The TAC Ombudsperson
&
Cycle 22 adjustments

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SMO

Outline

- The role of TAC Ombudsperson
  - Ombudsperson findings
  - Actions for Cycle 22
- Proposed HST-NRAO joint program
- Solar System Proposals
- Diversity update

Why appoint an Ombudsperson?

Over the past few cycles, community members have raised a number of concerns regarding the HST TAC process

- Perceived bias against particular areas of science
- Perceptions that individual committee members can unduly influence deliberations
- Questions regarding the level of appropriate expertise on the panels

We decided to address these issues by appointing an Ombudsperson for the Cycle 21 TAC meeting

- Senior member of the community who could serve as a dispassionate, impartial outside observer
- Dr Fred Lo, former Director of NRAO, agreed to take on the role for Cycle 21

The role of the Ombudsperson

The Charter

•The Telescope Allocation Committee (TAC) Ombudsperson is charged by the STScI Director to investigate issues and complaints brought forward by members of the astronomical community with regard to the allocation of telescope time by a TAC process supervised by STScI. The Ombudsperson is encouraged to make direct contact with community members to obtain further information on specific issues as the need may arise. Any such interactions should be treated as confidential.

•The Ombudsperson will observe the TAC process and consult with the STScI Director or designate to clarify any issues that might arise. S/he will conduct an independent assessment of the fairness of the process, and advise the Director on potential improvements that could be adopted for future TACs.

•In addition, s/he will provide the Director with an assessment of the utility of the role of "Ombudsperson" within the TAC process, and will advise on how frequently such a position might be incorporated in future TACs.

•The Ombudsperson will produce a report for the Director on the TAC process. The report will be made available to the community.

•Specific issues for HST Cycle 21: The Ombudsperson is asked to pay particular attention to discussions of proposals for Solar System, AGN, deep field and IGM research

The Ombuds Report

Findings:

- No evidence for "egregious bias (scientific or otherwise) in the discussions of the scientific merit of proposals…"
- High workload for panel chairs
  - Sentiment echoed by the Cycle 21 panel chairs
- The balance of seniority for panel members is skewed towards more junior researchers
  - Reflects the difficulty of recruiting more senior community members
- Conflict of interest can significantly reduce the number of panelists with relevant expertise who are eligible to vote on a proposal
  - This is particularly the case for the TAC, given the broad diversity of science interests
- "An uneasy feeling" about the triage process
  - Are good proposals being rejected because there's not sufficient time for discussion?

Actions: workload

- Under the current system, chairs are not required to submit preliminary grades on panel proposals; they do submit grades for proposals during the panel meeting;
- Chairs are required to submit preliminary grades for TAC proposals by the start of the TAC meeting, and they review and grade medium proposals sent forward by the panels
  - Each panel chair only sees the medium proposals assigned to his/her panel.

Mitigation:

- In Cycle 22, chairs will run the panel meetings, but will not vote on panel proposals i.e. chairs can focus on TAC proposals prior to the meeting.
- Panel chairs will be required to submit preliminary grades on TAC proposals at the same time as panel members, allowing us to calculate and circulate the triage list at the start of the meeting; this allows more time to check the triaged proposals.
- We will give the chairs more time to review medium proposals by using the preliminary grades to identify the top ~40% such proposals; those proposals will be circulated to TAC members at the start of the meeting. We will refine that list on Tuesday evening using the final grades from the panels.

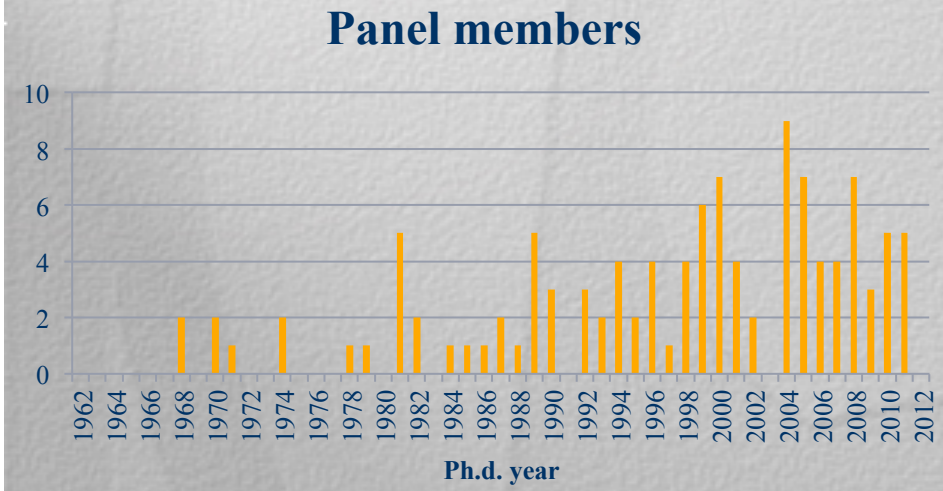
Actions: Panelist seniority

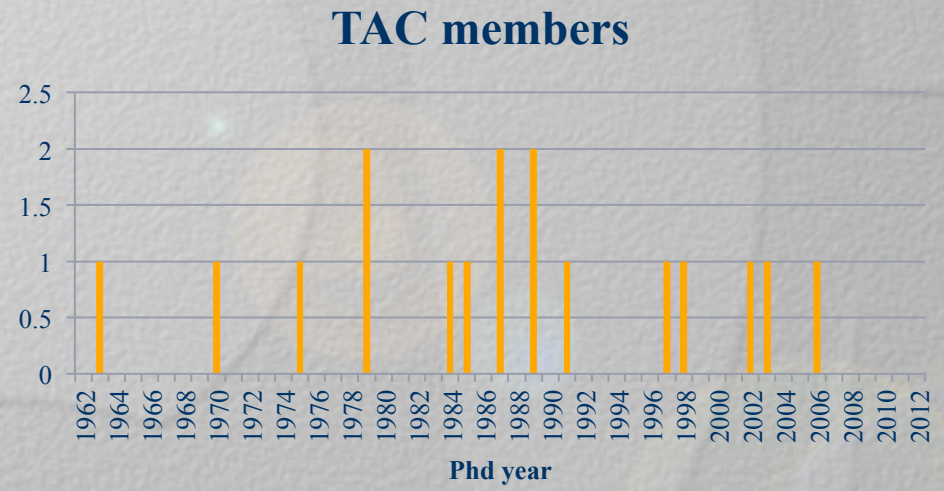
Ombuds report notes the skew towards more junior scientists on the panels

- Reflects difficulties in recruiting senior panelists
- Ensures that most of the panel members are active HST users

Typical recruitment success rate is ~1 in 3 for panelists

- A major reason cited for declining to serve is the timing of the TAC in May, which coincides with final examinations in many US institutions, including JHU





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  - The TAC meeting is currently held in week between JHU final exams and convocation

Mitigation:

- For Cycle 22, we will experiment with moving the TAC to the 2nd week in June
  - 1 week after the summer AAS, 3 weeks before the Chandra TAC starts
- Phase I proposal deadline will slip to mid-April
  - Overall reduction in 1 month between proposal submission and start of cycle
- We recognise that this introduces conflicts with US universities on a quarterly schedule & some European institutions

Actions: Expertise

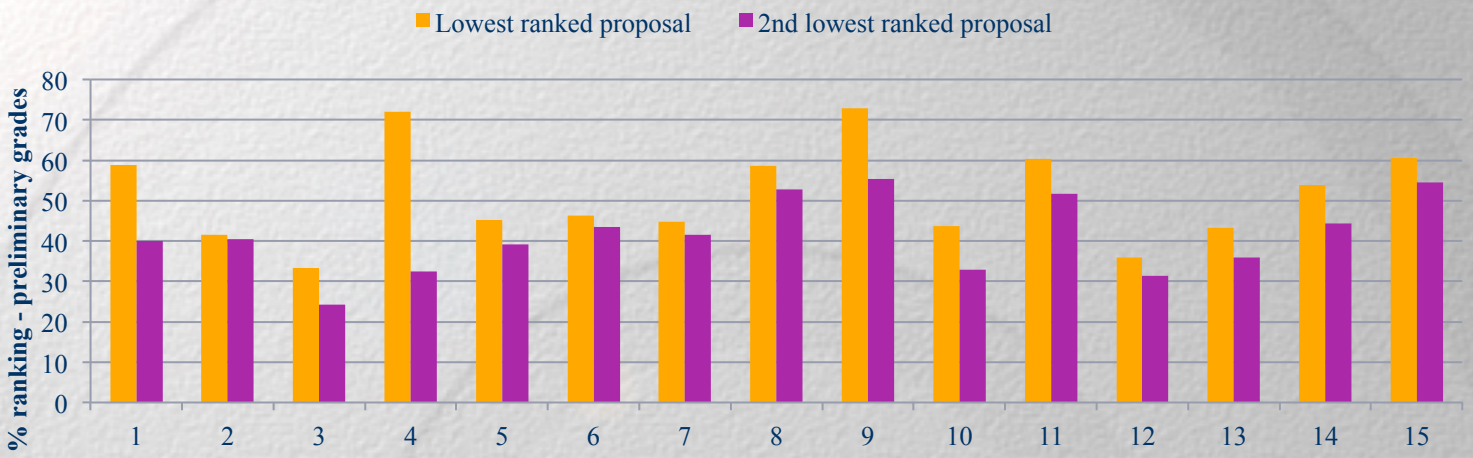
Medium and Large proposals identified as particular issues

- Medium proposals are reviewed & graded by individual panels prior to being promoted to the TAC
  - Comments are made available to TAC members, providing additional input
- Large proposals are discussed by individual panels, but comments are captured by the panel chair
  - Large proposals tend to be extragalactic, leading to a higher workload for AGN, Cosmology & Galaxies

Mitigation

- We propose to circulate each Large & Treasury proposals to 2-3 expert referees who will be asked to assess the proposal's
  - Strengths
  - Weaknesses
  - Timeliness
  - Likely impact
- Those reviews will be provided to the TAC members with the TAC triage list

Actions: Triage



For Cycle 21, we examined the preliminary rankings of the accepted proposals in each panel and for the TAC

40% triage level: i.e. set at the 60th percentile for preliminary rankings

- Identify 2 proposals/panel with the lowest preliminary rankings
  - Lowest ranked: 2 triaged proposals revived, 2 boundary proposals
  - 2nd lowest ranked: none lower than 55th percentile
- Results suggest that the triage level is reasonable
  - TAC members will have additional time to review the large-proposal triage list & identify possible saves

Summary

- The position of TAC Ombudsperson was created to provide an independent assessment of the equity of the TAC process, and to comment on specific areas of concern identified by the community
- The Ombuds report finds that the TAC process is fair, but identifies 4 areas of potential concern
  - Chair workload
  - Seniority
  - Expertise
  - Triage
- We have identified adjustments to the procedure that we believe may mitigate these concerns
- We propose to invite Dr. Lo to serve as Ombudsperson in Cycle 22 to provide an assessment of the revised procedures

Other topics

A Proposal for Joint HST-NRAO programs

HST currently has reciprocal joint programs with Chandra, XMM & Spitzer (pending senior review)

NRAO currently has one-sided agreements with Chandra & Fermi

NRAO is re-negotiating MOUs aimed at establishing reciprocal programs

STScI & NRAO propose initiating a reciprocal program with HST

- HST proposers can request time on North American NRAO facilities through the HST TAC
  - Green Bank Telescope (GBT), VLA & VLBA
  - Up to 3% of the available hours will be offered, with a maximum of 5% in any specific VLA configuration
- NRAO proposers can request time on HST at the February 1 deadline
  - Up to 30 orbits will be available
  - Successful proposers will submit Phase II HST proposals at the standard Phase II deadline
  - Funding will be available to US investigators at a level appropriate to supporting the HST data reduction; budgets should be submitted at the standard deadline
  - A successful joint program could be extended to include ALMA at a future date

We ask the STUC to endorse a joint program starting in 2014 (Cycle 22) for a 2 year trial period

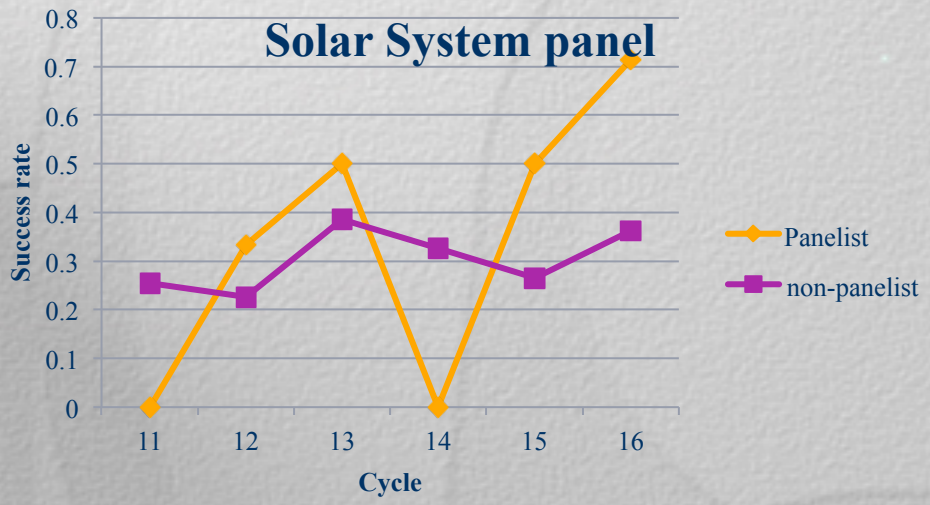
Solar System Proposals (1)

Cycle 11-16 program stats:

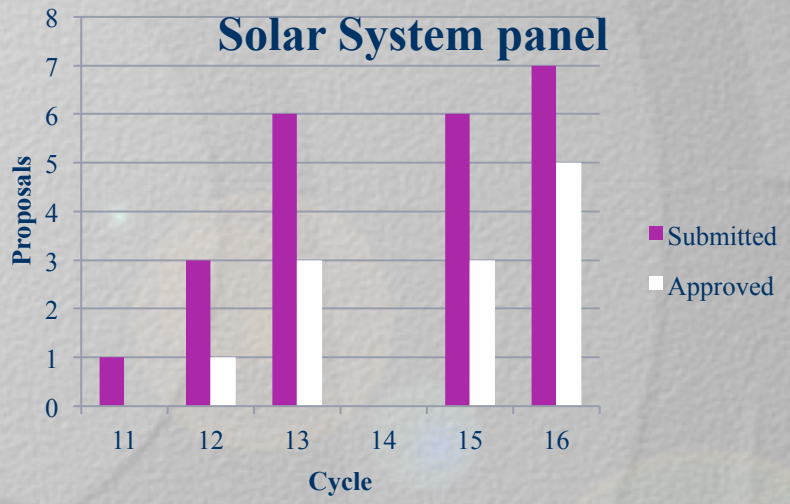
Solar system proposals were reviewed by a single panel in those cycles

Are panelists more successful than non-panelists?

Small number statistics, but overall, yes.



Comparison in success rate of panelists and non-panelists, Cycles 11-16.



Submitted/approved proposals for Solar System panelists, Cycles 11-16

Solar System Proposals (2)

Solar System Advisory Committee – Charter

- Solar System observations have played a major role in HST's science program since its launch in 1990. Over the years, the proposal pressure for solar system observations has diminished in proportion to pressure from other disciplines. After consultation with the Space Telescope Users Committee, the Space Telescope Science Institute's Director, Matt Mountain, has decided to constitute an advisory committee to explore the underlying reasons for the apparent decline in usage and to provide advice on future strategies for planetary science programs with HST. Committee members will be drawn from the planetary science community.
- The Solar System Advisory is hereby charged with the following primary tasks:
- Review the evolution of HST usage by the planetary community and match against factors such as changes in the time allocation process and in instrument capabilities;
- Solicit input from the community on the role that HST can play in planetary science and on methods for allocating observing programs;
- Investigate potential mechanisms that might better align HST observational programs with planetary science priorities.
- The committee will summarise their conclusions in a report to the Director.

Phil Nicholson (Cornell) has agreed to serve as Chair & Marc Buie will represent the STUC; other members to be selected.

Unconscious bias: Cycle 21

- STUC was briefed in April on the gender selection statistics presented to the STIC in February:
  - STUC recommended that the Cycle 21 HST TAC should be made aware of the general issue & chairs should be encouraged to ensure that discussion focuses on science;
  - Unconscious bias was raised as an issue in the Director's presentation at the TAC orientation (slides included as backup);
  - 3 STUC members served on the Cycle 21 TAC, 2 as chairs;
  - The issue was discussed by several panels.
- Cycle 21 overall statistics:
  - Average success rate = 23.0%
  - Male PI proposals:
    - 190 approved from 806
    - 23.6% success rate
    - 0.6% excess (~5 proposals)
  - Female PI proposals:
    - 62 approved from 288
    - 21.5% success rate
    - 1.5% deficit (~4 proposals)
- Further analysis in progress