

# **Annual Report of the AAS Working Group on Accessibility and Disability**

Report of Milestones: June 2017-December 2018

During the last 18 months, the WGAD has worked to continue progress in increasing access to publications, databases, and meetings. Our members have also served on and provided feedback and comments to AAS committees developing recommendations for inclusive graduate education practices and the AAS' forthcoming site visit program. Additionally, WGAD members have assisted with and presented at International Astronomical Union meetings and events, including a publication access panel at the General Assembly in Vienna and a special exhibit for children called Inspiring Stars. Presently, we are working on recommendations for authors to make their publications accessible which we aim to have incorporated in author instructions for AAS Journals submissions and wish to present in a letter to Nature Astronomy. Lastly, we are within weeks of completing recommendations for accessible meetings for the AAS and its divisions; this has been a very intensive endeavor, undertaken with careful consideration and input from all of the AAS equity and inclusion working groups as well as the Division of Planetary Sciences Subcommittee on Culture and Climate.

Below, we summarize in more detail activities, accomplishments, and contributions of the WGAD during the reporting period.

Last year, the WGAD membership drafted and voted on our by-laws; these were approved by the Board in October of 2017. These by-laws outline our charge as a working group and the logistical aspects of our self-governance. The by-laws have been posted to our website to allow prospective members insight to the group's general motivation and functioning.

WGAD Coordinating Committee member Dr. Jackie Monkiewicz has been serving on the Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion in Graduate Astronomy Education. WGAD submitted our recommendations to the Task Force for graduate student recruitment, graduate student admissions, mentoring, and recommendations for data collection. WGAD additionally encouraged the Task Force to structure their final document such that accessibility is

strongly highlighted as a priority for graduate students' inclusion and success.

WGAD co-Chair Alicia Aarnio has been serving as co-Chair of the AAS SVOC, ensuring accessibility and site conditions for astronomers with disabilities are considered in the site visit program. The WGAD responded to calls for comment and feedback on their best practices and site visit procedures documents, contributing helpful feedback for how a site visit team should consider assessing accessibility of a site and carefully determine availability of resources for astronomers with disabilities.

At the 230th meeting in June of 2017, the WGAD presented an iPoster entitled, "The AAS Working Group on Accessibility and Disability (WGAD) Year 1 Highlights and Database Access."

The WGAD, in coordination with AAS Publishing, hosted a well-attended special session on publication accessibility at the 231st AAS meeting in January 2018. WGAD members Aarnio and Monkiewicz presented to AAS Journals staff and interested astronomers examples of barriers to access presently encountered in the publication process, article access, and reader engagement, along with suggestions for improvements. The response was positive, and from this meeting, we have begun a collaboration to develop recommendations for authors, referees, and editors in order to assess the accessibility of articles from writing to publication to distribution to the community.

Also at the 231st meeting, the WGAD presented three posters on recent activities:

1. "Accessibility Guidelines for Astronomy and Astrophysics Meetings"  
WGAD members were present with this poster in the AAS booth to meet, greet, and answer questions
2. "Assessment of access to bibliographic databases and telemetry databases in Astronomy: A groundswell for development," and
3. "The AAS Working Group on Accessibility and Disability (WGAD): progress, current projects, and prospects for making astronomy accessible to all."

At each AAS meeting during the reporting period, WGAD maintained an active presence on Twitter (@AAS\_WGAD), giving meeting feedback and

accessibility resource updates. Through our AAS website, [wgad.aas.org](http://wgad.aas.org), as well as through meeting-specific Google forms, we actively solicit comments and feedback on accessibility needs and issues. Through the meeting-specific Google forms, we have received valuable requests and comments that we have incorporated into our meeting accessibility recommendations document. Lastly, our meeting presence and active seeking of comments and feedback has allowed us to personally quickly respond when access issues arise (as one example, we have delivered chairs to posters where a request had been made for one but the presenter found no chair upon arrival).

With support of AAS Journals, the WGAD helped organize a Journal Accessibility Panel at the IAU General Assembly in Vienna. August Muench and Greg Schwartz were particularly instrumental in making this a reality, much as they supported the WGAD in a similar event at the January 2018 AAS meeting.

Recognizing upcoming efforts to survey the AAS membership, the WGAD submitted recommendations to the AAS Demographics Committee. Our recommendations included expanding questions on accessibility aids/needs and disabilities in the AAS membership to better capture our current demographic make-up and to help anticipate and proactively meet the needs of the membership.

Among our most ambitious and impactful projects in this reporting period, the WGAD participated in the planning and implementation of the Inspiring Stars Exhibit at the IAU General Assembly in Vienna. This exhibit was put together in order to actively assess the Global progress of inclusion in our research field ( didactic aspects, outreach aspects and professional performance). The Office of Astronomy for Outreach acquired funding to study ways to effectively integrate inclusion in its current networks to support and disseminate all aspects of the multidimensional concept of access to the amateur astronomy, outreach and professional communities, and to ultimately make it easier for anyone to access information about our Universe. In six months, they will study and address the barriers and methods in order to promote the systematic application of research findings on inclusive accessibility at outreach, research, and didactic applications.

In the past reporting period, in order to accomplish all of the activities reported above, the WGAD organized six teleconferences as a full working group as well as additional smaller meetings for sub-teams working toward specific tasks. Our currently ongoing work includes completion of the recommendations for meeting accessibility and developing author and referee recommendations for publication access. At the upcoming 233rd meeting, January 2019, we will be presenting a poster and have reserved a space with the other participating AAS equity and inclusion working groups during the undergraduate reception in order to meet with students and raise awareness of our working group's existence and activities to increase accessibility in astronomy.