

# ARE WE DOING ASTRONOMY RIGHT?

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This may seem like a silly question, given the exciting discoveries filling our journals. But could we do even better? Are we doing astronomy sustainably or will our “Golden Age” soon draw to an end? For example, data used by graduate students are increasingly obtained via the web. Few students starting now will get any hands-on experience at a major world-leading telescope. Does this mean that the next generation of astronomers won’t know how to build telescopes? And how come the project that has arguably produced the most innovative science from HST (the Hubble Deep Fields), creating a new paradigm for astronomical discovery, was never awarded time through a peer-review system? How, actually, are discoveries made?

On Tuesday these questions will be addressed by a range of well-known speakers including three IAU Presidents (Ron Ekers, Catherine Cesarsky, and Robert Williams), controversial physicist and populariser Lawrence Krauss, pulsar discoverer Jocelyn Bell-Burnell, and astronomical futurist George Djorkovski. Other questions will include:

- Have we achieved the best way to allocate time on major telescopes?
- What will be the impact of enormously large data sets?
- How do we balance popular “bandwagons” against innovative but less popular ideas?
- Do we have the optimal system for training young astronomers?
- Is astronomical progress limited by discrimination?
- How should we optimize international collaboration, particularly on major missions?

While we should always ask such questions, the International Year of Astronomy seems a particularly appropriate time to review our progress, and see if we can do even better. Sp55, “Accelerating the rate of Astronomical Discovery”, will examine a range of potential limits to progress—paradigmatic, technological, organizational, and political, and draw lessons to guide future progress. It starts on Tuesday at 11:00 in Room 2.5, and continues until Friday. ☺

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