

Dear South African Astronomical Community

Target Readership And Purpose Of This Email

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This email is intended primarily for those who proposed for SALT time in the call which closed at the end of 2012 July and is referred to as "2012 Semester 2". It is, however, being sent to everyone on the email list: [sastronomers@list.sao.ac.za](mailto:sastronomers@list.sao.ac.za) , so that everyone will know how the time allocation went. If you are not interested in using SALT or knowing how its third time allocation went, don't bother to read any further.

The email gives a general description of the process we followed and the outcome. SALT Astronomy Operations will be contacting each PI shortly to inform them of the outcome of their proposal. For those of you who are co-Is on a proposal with a foreign PI, feel free to send this email to them (or indeed anyone who might be interested).

Who Did The Allocation?

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It was carried out by SASTAC (the South African SALT Time Allocation Committee) this semester comprising Kavilan Moodley, David Buckley and Darragh O'Donoghue (Chair), Petri Vaisanen, Vanessa McBride and Ilani Loubser.

What Needed To Be Done?

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Consider 46 Phase I proposals asking for at least some time from the SA share of SALT time. Time was to be allocated into priorities 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4. Priority 4 was, as previously, for those proposals which would not normally be done on a 10-m class telescope but would be observed when conditions were unacceptable for normal proposals (e.g. heavy cloud, very bad seeing), rather than have the telescope stand idle. As before, each proposal could receive an allocation of P0-3 time in each of the moon phases (bright, gray, dark).

How Much Time?

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The 46 proposals asked for 548 hours. The amount of time available was 327 hours so there was an oversubscription rate of 1.7. However, there was a significant undersubscription of bright time this semester (factor of 3) so gray and dark time were oversubscribed by a factor of 2.3 and 2.0 respectively. The statistics for all the proposals are contained in the attached document (RSA.pdf) compiled by Steve Crawford. The split of the available time over the priority classes was 44 hr for Priority 0-1 combined, 66 hr for Priority 2 and 220 hr for Priority 3. As usual, Priority 3 time is double what is available (to prevent the observing queue ever being empty) so that only 50 per cent of the Priority 3 observations will be executed (assuming weather statistics etc. conform to the long term average).

How Did We Do The Job?

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The process was essentially the same as for the last two semesters time. It was divided into 3 stages, given that it was impossible for any one person to read carefully all 46 proposals:

- (i) The 6 committee members were assigned roughly 20 proposals each, which meant that there were two "primary reviewers" of each proposal;

(ii) After having read their 20 proposals, they compared notes with the other person reading that proposal and came to a consensus view;

(iii) The entire committee met and considered each one of the 46 proposals (except their own - see below) which allowed comment from other members. Although the consensus view of the two primary reviewers was most influential, review by the entire committee often led to an adjustment of the proposed time allocation, or even a change of view of the proposal. A consensus view of the entire committee was then reached.

Technical reviews were also conducted by the Astronomy Operations staff and were taken into account in the allocation of time.

Did SASTAC Enjoy Unfair Advantage?

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We do not believe so. No primary reviewer considered his/her own proposal, whether as PI or co-I. Every time any proposal was discussed in the full committee, anyone on the committee who was co-I or PI on the proposal was asked to leave the room to allow the others on the committee complete freedom to criticise. For all proposals, the maximum number of PIs or co-Is on any specific one was two, leaving the other four available to assess it.

Time Allocation Policy

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We favoured:

- o Scientific merit above everything else but not overwhelmingly so. No proposal lacking scientific merit or containing observational or technical flaws received time. We again "pushed" scientific merit so that a large number of proposals received all the time they requested (see below).
- o Proposals leading to observations which would be used in a SA student's MSc or PhD project.
- o Proposals which would lead to publishable results on a short time scale including proposals with good prospects of finishing a previously started project.
- o Proposals which were led by South Africans (by which we mean people affiliated to a SA institution).
- o Proposals which took advantage of the strengths of the telescope.
- o Proposals with a synergy with KAT-7 or MeerKAT.

We were less favourably disposed towards:

- o Proposals in which a large amount of SA time was requested, but with a proportionately smaller role for those SA co-Is in the proposing team. In this regard, we definitely want to encourage SA scientists to participate in international collaborations. However, if the end result is simply appearing on the proposal and as a co-author on resulting papers without having played a significant scientific role, that is not "value for money" for SA science development. So we were looking for signs of more than participation "on paper" from SA co-Is if a significant amount of SA time was requested.
- o Proposals in which the efficiency of the observing program is low, or could be done on one of the SAAO small telescopes were assigned Priority 4. There were

three proposals considered for Priority 4 (as requested by the PIs). They were read by the assigned pairs of reviewers, who assessed whether they could be "tossed in the pot" of P4s.

How Did The Numbers Work Out?

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Of the 46 proposals, only 3 received no time. Of the remaining 42, 27 proposals received essentially all the time they requested. No proposal received more than 24 hr.

As for the previous two semesters, some proposals had the moon phase inappropriately specified and so we changed this. The distribution of awarded time across moon phase did not match what the moon provides (25 per cent bright and gray time, 50 per cent dark time). Instead, the 2012 Semester 2 allocation was 9 per cent bright time, 34 per cent gray time and 57 per cent dark time.

How Did We Regard Min Useful Time?

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Minimum useful time was able to be taken seriously but, of course, in many cases we did allocate less than the minimum useful time.

Darragh O'Donoghue

On behalf of SASTAC