

4. WORKING AND TASK GROUPS

4.1. Working Group on Astronomical Data (Ernst Raimond)

Most observatories have saved their observations for many decades. Nevertheless, few of the traditional ground-based observatories have managed to generate an archive of observations in a ready-to-use form, preferred by modern research techniques. Absence of critical information regarding the characteristics of the relevant equipment, and obsolescent or obsolete technology (e.g. in the case of photographic spectroscopy) diminished the usability of the data significantly, even when the original plates or data were stored properly. Very little of the basic operational information has been made public. In recent years astronomical space missions, notably the International Ultraviolet Explorer (IUE) and the Hubble Space Telescope, have shown by example what can and should be done to share observations more widely, thereby exploiting much more fully the information they contain.

Some new enterprises such as the Italian Galileo Telescope being built in the Canary Islands and the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope under construction in Chile are excellent examples of how data-archiving policies can be included right from the start. Improving the usefulness of archives of older observatories is also very desirable. Two, very different, initiatives are worth mentioning in this respect: (i) Recently, NASA has begun to merge its disparate data services and archives into one system, the Space Science Data Services; information: <http://ssds.nasa.gov/>. (ii) The IAU Working Group for Spectroscopic Data Archives is attempting to set up a World Plate Store of photographic spectra in order to safeguard the accessibility of these valuable data for the future.

During the past triennium, most members of the WGAD have been active in many fields concerning astronomical data and information. Raymond Norris (ATNF, Sydney, Australia), vice-chair of the WGAD, has done some work relating the WIPO intellectual property treaty and its possible impact on the future direction of the large databases. Observatory archives of observational data continued their services; some new archives are in the process of being set up. Links to existing observatory archives

<http://cdsweb.u-strasbg.fr/astroweb/center.html>.

4.2. Working Group on Libraries (U. Grothkopf, F. Murtagh)

Astronomy librarians worldwide maintain a considerable number of information resources. These include compilations of astronomy newsletters, observatory publications, and astronomy book reviews, lists of IAU Colloquia and other international meetings, the Union List of Astronomy Serials, directories of astronomy libraries' addresses, and a collection of observatory manuals available in electronic format. Colleagues from observatories in the U.S. have initiated and are involved in long-term projects on digitization and document preservation as well as developing an indexing and distribution system for electronic preprints.

Since 1988, the LISA (Library and Information Services in Astronomy) conferences have provided the opportunity to review the current state of information maintenance, delivery, and preservation, as well as to discuss the changing realm of libraries and librarianship. LISA III, a Euroconference, was hosted by the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias (IAC) and was held from April 21-24, 1998, in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Spain. A fourth LISA conference is envisioned for the year 2002.

In order to mediate between information users/readers and information providers/publishers, astronomy librarians maintain close working relationships with journal publishers, data centers, and abstract service providers. Rising prices of books and journals, changing rights for information users, and guaranteed access to electronic resources over time are only some of the problems that can only be solved through close cooperation of all key players.