



University of Colorado at Boulder

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Dr. Michael S. Turner, Assistant Director
Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Turner,

I am very pleased to inform you officially of the formal acceptance by the Mathematical and Physical Sciences Advisory Committee (MPSAC) of the report of the Committee of Visitors (COV) for the Division of Astronomical Sciences (AST). This report was considered by the Mathematical and Physical Sciences Advisory Committee during its April 7-8, 2005 meeting. The report was presented by telephone by the Chair of the COV, Dr. Craig Wheeler of the University of Texas, assisted by Professor Robert Kohn, a member of both MPSAC and the COV. The report strongly endorsed the programs and work of the Division of Astronomical Sciences, especially noting the fashion in which the Division has assembled an outstanding portfolio of world-class research programs and facilities. The COV was extremely pleased with the management of the division, the mechanisms by which decisions were made and the thoroughness with which those decisions were documented.

The report articulates several challenges facing AST, raising issues that MPSAC also believes should receive attention. AST faces particular challenges associated with new facilities, as documented in the report. The COV noted the importance of the new facilities and the careful mechanisms by which facility priorities are determined. The COV endorsed the Division's new strategic plan to build a sustainable program using a community-based process that considers the scientific merits of extant facilities and programs, as well as the advances that can be realized with new instruments and other initiatives. The COV strongly recommended that the AST grants program should be maintained at or above its current funding level, despite the severe budget pressure presented by proposed large facilities. The MPSAC strongly endorses the planned Senior Review as an important planning step to address these stresses.

The COV noted that AST will face severe challenges in the coming years to maintain its excellent research portfolio in the face of a difficult funding environment. The COV expressed confidence that the AST staff has the expertise and perspective to optimally manage its program within these severe constraints. The COV noted the key role of AST in fostering the next generation of scientists poised to take full advantage of new facilities. The COV further noted the uneven fashion with which Criterion 2 is treated by proposers, reviewers and review panels, and

urged AST leadership to continue efforts to enlighten the community with respect to this important component. The MPSAC unequivocally endorsed all of these recommendations.

The MPS Advisory Committee members had read the report carefully prior to our meeting, and Dr. Wheeler's presentation provided an opportunity for the Advisory Committee to ask further questions about the challenges described above, as well as questions arising from the other COV recommendations. At the end of this exchange, the MPS Advisory Committee members were firmly convinced that the COV report provided a fair and balanced perspective on the operation of the Division of Astronomical Sciences, and that it had properly posed the important issues facing AST. We are very grateful to the COV and its Chair for this excellent, in-depth review of the Division of Astronomical Sciences, and we are grateful to the AST staff for their thorough preparations for this review and for their commendable performance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Carl Lineberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

W. Carl Lineberger, Chair
MPS Advisory Committee

cc: Dr. Craig Wheeler
Dr. Robert Kohn
Dr. Wayne Van Citters
Dr. Morris Aizenman