

LGBTQ Careers in Astronomy

**What we are doing to make Astronomy more
LGBTQ-friendly**

Jessica Mink

Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory

*American Astronomical Society Committee on Sexual
orientation and Gender identity Minorities in Astronomy
(AAS-SGMA)*

Inclusive Astronomy 2015 Scientific Organizing Committee

A Bit About Me

MIT 1973 S.B. Planetary Science

MIT 1974 S.M. Planetary Science

Cornell 1976 – 1978: In lieu of graduate school, I helped discover the Uranian rings and worked on all aspects of stellar occultations by solar system objects: predicting, observing, and analyzing.

MIT 1979 – 1984: I continued to work on occultations of stars by solar system objects after our group moved from Cornell, including writing lots of papers

SAO 1984 – 1989: Data reduction and analysis software for the Spacelab 2 Infrared Telescope, which flew on the Space Shuttle in 1985 and mapped the Milky way galaxy. To plot maps, I wrote the xterm graphics terminal emulator

SAO 1989 – present: Data reduction and analysis software for ground-based spectra of stars and galaxies and widely-used utilities for dealing with images of the sky from digital images and glass plates and catalogs of astronomical objects. (RVSAO and WCSTools)

Out to Innovate March 2017



I sing and act, too!

What we are doing to make Astronomy more LGBTQ-friendly

Two tracks

Inside

**American Astronomical Society SGMA Committee
to advise the officers (along with CSWA, CSMA, DWG)**

Outside

**Inclusive Astronomy Conference in 2015 including all under-
represented groups in the profession: Women, LGBTQ, Racial
and Ethnic Minorities, Astronomers with Disabilities**



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

SGMA's Charge

The Committee for Sexual-Orientation and Gender Minorities in Astronomy (SGMA) is tasked with promoting equality for sexual-orientation and gender minorities (SGMs) within our profession, including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning or queer, or asexual. To that end, SGMA works to end hiring and workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression eliminate the inequalities in compensation experienced by SGMs; create a professional climate that respects and values diversity serve as a conduit for communication between the AAS Council and the SGM community support networking and peer mentoring among SGMs provide resources to support SGM equality within the astronomical profession.



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Advising AAS Council

After I wrote our Women in Astronomy blog post in January, 2017 entitled **Thinking About Boycotts**”, SGMA drafted this safe meeting policy in March:

In the absence of a nationwide anti-discrimination law covering sexual orientation and gender expression, it is the policy of the AAS to locate its meetings in cities where all LGBTQIA attendees are welcomed and accommodated. If laws change after contracts are signed, the AAS will do everything that it can to enable those discriminated against to participate fully in the conference



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Monthly Post on Women in Astronomy Blog

- “On Being a Transgender Astronomer” Jessica Mink (*Dec.16, 2014*)
- “On Becoming a Woman Astronomer” Jessica Mink (*Nov. 18, 2015*)
- “On LGBTQ Visibility at Colloquia” Dr. Jane Rigby. (*Dec. 14, 2015*)
- “Astronomy Without a PhD” Jessica Mink (*Jan. 13, 2016*)
- “Transitioning as a Junior Astronomer” Anonymous (*Mar. 9, 2016*)
- “When bathrooms and supernovae collide: Anti-LGBTQ legislation is hindering participation in science” MacKenzie Warren (*May 4, 2016*)
- “**Astronomer Privilege**” Jessica Mink (*June 1, 2016*)
- “The Nashville Recommendations for Inclusive Astronomy” Jessica Mink (*July 27, 2016*)
- “**Help SGMA Assess Institutional Gender Identity and Expression Policies**” Jessica Mink (*Sept. 21, 2016*)
- “Understanding Gender Fluidity” Dr JJ Eldridge (*Oct. 3, 2016*)
- “**Losing Privilege and Gaining Something Else**” Jessica Mink (*Nov. 17, 2016*)
- “**Gender Identity Policies Affecting Astronomers**” Jessica Mink (*Dec. 14, 2016*)



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Supporting LGBT+ Physicists & Astronomers: Best Practices for Academic Departments

LGBT+ Physicists (lgbtphysicists.org)

AAS Committee on Sexual-Orientation and Gender Minorities in Astronomy
(SGMA; sgma.aas.org)

Timothy Atherton, Tufts University

Ramón Barthelemy, Western Michigan University

Wouter Deconinck, College of William and Mary

Van Dixon, Space Telescope Science Institute

Elena Long, University of New Hampshire

Merav Opher, Boston University

Diana Parno, University of Washington

Michael Ramsey-Musolf, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Jane Rigby, NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

Elizabeth H. Simmons, Michigan State University



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Why bother?

- Science advances fastest when the best scientists are free to apply their intelligence and imagination to the exploration of the universe without limits and without fear. Sometimes, the best scientists are LGBT+.
- Institutions that are viewed as unfriendly to LGBT+ people quickly find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. When LGBT+ scientists leave our departments to work at other institutions, our students, our scholarly communities, and our own research suffer.
- A more inclusive workplace has advantages for all of us: greater flexibility to perform our work, greater support for work/life issues, and greater freedom to be ourselves.



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Improving Departmental Climate Today Improving Departmental Climate Tomorrow Recruitment and Personnel Issues Advocacy at the University Level

Out to Innovate March 2017



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Improving Departmental Climate Today

1. Use gender-neutral and inclusive language
2. Do not tolerate offensive language
3. Include everyone in social events
4. Invite LGBT+ speakers to campus
5. Pay attention to course climate
6. Discuss climate with faculty
7. Discuss climate with advisees



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Improving Departmental Climate Tomorrow

8. Increase LGBT+ visibility within the department
9. Recognize and award significant achievements
10. Include LGBT+ people in positions of power
11. Create safe spaces within the department
12. Encourage faculty and staff to receive diversity training
13. Actively recruit LGBT+ students
14. Increase networking opportunities
15. Consider LGBT+ persons when developing family-friendly policies



Sexual-Orientation and
Gender Minorities in
Astronomy

Recruitment and Personnel Issues

16. Include non-discrimination statements in job announcements
17. Allow name changes on departmental records

Advocacy at the Institutional Level

18. Become an advocate
19. Identify your LGBT+ students
20. Address the needs of trans folk



20. Address the needs of trans folk

- **Advocate for the removal of the transgender exclusion from your institution's health plan.** Many health plans exclude “procedures related to being transgender.” This exclusion has been applied to both medical services related to the transitioning process and unrelated problems, such as the flu or a broken arm.
- **Express a clear policy that students, faculty and staff may use any restroom appropriate to their gender identities.**
- **Designate some restrooms as all-gender.** Usually, all-gender restrooms are single-stall; new ones may be added in a building renovation or existing ones may be re-labeled with an inclusive sign. These restrooms provide critical infrastructure for people with disabilities, family needs, and people with privacy or medical concerns.
- **Help trans students deal with Selective Service.** People who were assigned male at birth are required to register with the Selective Service System within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday. People who were assigned female at birth are not required to register regardless of their current gender or transition status. Trans students may thus have difficulty providing proof of registration.
- **Transtronomers** is a small-but-totally-awesome community of trans astro folks on Facebook which provides an open discussion forum and mutual support for astronomers who happen to be transgender. As this is a secret group, membership and in-group activity is confidential, and new members have to be recommended by a current member.

Inclusive Astronomy 2015



The Nashville Recommendations

Why Inclusive Astronomy? Why now?

- People of color comprised 37.4% of the US population in 2013, and are projected to become the majority by 2044; yet only 2.1% of astronomers identify as Black or African-American and 3.2% as Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish origin (AIP, 2014).
- In 2012, there were fewer than 75 female physics and astronomy faculty members who are African-American and Latina in the entire United States; these numbers have remained essentially static between 2004 and 2012.
- There is little data published on people with disabilities or LGBTIQ* individuals in Astronomy, but studies in other STEM fields point to negative experiences and outcomes for these groups (Yoder & Mattheis 2014).
- White women have made great progress in Astronomy since the 1992 Baltimore Charter, but their accomplishments are systematically undervalued, and they are still underrepresented in senior leadership.

An Intersectional Approach

- Different forms of discrimination or oppression intersect for people with multiple marginalized identities.
- A key focus of this meeting
- A well-established conceptualization
- Racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and ableism are often linked and so should solutions
 - e.g. that women of color are faced with the intersection of racism and sexism
 - e.g. benefits packages and policies that specifically include LGBTIQ* and disabled astronomers
- Presentations, recommendations come from research, personal experiences of attendees, and previous sets of recommendations

Structure of the Meeting and Recommendations

Four Themes:

- Removing Barriers to Access
- Creating Inclusive Climates
- Improving Inclusion and Access to Policy, Power, and Leadership
- Establishing a Community of Inclusive Practice

Three timescales of implementation:

- Short term: 1 - 3 years
- Medium term: 3 - 5 years
- Long term: > 5 years

Barriers to Access

Summary

- Make graduate admissions fair.
- Eliminate barriers in pre-/early-college access to astronomy.
- Eliminate practices in hiring and promotion that are discriminatory.
- Ensure that astronomical institutions, facilities and data are accessible to all.

Creating Inclusive Climates

Summary

- Provide a welcoming, inclusive and healthy climate:
 - End harassment
 - Ensure access to quality, affordable health care
 - Work-life balance and welcoming environment
- Enact policies that are friendly to all families.
- Provide effective mentoring and networking opportunities.
- Adopt teaching practices that support marginalized students.

Power, Policy, and Leadership

Summary

- Inclusive Diversity (gender, ethnic, racial, geographical, institutional, etc.) should be made a priority (not just a goal) in all areas of policy making and leadership roles throughout the astronomy community.
- Future decadal surveys should address concerns of diversity in participation, leadership and policy making as part of recommended actions.
- Funding (e.g., grants) should also be tied to metrics and progress on the inclusion of underrepresented, under-resourced and disenfranchised groups.
- Astronomical researchers should acknowledge the responsibility to be 'good citizens' in areas where research intersects concerns in the larger society.

Inclusive Practice

Summary

- Recognize societal boundary conditions and large-scale power imbalances.
- Respect the rights and cultural values of Native and indigenous peoples when developing astronomical facilities.
- Practice active allyship.
- Learn and use best practices for discussing racism and its intersections.
- Implement accountability procedures.

A Pathway Toward Adoption

- AAS publicly endorses vision statement and supports recommendations, provides online framework (website) to host recommendations and institutional commitments
- Institutions publicly endorse vision statement, develop and commit to short-term, medium-term and long-term plans based on relevant recommendations and documented barriers
- Institutions annually report back on progress on plans (status, pathway to implementation)
- AAS supports semi-annual sessions at national meetings to further develop recommendations and assessments, and share experiences of implementation
- Host departmental site visits to gauge the climate for people with one or more marginalized identities, and ensure that these site visits are intersectional