Instructions and Suggestions for the Organising Committee for the ASA Harley Wood School of Astronomy

(Latest significant revisions 7 Nov. 2010))

This long set of instructions is intended to give meeting organisers a starting point when planning their meeting. Any amendments/additions are welcome.

Index

Organising Committees

- Choose the organising committee. In recent years the HWS has been organised by students and this has been successful. A proposed model involving both an LOC and an SOC is:
    - **Local Organising Committee** (min. ~5 students from host institution(s), meeting regularly, with a nominated chair) with responsibilities for
        - venue/accommodation
        - web page information
        - final list of speakers
        - tour organisation
        - allocation of travel money
        - school memento
        - social activities
    - **Scientific Organising Committee** (~6 students representing at least major institutions) with final responsibility for the list of speakers
        - choice of topic
        - input on and approach to speakers
        - liaise regarding institutional transport arrangements
    - Some committees have been much larger (probably too large).
    - The ASA Council would like to ensure some oversight of the process, either having a Council member involved or at least a member of the ASM organisation.
    - Appropriate gender balance and diversity should be ensured across both committees.

Back to top

Basic Organisation

- **Date:** A three day school just before the ASA AGM is usual and probably best, typically from the Thursday night to the Sunday morning.
- **Theme:** Choose a theme with a view to student interest and available speakers. Check the themes of at least the last three HWWS to avoid repetition. Many students attend 2 or 3 consecutive Schools. Avoid a theme which is too narrow to attract a lot of students.
- **Speakers:** Both local speakers and overseas visitors who may be in Australia anyway or may be coming for the ASA should be considered.
- **Numbers:** Recent HWWS have attracted 50-70 students (perhaps this should be an upper limit). Budgeting on a smaller number may allow scaling up if numbers are high - better than having to scale back. Remember to allow for the speakers and possibly their families. If numbers are too high, Masters and PhD students should have clear preference over others (if any).
- **Venue:** A university venue is cheap and easy but has severe disadvantages. Local students will have many distractions and generally will not interact as well as they might. Speakers will also be inclined to stay only for their talks so interaction with students will be limited. An external (remote?) conference/meeting centre overcomes these problems and definitely results in a more social and 'non-study' environment. It does bring its own problems of course - transport will be needed, and costs will be higher. You want a venue which is attractive enough for speakers to stay at least one or two nights and so meet the students somewhat informally. For example consider picking a venue that has:
    - A really nice location (by the sea, mountains winery,..),
    - A resort that does conferences,
    - A restaurant/catering for a conference dinner in-house.
    - Accommodation in-house (easier for the organisers) OR is near cheap accommodation (that they book themselves - easier for the organisers),
    - Venues nearby for breakfast/lunch/dinner and night spots OR does venue provide communal meals (which can greatly increase interactions between students and speakers). Make sure the food is reasonably good and food/drink costs are reasonable!
    - Check AV facilities. White boards/OHPs etc. are usually included but a projector may be $500 extra. Ensure there is a spare projector (provide your own) and bring a laptop for speakers who don't have their own.
    - Do not choose too basic a venue. Poor facilities will not be popular with the students.
    - Check public liability insurance for the venue. The ASA has its own public liability insurance..
    - *Be very clear on all the details and costs of the venue arrangement.*
- **Extras:** A HWS 'memento' is a good idea. Perhaps a conference bag or add something more unique or entertaining?
- **Details just before the meeting:**
    - Finalise numbers and inform venue.
    - Make up list of students. Prepare Name tags. Make sure the print is LARGE, includes first and last names, and their institution.
    - Prepare receipts for all the students and make sure that they get them.
    - If numbers are more than the originally estimated, decide if budget allows enhanced social activities or other extras.
    - Some people may drink a lot and sleep little, but insist on 'appropriate' behaviour at all times, especially at parties/social events.

Finances

- The HWS is TOTALLY self-funded apart from financial help to students for travel (see below). A float may be requested from the ASA.

1. **Estimate costs:** Costs include

    - Venue (including AV equipment, food,..?)
    - Accommodation (more likely paid by registrants)
    - Meals
    - Morning and afternoon teas
    - Transport
    - Conference bag, name tags, ..
    - Memento, Trivia proizes, ..
    - Merchant fees charged by the bank

- **Registration:** The 2011 charge to students was ~$330 (early ASA member registration) for the entire School. Registration is via a web form with payment usually via faxed return of credit card details. Registration should probably include the cost of the dinner since it may be regarded as part of the conference program and will make it easier to justify to departmental accountants.

For the 2008 HWS onwards, student members will be charged ~$30 less than non-members. New members may join at the time of registration and, for the purpose of registration, be deemed to be members from the date the application is received by the Secretary. This is intended to encourage students in the first year of their candidature to attend the Harley Wood School. Pre-existing members must have paid their membership for the year. Eligibility under these conditions should be checked with the Secretary and Treasurer.

Invited speakers pay no registration.

- **Speaker costs:** Consider the speakers costs too since they pay their own way (and they may want to bring their families). Invited speakers now pay no registration.

- **Travel support:** Funding is provided to the organisers through the ASA (~$1500) **to help equalise costs to students travelling from various parts of Australia** The ASA does not usually provide more funds - although it has provided extra funding up to perhaps $2K in the past for more distant HWS locations, effectively allocating corporate membership fees to this task. Some information for applicants is provided on the [Student Travel Assistance](#) web page.

Guidelines for the LOC are as follows:

- It is generally expected that institutions will fund student attendance at the Harley Wood School.
- Decisions on disbursement of ASA funds are managed by the HWS LOC.
- The aim is to roughly equalise the cost of travel for all attendees using the cheapest reasonable mode of travel. (e.g. students from Western Australia could expect more support to attend an east coast meeting than a Sydney student, who may get none).
- These funds are not awarded to support ASM attendance (although in practice the ASM and HWS are likely to be close together, so HWS travel funding may enable attendance at the ASM.).
- A contribution to accommodation may be considered if sufficient funds are available, but Registration is unaffected by distance and therefore not funded.
- The HWS LOC needs to decide what can be offered on the basis of what funding is available and how many people apply, so amounts may vary from year to year. This will usually mean a fixed

amount for people from a given location - perhaps only enough to subsidise but not fully cover travel.

- There is little point awarding very small amounts to many people so, if necessary, preference should be given to ASA members over non-members. Non-members may register as a member providing the Secretary receives their membership application prior to the closure date for early HWS registration. Payment of annual membership fees must then be received within 14 days of the closure date. This is intended to encourage students in the first year of their candidature to attend the Harley Wood School. Eligibility under these conditions should be checked with the Secretary and Treasurer. (For the ASM, a slightly stronger statement says that presenting at the ASM is limited to only one time as a non-member).
- Enquiries should be directed to the HWS LOC.
- Claims must be sent to the ASA Treasurer, accompanied by *original* receipts. (these days, 'original' may sometimes be just be printed emails or web pages). One claim only is recommended to minimise work, but you may wish to relax that to accommodate any financial hardship.
- Other sources of funding may need to be considered. Possibilities include the Donovan Trust, the Ian Potter Foundation and the George Alexander Foundation.

Program

- 10 hours of talks in 1 hour slots is probably a good minimum number for a solid program.
- Ensure appropriate gender balance and diversity in the program of presenters.
- Try for a balance of Australian and overseas researchers - not just from the home institution.
- Make sure speakers know the audience. Tell them that among the students will be some with very little astronomical background. They should assume intelligence and interest, but they will not be speaking to an expert audience.
- Try to coordinate the speakers by giving them outlines of the topics they should consider addressing and other speakers' topics. Try to avoid missing very important topics which students might reasonably expect to be covered, and also try to avoid all the speakers presenting variations on a theme.
- Speakers should be encouraged, right from the first approach, to prepare lecture notes (with references) for the students so that they can listen rather than write. If possible, these should be distributed to the students beforehand via the web. This should make it easier for speakers to adopt a more "interactive" style (including group discussions, problem solving sessions, ...), rather than "lecturing".
- If there is any trouble getting speakers, the ASA Council should be approached for advice and assistance.
- Should the students themselves give a talk? Recent opinion seems to be no. It may help to know what they do, but many will probably repeat the talk for the ASA Scientific Meeting. A good alternative is an interactive session involving students and lecturers on subject(s) of interest.
- Organise an activity for the first night (an icebreaker) - e.g. a trivia night - where you encourage/force students to mix outside their institutional groups. Provide drink and nibbles (but set a bar tab or time limit).
- Organise a conference dinner (but set a bar tab or time limit).

Announcing meeting information

- Distribute first notices detailing dates, venue, theme of School in February/March. This should be done via email to all ASA members (catching many students and all likely supervisors), through the ASA Secretary John O'Byrne.
- A meeting web page should be created, with a link to the ASM and ASA web pages. Web sites for some recent meetings are still available on-line - see the ASM web page.
- The Registration form should include details of the registration fee and a deadline for registration and payment. A sample registration page from the HWS2005 meeting is available, in this case as part of the ASM registration page.
- Include information on requesting travel support.
- Final information to students and speakers should include program, maps, transport arrangements, timetables etc. - all via the web page.

Suggested timeline

- Before Christmas
    - o Seek Committee members
    - o Choose topics and shortlist speakers
    - o Get reports on one or more previous meetings (from previous organisers or ASA Council)
- Early in the New Year
    - o Nominate Chair of SOC
    - o Approach speakers
- Late February
    - o Initial email announcement of meeting and web page announced with all basic information available
    - o Confirm all speakers
    - o Report to ASA Council with details and budget
- Late March
    - o SOC chair liaise with speakers for possible interactive approaches to talks
    - o Draft program and circulate for comment by SOC and speakers
    - o Decide final program
- Late April
    - o Speakers to submit suggested reading, abstracts, material to go to the web
- Mid May
    - o Closing date for early registration
- Mid June
    - o Reminder email with last minute information.
- Late June/Early July
    - o Have fun at the HWS!
    - o Report to the ASA Council meeting held immediately prior to ASM
- As soon as possible after the School is over:
    - o Finalise finances
    - o Make up a financial statement for the ASA and write a report for the ASA Council meeting, typically in November.