

NATIONAL ASTRONOMY AND IONOSPHERE CENTER
ARECIBO OBSERVATORY



M E M O R A N D U M

TO : NAIC Staff
FROM : Robert Brown
DATE : November 13, 2006
SUBJECT : Notice to NAIC Staff

Let me take a moment to bring everyone up to date on our planning for implementing the recommendations of the Senior Review at NAIC. As a reminder, the three recommendations are:

1. Reduce NSF astronomy division support for Arecibo to \$8M over the next 3 years.
2. Schedule the survey programs for 80% of the time used for astronomy on the telescope through 2010
3. In 2011, plan either to close Arecibo or operate it with a much smaller astronomy budget; additional funds to be provided by other sources.

In order to implement these recommendations, NAIC will have to reduce the “scope” of the astronomy program, the number of activities at NAIC supported by funds provided to us by NSF astronomy (AST). Here is a list of the steps we are planning to take, and the changes you can expect to see, in the immediate future:

1. We will eliminate all AST-supported NAIC program elements that are not directly related to operation of the NAIC astronomy research program. Closure of the NAIC Ithaca shop is one example of this.
2. We will reduce the number of telescope observing hours for astronomy to approximately 3800 hours per year. (Now it is 4800 hours per year).
3. Nearly all astronomy observations on the telescope will be scheduled at night, leaving the days free for maintenance activities.
4. We will do telescope and instrument maintenance 8-hours per day, 5-days per week (Monday-Friday).
5. Because 80% of the astronomy observations will be for survey observations, we will reduce the number of receivers available for astronomy observations from 13 to 6. This will make it easier to maintain the remaining receivers.
6. The survey observations require less local support. Accordingly, scientific and support services in many areas will be reduced.

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7. We will encourage remote observations to reduce the number of on-site visitors requiring Observatory assistance. This will enable us to reduce the cafeteria hours, and trips to the airport, for example. Student visits for training still will be encouraged.
8. We will continue to operate the Arecibo Planetary Radar in FY2007 as we seek additional support for it from NSF and other sources.

The reduction in services will result in a smaller AST-supported staff. To the maximum extent possible, open positions and voluntary retirements will be used to achieve the necessary staff reductions. Where that is not possible, a layoff of personnel will be required. The staff members affected by the layoff will be notified by November 30, 2006. All are valuable and dedicated employees whose loss to the Observatory affects all of us.

As we renew the NAIC astronomy program around a reduced budget, our objective is to add new elements that will enable NAIC to develop the research capabilities necessary for it to play a leadership role in the future of U.S. astronomy. I will be working with the astronomy staff at the Observatory on several specific initiatives to achieve these goals. A key element in all of our activities is to strengthen the research partnerships we have forged with U.S. academic institutions as a result of the experience with the ALFA survey programs. I am confident that our renewed astronomy program will be recognized positively by the decadal survey committee and that it will become the basis for sound future growth.

On November 28th, I will be accompanying the Cornell Legislative Affairs Officer, and Prof Joe Burns from the Cornell Office of the Vice-Provost for Research, to Washington, D.C., to meet with the staff of about a dozen members of Congress who are active in U.S. science policy matters. The purpose of the visit to inform them about the effects of the senior review recommendations on NAIC and to remind them of the unique contributions the Arecibo Observatory makes to U.S. science and to the people of Puerto Rico.

The efforts of all of us working together will be required to get us past these difficult times. I sincerely appreciate your cooperation and support.