guard by this development. In an attempt to make sense of the membership, a survey was conducted, asking the new membership about their interests, experience and goals. We received 76 responses. I have used the information collected mainly to suggest people for speaking or service positions when I receive requests for suggestions of volunteers with specific interests. I also used the list to ask for suggested contributions to the webpages. However, I have found it difficult to know what to do with a working group that is so large and have almost certainly not used the group to its fullest effect because of the planning effort needed for this activity.

The IAU website pages for the Women in Astronomy working group were also mentioned in the previous triennial report. The pages were available, but had not been populated at the start of the 2018. In March 2020, a call was put out to the community for resources that could be

made available as informational content for those webpages. This year we are sorting out those resources as well as information made available by the SCEGS and other groups and communities interested in supporting gender equity. However, there is currently not a plan in place for the upkeep of these pages. This will likely require a dedicated member of the OC to regularly monitor content, identify out of date content and suggestions for new content. To facilitate the coordination of information and succession planning, a common WIA email repository, kept by the IAU, would be helpful (see details below).

In addition to the larger activities mentioned above, the WIA working group chairs have supported several inquiries with respect to the mission from the working group. Requests have been fielded for talks and interviews to different groups of women and girls about the field and careers in astronomy. The chairs have written letters of support and offered suggestions for various symposia related to the working group's mission.

Santiago Vargas Dominguez reports on the establishment of a group of women in astronomy in Colombia. Almost 80 young Colombians are now part of a group, initiated by 4 of them, that searched for Colombian women working in astronomy-related areas, which is called AstroCHIA. They are leading the gender bias awareness in the country and the promotion of astronomy among girls. <https://www.facebook.com/astrochiacol> <https://twitter.com/astrochia?lang=en>

2.1. *Suggestions that would aid in productivity of the WIA working group*

As we approach the time to turn over the chair and co-chair positions to new members, I am able to reflect on a few resources that could help support the next leaders of the working group.

- Better onboarding about the structure and requirements of the IAU with respect to working groups with detailed descriptions of board expected responsibilities, a calendar that includes IAU deadlines or ongoing activities that the chair is expected to meet and the expected time commitment.
- An email repository hosted by the IAU in order to route IAU related email. Often IAU email was stuck in my spam filter and went undiscovered. It would be helpful both organizationally and for succession planning to have a repository so that new chairs can have access to the pertinent information, discussions and plans from earlier years.
- It would be helpful to have a meeting interface that was sponsored by the IAU so that chairs do not have to use their own access. Even without the pandemic, all communication with EC needs to happen online. IAU should support these meetings with chair access to a link for meeting EC members. Whatever platform is used, it needs to be available world-wide.
- Better coordination of working groups with larger IAU information structures like the news/website team could be beneficial. IAU press staff should consider polling WGs for content.

Dara Norman
Chair Women in Astronomy Working Group