

COMMISSION 51

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BIOASTRONOMY

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1. Introduction

Bioastronomy: Search for Extraterrestrial Life was established as Commission 51 of the IAU in 1982. The objectives of the commission included: the search for planets around other stars; the search for radio transmissions, intentional or unintentional, of extraterrestrial origin; the search for biologically relevant interstellar molecules and the study of their formation processes; detection methods for potential spectroscopic evidence of biological activity; the coordination of efforts in all these areas at the international level and the establishment of collaborative programs with other international scientific societies with related interests. In 2006, Commission 51 was renamed simply *Bioastronomy* at the IAU General Assembly in Prague, and approved for the next six years, the default extension for an IAU Commission.

2. Meetings

The primary activity of IAU Commission 51 is to organize a *Bioastronomy* meeting every three years. *Bioastronomy 2007* was held in 2007 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and was a great success, largely due to the efforts of William Irvine, chair of the SOC for the meeting and vice-president of Commission 51, and to Karen Meech, chair of the LOC for the meeting and past president of Commission 51. A full description of the meeting can be found on the meeting's web pages at <www.ifa.hawaii.edu/UHNAI/bioast07.htm>.

While at the San Juan meeting, a group of Commission 51 members met with Antonio Lazcano, president of the International Society for the Study of the Origin of Life: The International Astrobiology Society (also known as ISSOL), several ISSOL board members, and other interested bioastronomers and astrobiologists in order to discuss plans to hold a joint meeting in the future. The motivation for having such a joint meeting is to try to ensure the continued growth of both of our fields without putting undue pressure on ourselves by having competing meetings at different times and locations. There is considerable overlap between the interests of ISSOL and Commission 51, and a common

meeting seems like a reasonable means to avoid having people being able to only attend one meeting or the other due to the constraints of time and money.

We decided to plan on holding a joint meeting of ISSOL and Commission 51 in either 2010 (three years after *Bioastronomy 2007*) or 2011 (three years after the next ISSOL meeting in Florence, Italy in 2008). We anticipate having a truly joint meeting with a single, unified program of talks and events for a total of perhaps 500 participants. The dates and venue for this meeting remain to be determined. Antonio Lazcano and I have invited expressions of interest from institutions that would be willing to host the first joint ISSOL/Commission 51 meeting in either 2010 or 2011, and at least one serious indication of interest has been received. We plan to decide this issue at the ISSOL meeting in Florence in August, 2008.

3. Organizing Committee

The Commission 51 Organizing Committee (OC) has eight members, five from the USA, and three from Europe. In order to address this geographical imbalance, the OC discussed via e-mail the idea of adding new OC members, and invited a new OC member, who had to decline the invitation on the basis of not being an IAU member. In the process of deciding how to proceed, we realized that the IAU rules state that the OC should not have more than eight members, making the question of adding new members moot. In the future we intend to address this imbalance by replacing OC members from the USA by IAU members from other regions, such as Africa, Asia, and South America.

4. Symposium and Special Session sponsorship

Commission 51 has been asked to support a number of proposals to hold IAU Special Sessions and Symposia, either at the IAU XXVII General Assembly (GA) in Rio de Janeiro, 2009, or on their own. The Commission 51 OC considered four requests for solitary symposia in 2006, and found that two of the four were close enough to Commission 51's interests to merit our support. In 2007 the Commission 51 OC considered three requests for support of Special Sessions at the 2009 GA, and one request for support for an IAU Symposium at the 2009 GA. All four of these proposals were judged to be appropriate for Commission 51 support.

5. New Members

Twenty new members of Commission 51 were approved at the IAU GA in 2006, and since then another ten scientists have requested membership in Commission 51. We encourage other IAU members to join Commission 51, which can be accomplished simply by sending an e-mail to the Commission 51 President <boss@dtm.ciw.edu>.

6. Closing remarks

We look forward to holding our first joint meeting with ISSOL in 2010 or 2011. Details for this meeting will be e-mailed to the Commission 51 membership and posted on the Commission 51 web site once the decisions have been made. The web pages for Commission 51 are located at <www.dtm.ciw.edu/boss/c51index.html>.

Alan P. Boss
president of the Commission