To: Angela Speck, Vera Margoniner, Eric Gawiser, Virginia McSwain, Nathan Smith, Ian Dell'Antonio, Sangeeta Malhotra, Adam Stanford
From: R. Blum
CC: D. Silva, NOAO Executive Council
Subject: NOAO Response to the User's Committee report 2011

September 6, 11

Dear Angela,

Thank you to you and your committee for your continued efforts on behalf of NOAO and NOAO users. Below please find NOAO's response to the UC 2011 recommendations. We will do everything in our power to respond positively to each recommendation. In cases where that is not possible, or NOAO holds a different point of view, we'll look forward to a continuing dialog.

Sincerely,

Bob

1. KPNO & CTIO

Recommendation 1.1

We recommend that DECam be made available to surveys. Regular survey rules should apply, with the "maximum time" guideline modified so that no more than 20% of *non DES Blanco time* in each semester is available for surveys.

We agree DECam should be available for surveys. We will assess the demand for this capability once DECam is commissioned and operating.

Recommendation 1.2

We recommend that NOAO find a way to provide a U-band filter for DECam.

We agree. NOAO will purchase a U band filter. NOAO's project scientist is already working with Asahi in Japan to execute a proof of concept. We expect to formally order the filter late in 2011 or early 2012 once the results of the proof of concept are known.

2. ReSTAR

Recommendation 2.1

The UC recommends that TripleSpec be placed at SOAR, but NOAO should pay close attention to the relative demand for SOAR and Blanco time requests. When the SOAR partnership is renegotiated in 2014, NOAO should try to acquire a higher share of SOAR time for the US if the oversubscription rate consistently rises above 3.

We agree. NOAO is waiting for NSF approval to change TS4 from Blanco to SOAR. NOAO believes this will be an important new capability and "science success" on either telescope.

Recommendation 2.2

The UC recommends that NOAO consider time exchanges between the Blanco and the international SOAR partners should the need arise to balance demand at both telescopes.

We agree. NOAO now has an MOU with Brazil for time exchanges. Such exchanges have been made, and we expect the interest to grow once DECam and COSMOS are available.

Recommendation 2.3

The UC recommends that NOAO proceed with the Phase 2 proposal as planned. While the Palomar and ARC facilities include some overlapping capabilities, each facility offers other compelling reasons for NOAO participation.

We agree. We will consider continuing the Palomar access. Given likely fiscal contraints, we will prioritize ARC above Palomar consistent with the Phase 2 review and remote observing capability offered by ARC.

3. BigBOSS

Recommendation 3.1

We recommend that the MOU for BigBOSS include the blue arm for the spectrograph.

We agree. This will be a high priority for NOAO as the project develops.

Recommendation 3.2

We encourage NOAO to consult the user community on proposed terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the BigBOSS team before it is finalized.

NOAO will keep the community informed about progress in the development of the collaboration. We will consult with our Users Committee and AURA Observatory Council about the terms of any MOU between NOAO and the BigBOSS team.

Recommendation 3.3

We recommend that NOAO retain _ 25% of dark time on the Mayall during the BigBOSS survey.

We agree that community access to dark time is a priority. We will balance the community needs and survey needs in reaching a final schedule for the survey.

Recommendation 3.4

We recommend that steps be taken to ensure that data products generated by BigBOSS are readily accessible by the community.

We agree. NOAO will ensure that the tools needed to produce data products for the community are available (just as we are doing for DECam).

Recommendation 3.5

We recommend that NOAO consider including a scientist from outside of BigBOSS and NOAO in the planning process.

We will consider this suggestion as the project develops. A Users Committee representative might be particularly useful.

4. Gemini

Recommendation 4.1

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

NOAO has consistently advocated to Gemini directly and through the US Gemini SAC and US members of the GSC to provide for remote participation in nightly observing through eavesdropping during queue scheduled observations. Gemini's queue operation should naturally lend itself to classical/remote observing. NOAO will continue to discuss developing this option with the US Gemini Caucus (US SAC, US GSC and Board memebers).

Recommendation 4.2

We recommend NOAO continue to facilitate classical observing for the US community.

NOAO believes classical observing is key to the development of a strong Gemini user community. We will continue our efforts to bring live humans to the telescopes.

Recommendation 4.3

We recommend NOAO advocate for implementing ways to improve Phase II of the proposal process.

NOAO believes Gemini's Phase II software is a highly effective tool to plan and execute observations. We will continue to pass user concerns to Gemini so the tool can be improved, and we will continue to work with users to train them in its use.

Recommendation 4.4

We recommend NOAO advocate for the acquisition of an X-Shooter clone for the Gemini telescopes.

NOAO has advocated for this capability in the past and will in the future within the context of addressing US community desires for future capabilities. We will continue to gather user input on the best directions for future instrumentation (ala ALTAIR) in order to help Gemini make informed choices that respond to the US community. The recent call for proposals to design a high-resolution optical spectrograph is a good example of the effectiveness of this approach.

5. LSST

Recommendation 5.1

We recommend that NOAO continue to facilitate the addition of new members to existing LSST science collaborations and the formation of new ones.

We agree. NOAO has a call out for new collaborators (August 2011). A TAC will be convened in late 2011 to make new selections from the submitted proposals.

Recommendation 5.2

We recommend that NOAO continue to host LSST science collaboration meetings and workshops.

We agree. NOAO will support future collaboration meetings.

Recommendation 5.3

We recommend that efforts be made to make the LSST simulator more accessible to the general astronomical community.

We understand the value of having the simulator more widely available and support this goal. However, significant resources (human and capital) are required to make system that would be effective for general users. If more resources become available, NOAO will work with LSST on this activity.

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 is working with the community, its committees, and NSF to vigorously make the case for continued support to its core mission after the NSF portfolio review. At the same time, NOAO is moving to enhance the amount and impact of survey science, an area for which the Blanco and Mayall 4-m's are uniquely qualified in the US portfolio. We envision an exciting future where discovery by PI's and focused survey experiments combine to maintain an outstanding suite of capabilities for the US community.

Recommendation 6.2

We strongly recommend that NOAO pursue remote observing options for both Gemini and smaller telescopes in the system.

See the 4.1 above for Gemini. ReSTAR Phase 2 will directly address the desire for remote observing (stay tuned) and NOAO will cautiously begin moving toward a remote observing offering on its own facilities in the coming year.

Recommendation 6.3

We recommend that NOAO plan a fact-finding mission and visit IRTF to investigate their remote observing model.

This is an excellent idea and we will pursue it.

Recommendation 6.4

We recommend that NOAO run a pilot remote observing program extending the WIYN and SOAR remote observing options beyond the partner institutions to the wider NOAO community.

We will consider doing this for 2012A or B.

Recommendation 6.5

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.

Based upon opportunity and need for resources, NOAO will consider new partnerships in the years ahead.

Recommendation 6.6

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 are sympathetic to the community's desire to link research funding to successful telescope proposals. We would be happy to work with NSF on a program to do this if resources were made available.

ODI

Recommendation 7.1

We recommend that NOAO continue working with WIYN and leading the effort to ensure that this capability is deployed.

NOAO is working closely with WIYN to deliver a plan for completion of a partially filled focal plane that could be delivered in FY12. This would be the first step toward a fully functional instrument with a complete one degree field of view.

Recommendation 7.2

We recommend that NOAO staff continue working with Indiana/PPA to develop the pipeline and archive architecture for ODI.

NOAO continues to work with WIYN to develop the PPA.