

NOAO Response to the 2010 User's Committee Report

The NOAO User's Committee (UC) met in Tucson on June 15 and 16, 2010. Their full report is available here:

http://www.noao.edu/dir/usercom/2010/NOAO_UC_report2010D.pdf. The following is the NOAO response to the specific recommendations made by the UC in the 2010 report.

NOAO is very grateful to the UC for their hard work on behalf of the US observing community. Special thanks are given to Eric Gawiser this year for filling in as the chair of the committee for the two-day meeting.

1. CTIO and KPNO

Recommendation 1.1

We recommend that an extension of NEWFIRM's presence at CTIO beyond 18 months be considered if there are delays in the commissioning of DECam.

NOAO is committed to maximizing the science productivity of NEWFIRM. We will consider extending the NEWFIRM time at CTIO later this year as DECam planning proceeds. We will discuss this with the UC in June 2011.

Recommendation 1.2

We strongly recommend the continuation of the efforts initiated by outgoing KPNO director with respect to outreach, special programs and liaison with the Tohono O'odham nation.

NOAO will continue to work with the Tohono O'odham Nation to maintain and improve relations.

Recommendation 1.3

We recommend that CTIO prioritize the order in which new instruments are commissioned on SOAR, such that SAM is given highest priority.

The SOAR Observatory through its board and director set the priorities for commissioning. They solicit input from their Science Advisory Committee and communities as well. CTIO has prioritized SAM as one of its highest priorities along with DECam in 2011. Current plans have the LGS components being installed in September 2010 and seeing first launch in November 2010. This is well in advance of critical DECam efforts and should therefore proceed as planned. CTIO has advocated for a timely commissioning of SAM and this is high on SOAR's list, along with Goodman commissioning (see below).

Recommendation 1.4

We support NOAO's efforts to encourage UNC to provide the tools for multi-slit observing with the Goodman spectrograph.

The SOAR board has initiated a plan to assess the status of Goodman in long slit and MOS modes. A committee will report by August 30, 2010 on the specifications originally defined for Goodman and its current performance with respect to those specifications. SOAR will work with UNC to have all the long slit modes fully commissioned and documented up to specification by the end of calendar year 2010. SOAR and UNC will then plan for commissioning the MOS modes by mid 2011.

Recommendation 1.5

We urge that NOAO continue advertising the new capabilities at SOAR aggressively.

We agree. We are planning to have SOAR represented as one of our three main backdrops at the AAS in January 2011 (Seattle). We will "push" SOAR to AAS members with a series of pamphlets for the facility and instruments.

2. ReSTAR

Recommendation 2.1

We continue to endorse NOAO's three-phase plan to implement the ReSTAR initiatives and reinvest in KPNO and CTIO.

NOAO appreciates the UC's support for this plan.

Recommendation 2.2

We recommend the availability of Palomar time, and the sensitivity of the instruments be better advertised to the NOAO user-base.

The NSSC SUS is looking into a more integrated Call for Proposals process that will include better advertising and availability of important user information.

Recommendation 2.3

We recommend that NOAO continue to pursue additional funds and continue an updating and prioritizing their infrastructure needs and involving the user community in the process.

Look for more Phase 1 activity in 2010-2011 as well as planning for Phase 2 of ReSTAR. NOAO is expecting an award from NSF of \$3.9M in FY10 that will be used to construct a copy of TripleSpec for CTIO and a second copy of OSMOS (COSMOS) for CTIO. These projects will begin in 2011.

The ReSTAR committee was reconvened and has finished its report for Phase 2 (see <http://www.noao.edu/system/restar>). We expect to call a meeting before the end of the year for any interested community stakeholders (operators of telescope facilities, instrument builders) to discuss how they might participate. Following a review and selection of proposals, NOAO will submit a Phase 2 proposal to NSF.

3. Large Science Proposals

Recommendation 3.1

We recommend that the time promised in exchange for an instrument be carefully considered, such that the scientific value of open access retained by users is at least as good as it would be without the new instrument.

NOAO will carefully consider carefully the benefits to the community arising from new capabilities on the Mayall in exchange for time to a Large Science Program (LSP). NOAO will rely heavily on a non advocate review of the LSP and this review panel will include members from NOAO's oversight committees.

Recommendation 3.2

We recommend that NOAO ensure that any loss of capabilities at the Mayall resulting from an LSP be made available elsewhere in the U.S. O/IR system.

NOAO will work hard to make sure high demand capabilities are provided for elsewhere in the system when and if a LSP capability deploys on the Mayall. The extent to which NOAO will be successful in gaining new capabilities to offset a LSP will depend, at least in part, on community demand.

Recommendation 3.3

We encourage NOAO to demonstrate to the user community that a full analysis of costs and benefits of a proposed LSP was performed in making the decision to go ahead.

NOAO will communicate to the community the results of the non advocate review and the full process developed to solicit, review, and deploy (if appropriate) a LSP on the Mayall.

Recommendation 3.4

We recommend that NOAO consult the user community on proposed terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the LSP team before it is finalized.

NOAO plans to be fully open with community as it makes the decision on accepting or rejecting a LSP proposal. NOAO reserves the right to enter into an MOU with a LSP team without seeking explicit community approval. NOAO has already solicited community input and will accept input at any time. In addition, the Director will solicit explicitly reviews of the LSP by the UC and NOAO Survey TAC.

Recommendation 3.5

NOAO should keep open their legal right to back out of the agreement for as long as possible before the formal agreement is signed.

NOAO will ensure that the community access to the Mayall is protected and only exchanged for new capabilities once those are understood to perform as expected.

4. Gemini

Recommendation 4.1

We encourage NOAO/NGST to follow the ALTAIR recommendations and facilitate action towards procurement of new high resolution spectroscopic instruments for the Gemini telescopes.

NOAO has and will continue to advocate to Gemini for high resolution spectroscopic capabilities.

Recommendation 4.2

We recommend that NOAO encourage Gemini to expedite FLAMINGOS-2.

FLAMINGOS-2 (F2) is the stated highest priority for Gemini. NOAO agrees with this and will continue to argue for an as-soon-as-possible deployment of F2 at Gemini South.

Recommendation 4.3

We urge NOAO to advocate for and help development of remote observing system akin to those available at e.g., IRTF, Keck, WIYN, etc.

NOAO is willing to help develop remote observing capabilities for the US community. However, NOAO feels this aspect of operations must be prioritized below new and improved instrument capabilities at Gemini. It must also be developed within a comprehensive operations plan at Gemini which reduces costs by 25% as mandated by the Gemini board following the withdrawal of the UK from the Gemini partnership.

Recommendation 4.4

We recommend that NOAO/NSSC encourages US observers to use the mid-IR capabilities of Gemini and supports mid-IR observer by encouraging Gemini to make the mid-IR instruments available more regularly.

NOAO advocates to US observers to take advantage of the complete package of Gemini instruments in order to produce the best science possible.

Recommendation 4.5

We recommend that NOAO urge Gemini to maintain its mid-IR capabilities, with at least one instrument (T-ReCS more used), in south, and perhaps consider options of sharing a mid-IR instrument in the north with Subaru.

NOAO agrees that one mid-IR capability should be maintained at Gemini. Instruments will soon exceed ports at Gemini South, and Gemini may find it more advantageous to maintain either TReCS or Michelle on the mid-IR superior site of Mauna Kea.

5. LSST

Recommendation 5.1

We recommend that NOAO continue to facilitate the formation of new science collaborations.

NOAO will continue to work on bringing in more users to the science collaborations.

Recommendation 5.2

We encourage NOAO to host more LSST science collaboration workshops in the future.

We will try and accommodate more workshops as resources allow.

Recommendation 5.3

We recommend that efforts also be made to make the simulator more accessible to the general community, including astronomers not in the science collaborations.

We will continue to make efforts to get the simulator information into the hands of users. At present the simulator is not a “user friendly” tool, nor is there a computer to run it on which would make output readily available on short (less than a week) timescales.

Recommendation 5.4

We encourage NOAO to provide LSST follow-up facility by beginning work on the copy of Triplespec if and when funding becomes available.

Agreed. See section 2 above.

6. Overall Balance

Recommendation 6.1

We recommend that NOAO continue its rough balance of current activities and attempt to protect each of its core missions despite the current fiscal challenges.

NOAO will continue on its current course as outlined in the Long Range Plan:

<http://www.noao.edu/dir/lrplan/2010-noao-lrp.pdf>

Recommendation 6.2

We continue to endorse pursuing more partnerships, while also reiterating our strong belief that NOAO facilities should remain available for open access for the great majority of the time.

Open access is the bedrock of the NOAO mission. NOAO will continue to strive to expand open access on all telescopes in the US that are in heavy demand by the US community. NOAO will also balance raw access with opportunities for new state-of-the-art capabilities that offer significant new science to be accomplished. Finally, NOAO will consider proposal pressure and available resources when balancing the

amount of open access time on certain of its telescopes when opportunities arise to gain more access on other (more valued) telescopes.

Recommendation 6.3

We continue to encourage NOAO to cooperate with the efforts to develop a funding source to ground-based observational studies and remove the necessity to apply for telescope time and data analysis funding separately.

We agree with this goal but recognize funding remains highly competitive for other worthy programs at NSF.

Recommendation 6.4

We again suggest that the Instrument Capabilities search page be made more prominent so that it becomes the first thing users find when looking for a list of available capabilities. We urge NOAO to enable multiple buttons to be pressed in each category so that e.g. both large and medium telescope results can be displayed as one page.

We will place this link: <http://www.noao.edu/roadmap.php> at the top of this page: <http://www.noao.edu/observing-information.php> as a temporary solution. These pages are being redefined in order to make a more uniform and complete "entry point" into the user capabilities for all NOAO accessible facilities.

Recommendation 6.5

We urge NOAO to allow proposals for 2nd and possibly 3rd-choice instruments via an "OR" clause added to the multiple instrument runs available in the proposal form.

We are planning for an experiment in the next Call for proposals to do this for optical spectroscopy in the North (RC Spec, Double Spectrograph) and South (RC Spec, Goodman).

Recommendation 6.6

We suggest that NOAO revises its policies of time allocation to protect general users and ensure that the entire community has access to the new and exciting instruments.

We agree that all users should have the same access to new and exciting instruments to the greatest extent possible. NOAO will carefully consider any special proposals that result in capabilities with restricted access.

Recommendation 6.7

We recommend that NOAO follow a policy of only allowing survey proposals on an instrument following its commissioning.

Agreed. NOAO will only accept proposals for instruments that are already commissioned.

Recommendation 6.8

We endorse NOAA's efforts to improve their website and archive interface and are willing to help with this continuing process.

NOAO appreciates the UC's endorsement and offer to help.

7. ODI

Recommendation 7.1

We recommend that NOAA's share of WIYN in the ODI era should be as large as is possible consistent with finishing the fully-functioning instrument.

Acknowledged.

Recommendation 7.2

We encourage NOAA and its partners to complete ODI as rapidly as practicable.

At the time of this writing, WIYN and the ODI team are preparing for a full-scale review of the entire ODI project. Following a successful review, NOAA intends to work with its WIYN partners to try to find an affordable and timely way forward to a successful ODI deployment and operation. However, ODI is not a NOAA project; therefore, NOAA cannot guarantee the ultimate schedule or state of ODI at this time.