

Annual Report of the AAS Working Group on Accessibility and Disability

The Working Group on Accessibility and Disability (WGAD) was founded in January 2016 by the AAS Council in response to a proposal from AAS members who were concerned with widespread ableism in astronomy that is driving disabled students and scientists out of the field. This annual report summarizes WGAD activities from April 2016-April 2017.

We have made significant progress on the goals stated for our first year as a working group. WGAD is pleased to report the development and release of publication accessibility guidelines¹ which have already been reviewed and are being acted upon by IOP and AAS publishing. In response to our document, the IOP Publishing office brought in external consultants (Nomensa) to audit PDF and HTML publication accessibility and W3C compliance. As of January 2017, IOP HTML resources were assessed as accessible; though improvements to screen reader tagging needed to be implemented, a short turnaround was estimated for this. PDF accessibility failed compliance testing, and a longer timeline for PDF accessibility was estimated. Independently, we learned a third avenue is in development for engagement with published materials: ePub3. This interactive publication medium will provide multimodal access to materials, an item in our recommendations. We are working now to reach out to representatives for other publishers, including ASP. Additionally, we are currently writing accessibility guidelines to add to author instructions for manuscripts submitted to journals managed by AAS Publishing; we estimate this will be complete by June 2017. Finally, as we expressly discussed with IOP representatives in January, we will continue to work with IOP to ensure that in addition to meeting accessibility compliance criteria, user testing is regularly performed as technologies are developed and evolve.

We have established our website² and are presently working to populate it with resources for the community. Primarily to engage with meeting attendees, we have also established an official twitter account³ to interact

¹ Improving Accessibility of Astronomical Publications, URL:

https://wgad.aas.org/sites/wgad.aas.org/files/Recommendations_WGAD_2016.pdf

² <https://wgad.aas.org/>

³ https://twitter.com/AAS_WGAD

and respond in real-time as access concerns arise. In addition to online presence and responsiveness, WGAD members have committed to presence at AAS meetings (we had a poster at the January meeting and will have one at the summer meeting). WGAD coordinating committee members will also be at the Women in Astronomy IV meeting, presenting a poster, informally interacting, and sitting on the Universal Design panel to share immediately actionable accessibility guidelines for courses and documents.

Working toward our stated year-1 goals, WGAD collaborated with the Committee on the Status of Minorities in Astronomy (CSMA), the Committee on the Status of Women in Astronomy (CSWA), and the Committee for Sexual-Orientation and Gender Minorities in Astronomy (SGMA) on the creation of a proposal to establish an intersectional site visit program through AAS. WGAD was represented by Lauren Gilbert. This proposal was accepted by the AAS Council in January. The AAS has released, as of April 2017, a site visit proposal and is forming an oversight committee consisting of representatives from all the AAS inclusivity committees and working groups. We will provide our full support in this endeavor, and look forward to continuing cooperation with the CSMA, CSWA, and SGMA in developing site visit policy and procedures.

In our next year, major goals include continuing to pursue publication accessibility, building upon the successes we have had so far. With the IAU Commission C1 for Astronomy Education and Development, we are working to develop guidelines for database accessibility, another major challenge for making astronomy accessible to all. At the January 2017 meeting, WGAD representatives informally spoke with Renee Battle, Joel Parriot, and Meg Urry about AAS meeting accessibility. We are working on a proposal to appoint an accessibility liaison; until this is complete, we have members of the coordinating committee attending meetings to help survey attendees for access issues and mitigate them as they arise. In parallel, we are developing a meeting accessibility document with a goal of completing a robust first draft by October 2017; we hope this document will be referenced broadly across the community in organizing meetings and symposia. Finally, for the 2018 Winter meeting, we are working on a proposal for a town hall on access, as an awareness campaign is among our priorities for the next year.