

Looking to the Future

David Silva

Strategy informs tactics. If you do not know where you want to go, you will not get anywhere or be ready to take advantage of unexpected opportunities. In the last *Newsletter*, I wrote about how current strategic priorities are driving our short-term budget decisions.

But, what about the future? How does NOAO merge strategic guidelines from the NSF Senior Review with community ambitions for science capabilities over the next decade across a broad range of telescope apertures? Certainly, the decadal survey (Astro2010) is interested in an answer from NOAO. To help sharpen our answer, AURA has convened a community-based committee chaired by Tim Beers (Michigan State). The Future of NOAO (Future) committee charge and a list of committee members are available at: www.noao.edu/system/future09.

The first face-to-face meeting was held in Long Beach immediately after the January American Astronomical Society meeting. Prior to the meeting, Beers asked everyone to provide their top five NOAO and/or System priorities for the first five years and the next five years, commencing essentially in 2010. Based on these initial

thoughts and two days of vigorous discussion, the committee is working on a white paper that begins by stating their view of why a strong national observatory is essential for US optical/infrared (O/IR) astronomy and what NOAO needs to do over the next decade to fulfill that vision. Topics include implementation of recommendations from the Renewing Small Telescopes for Astronomical Research and Access to Large Telescopes for Astronomical Instruction and Research committees about future relationships between NOAO and Gemini, the role of NOAO in the LSST and GSMT observatories, and concepts for a more coherent strategic roadmap for data management for the ground-based O/IR System.

The Future committee plans to release their draft white paper to the community-at-large in early March with a request for prioritization and feedback via a Web-based survey form. Based on community feedback, the committee will produce a final white paper by early May. This schedule is aggressive but necessary to fit within constraints posed by the broader Astro2010 input process.

I am excited by how the Future of NOAO white paper is shaping up and the enthusiastic vision it conveys. I believe you will be too.



Budget Update

David Silva

Stimulus is the word in Washington. Stimulus funding may present an unexpected opportunity to strengthen NOAO. Here's how.

It appears that Congress will send between one and two billion dollars to the NSF. That money will have to be handed out fast to energize the US economy. NSF is looking for "shovel-ready" projects, especially projects that improve university-related research infrastructure and help catch up on deferred maintenance.

So that we are ready when NSF wants input, NOAO is preparing lists of candidate projects now. On the bricks-and-mortar side, we have compiled a list of deferred maintenance projects that contains everything from basic building maintenance on Cerro Tololo to a new water treatment plant on Kitt Peak to significant building improvements in Tucson and La Serena. Individual projects cost from thousands to millions of dollars.

On the science capability side, NOAO has obvious needs and wants, starting with complete funding of our Renewing Small Telescopes for Astronomical Research implementation proposal. That alone would

lead to new spectrographs for the Mayall and Blanco 4-meter telescopes, access to the Palomar 5-meter telescope, and design studies for an echelle spectrograph for the Discovery Channel Telescope as well as 2-meter telescopes to add to the Las Cumbres Observatory Global Telescope network. We would also like a clone of the NEWFIRM wide-field infrared imager and expanded funding of the Telescope System Instrumentation Program to expand public access at the independent observatories.

To be honest, it is difficult to know what will really happen. NOAO may get no stimulus money; it may get millions. But, like the lottery, if you do not play, you cannot win. And unlike the lottery, I believe our chances of at least partial success are actually pretty good.

To close on a cautionary note: stimulus money will not solve our FY09 base budget problems discussed in the last *Newsletter*. NOAO may get a significant amount of short-term project money and still be constrained in staff size. For now, we need to stay conservative with staff size issues in particular. Fortunately, much of the possible work related to stimulus money can be contracted to bricks-and-mortar service providers, short-term technical staff, or university labs.

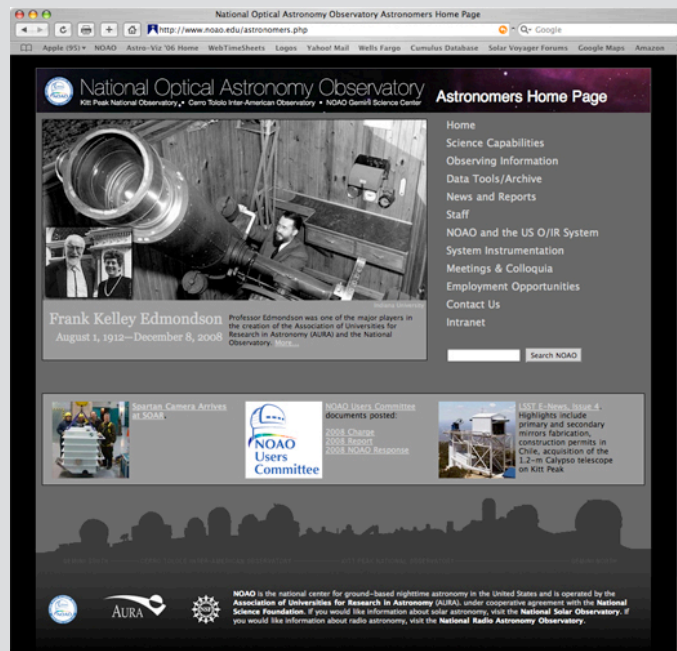
New Look for NOAO Home Page

Robert Blum

On January 1, NOAO released its new home page at www.noao.edu/. The new look, shown below, is designed for NOAO users and the general public to quickly locate the information they need. For starters, the old home page information has been split into two pages. The initial page is oriented now more to topics and information appropriate to a general audience. Clicking the prominently displayed button labeled “Astronomers” takes the astronomer to the second, similarly-styled, Astronomer home page. Here, the main links have been expanded to include resources US

astronomers need to write proposals, reduce and find data, contact or identify NOAO staff, and navigate the US ground-based optical/infrared System.

A bar of items “below the fold” is routinely updated and shows current events, new projects, and important reports from our advisory committees. We encourage our users to check out the new pages and give us feedback; use the new “Contact Us” link, or send comments directly to Mark Newhouse (newhouse@noao.edu) and Bob Blum (rblum@noao.edu).



Screen shots of the new NOAO home page (left) and Astronomer home page (right). A focused set of main links on the right side center of both pages is designed to get information to users quickly. For example, all science capabilities from current to future telescopes and instruments are accessed through the “Science Capabilities” link.