

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 on 2012 Feb 24 and is referred to as "2012 Semester 1". 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 second 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) comprising Renee Kraan-Korteweg, Michael Feast, Kavilan Moodley, David Buckley and Darragh O'Donoghue (Chair).

What Needed To Be Done?

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Consider 75 Phase I proposals (89 last time) 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 new for this semester and applied to 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. Another significant change this time was that 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 75 proposals asked for 745 hours (versus 1097 last time). The amount of time available is 423 hours so there is an oversubscription rate of 1.76 (versus 3.75 last time). SASTAC's task was thus ***MUCH*** easier than last time. 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 56 hr for Priority 0-1 combined, 85 hr for Priority 2 and 282 hr for Priority 3. As was the case last time, 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 last time. It was divided into 3 stages, given that it was impossible for any one person to read carefully all 75 proposals:

- (i) The 5 committee members were assigned roughly 30 proposals each, which meant that there were two "primary reviewers" of each proposal;

(ii) After having read their 30 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 75 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.

The statistics of each sub-field of astronomy in the proposals was considered to see if moderation within a sub-field or across sub-fields was needed but, like last time, there was no need for this. The proposals could be divided up into "Binary Stars", "Near Field Cosmology", "Far Field Cosmology" with a few proposals not fitting these categories. The 3 major categories each received more or less equal shares of the 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 three 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. Because the oversubscription was not as large as last time, we "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.
- 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.

How Did The Numbers Work Out?  
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Of the 75 proposals, 12 received no time (versus 15 out of 89 last time). Of the remaining 63, 5 received allocations only of P4 time (as the proposers themselves requested). 32 proposals received more than 90 per cent of the time they requested.

The distribution of time awarded was:

Time	Number
0 hr:	12
0.5-5 hr:	25
5-10 hr:	22
10-15 hr:	7
15-20 hr:	2
20-25 hr:	2

No proposal received more than 22 hr.

As was true last time, we also noted that in many cases, the moon phase was inappropriately specified and so we changed this. The distribution of awarded time across moon phase more or less matched what the moon provides: 25 per cent bright and gray time, 50 per cent dark time.

How Did We Regard Min Useful Time?
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Last time the oversubscription rate was so large that it was impossible not to award time which was less than the minimum useful time. This time around minimum useful time could be taken more seriously and for only 8 proposals did the time awarded turn out to be less than the minimum useful time the proposers specified (no promises for the future!).

SASTAC Discretionary Time  
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We decided to hold back 21 hrs of Priority 3 time to allocate during the semester. Apart from the usual Target of Opportunity time, requests for other reasons may be considered. SASTAC is currently debating how to manage this time. Naturally we do not want to have to entertain lots of proposals on an ongoing basis. So we will announce in due course (soon) the criteria and procedure for people in the community applying for some of this time. At the moment, a proposal for SASTAC Discretionary Time has been approved for Phase I. Those awarded time will then fill in a Phase II proposal for their targets with the amount of time allocated. More details later.

Darragh O'Donoghue

On behalf of SASTAC