

ANUTAC Handbook

Paul Francis, 27th July 2016

1. Background

The Australian National University (ANU) Time Allocation Committee (ANUTAC) is responsible for allocating observing time on the ANU's telescopes at Siding Spring Observatory and ANU time on other telescopes to which the ANU has access (currently the Las Cumbres Observatory telescopes, LCOGT, and the open time on SkyMapper).

2. Membership

ANUTAC has seven members. Six members are appointed by the Director of the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics, in consultation with the Chair. At least one member of ANUTAC is external to ANU. When a new ANU member needs to be appointed, the Chair will issue a call for nominations. Both ANU and external members will serve on ANUTAC for two years. Membership of ANUTAC will be selected so far as possible to balance different research fields. The Chair and Deputy Chair are also appointed by the Director RSAA.

The seventh member is elected by the research student body for a six month term.

3. Meetings

ANU telescope time assignment schedule:

Jan 28th: Call for 2.3m applications for May-June-July quarter

Feb 15th: Closing date for 2.3m May-June-July applications and LCOGT April-September applications

Mar 15th: TAC meets to allocate 2.3m time for May-June-July

Apr 28th: Call for 2.3m applications for August-September-October quarter

May 15th: Closing date for 2.3m August-September-October applications

June 15th: TAC meets to allocate 2.3 time for August-September-October

July 28th: Call for applications for ANU 2.3m November-December-January quarter and LCOGT October-March applications

Aug 15th: Closing date for ANU 2.3m November-December-January applications and LCOGT October-March applications

Sep 15th: TAC meets to allocate 2.3m time for November-December-January

Oct 28th: Call for applications for 2.3m November-December-January quarter

Nov 15th: Closing date for 2.3m November-December-January applications

Dec 15th: TAC meets to allocate time for 2.3 November-December-January

Time on other telescopes will be discussed at the most appropriate meeting.

Meetings will be held in Canberra to allocate time. At the discretion of the Chair, members may participate by video/teleconference, or nominate substitutes to take their place.

Four members constitute a quorum.

If the telescope oversubscription is small, then meetings may, at the discretion of the Chair, be held by e-mail. If no consensus can be reached by this method, a face-to-face meeting will be held.

4. The Allocation Process

Observing proposals must be received by the deadline. 2.3m proposals are submitted via an on-line system. SkyMapper and LCOGT proposals are submitted by e-mail to the chair.

The Chair circulates the proposals to the committee members. The members rank each proposal on a point scheme against the following six criteria (points for each criterion given in square brackets):

1. Scientific impact [5]
2. Technical Feasibility [5]
3. Return for the time used [5]
4. Results from previous allocations (if relevant) [3]
5. Justification for the particular telescope/instrument [3]
6. Backup program in case of poor weather or partial instrument unavailability [3]

The grades, together with written comments, are forwarded to the chair ahead of the TAC meeting.

For each proposal, one TAC member will be asked to check its technical feasibility in detail, and to report on this to the Chair. If expertise in a particular telescope or instrument is not available in the TAC membership, the proposal can be technically assessed by an outside expert. If a potential technical issue is identified, it will be forwarded to the proposer before the TAC meeting to allow them to comment and/or modify their proposal.

At the meeting, the Chair (or nominee) will summarise the written comments and average pre-grades for each proposal in turn. They will then be discussed by the whole committee. Committee members may not grade or discuss any proposals in which they are involved, or for which they feel there may be a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest will be adjudicated by the Chair (or by the Deputy Chair if they involve the Chair). Conflicted members of the committee must leave the room while the relevant proposals are being discussed.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the members will record their revised grades, which will be passed in confidence to the Chair (or nominee).

Any proposals with guaranteed time will be handled as per the original agreement giving the guarantee.

If a particular telescope is not greatly oversubscribed, then, at the discretion of the Chair, and with the unanimous agreement of the TAC members, an abbreviated version of the above procedures may optionally be used. For Keck time, the full process will always be used.

5. The Scheduling Process

As soon as possible after the ANUTAC meeting, the Chair will come up with a draft telescope schedule for the ANU telescopes, taking into account the final grades, the date and the moon phase constraints as far as possible. This will be circulated to ANUTAC and

if approved will be posted on the web. Where possible, successful proposers will be given the full time they requested.

All proposers will be e-mailed the results of the TAC process. For all unsuccessful proposers, feedback will be provided on the TAC decision. Feedback may also be provided, at the discretion of the Chair, to successful proposers.

6. Responsibilities of the committee members

6.1 All members

1. Notify the Chair of any potential conflicts of interest.
2. Assess and grade all proposals before the meeting.
3. Prepare a summary of nominated proposals, and present this during the meeting.
4. Provide feedback for unsuccessful proposals.

6.2 Chair

5. Oversee policy matters.
6. Set up the automated proposal system prior to each proposal round, and close it down after the deadline has passed.
7. Liaise with technical staff to schedule telescope down-time and instrument maintenance/commissioning.
8. Write and widely distribute the calls for proposals.
9. Answer questions about the proposal process and oversee the resolution of any technical problems.
10. Distribute proposals to TAC members and nominate presenters.
11. Schedule the meeting.
12. Conduct each meeting and record grades and comments.
13. Schedule the ANU's telescopes.
14. Publish the schedule and provide feedback to proposers.
15. Keep the on-line schedule updated as changes occur.
16. Provide reports to the RSAA Director and to all-school meetings, as requested.
17. Account for any guaranteed time allocated.
18. Distribute a call for nominations for new ANUTAC members whenever required, and advise the director on the choice of new members.
19. Ask the students to appoint new representatives on the TAC when required.

6.3 Deputy Chair

To stand in for the Chair when they are unavailable or conflicted.