

Dear Department Chairperson,

In January 2005, the American Astronomical Society (AAS) unanimously endorsed a series of recommendations aimed at promoting gender equity in astronomy. We are writing your department to encourage it to follow suit. We all want to increase the diversity of our field, for the betterment of the science, for fairness to non-traditional students (women, minorities), to continue to be supported by a diverse public, and because equal opportunity is the law (Title IX). Universities are aware of the continued barriers that women face in academia, as noted by the “Statement on Gender Equity in Academic Science and Engineering” signed by nine universities in 2001 and reaffirmed by the same institutions on December 6, 2005. National laboratories and other institutions are also concerned with achieving a diverse and fair working environment.

The AAS has long been a proponent of diversity in science. To this end, the AAS created a Committee on the Status of Women in Astronomy in 1972, and a meeting was held to address ways to promote equity in 1992. That meeting resulted in the Baltimore Charter for Women in Astronomy (see www.stsci.edu/stsci/meetings/WiA/BaltoCharter.html), an initial set of recommendations to improve the environment for women in astronomy. A second meeting was held in Pasadena in 2003, and led to another set of recommendations that extend those in the Baltimore Charter. The Pasadena Recommendations suggest concrete steps that can be taken by individual institutions.

The AAS has been very forward thinking and pro-active in increasing the number of women – and we are finally seeing results; since 2003 over 50% of AAS members between the ages of 18-23 have been women. Now we ask you to come together and consider the Pasadena Recommendations – discuss them, endorse them officially (notify us, we will post endorsements on our web site www.aas.org/cswa), post them prominently (a brochure, suitable for printing, is available at our web site), advertise them to your university administration, and take proactive steps to promote equity in your own institution. We also welcome comments and feedback.

Sincerely,

Craig Wheeler, President of the American Astronomical Society

Geoffrey Clayton, AAS Committee on the Status of Women in Astronomy