

Tic TAC

Introduction

There are many more astronomers in the world than telescopes. And the telescopes are not all the same. Some are gigantic and expensive, costing hundreds of millions of dollars to construct. Others may be small, but are capable of important work like tracking near earth asteroids. Observatories (a complex of buildings, domes that house telescopes, and a community of people that run it all) also spend money and time to maintain their telescopes so that astronomers can use them to explore the Universe. Astronomers generate new and creative hypotheses that drive their research and observations of a variety of celestial objects. Someone or some organization must decide who gets to use what telescope. That organization at McDonald Observatory is called a Telescope Allocation Committee.

The Mighty Telescope Allocation Committee

An important committee at most telescopes around the world is the Telescope Allocation Committee, or TAC. This committee of astronomers reviews all requests made for use of the telescopes at an observatory. The TAC then decides who gets to use the telescopes and how much time they get. They also have the job of telling some scientists that their proposals will not get time. In many ways, this process resembles applying for a job.

The first part of a proposal is the abstract. An abstract is a summary of the proposal. It is short, usually just a couple of paragraphs. The rest of the proposal is usually several pages long, and is broken up into several sections. In this activity, you are going to review six different abstracts. You will need to come up with a rubric for assessing each proposal. You may only accept two. Be sure you can justify why you've accepted an abstract and why you've rejected abstracts.

Telescopes and Instruments at McDonald Observatory

Information about the telescopes and instruments at McDonald Observatory is on the "What Are Astronomers Doing?" web site <http://mcdonaldobservatory.org/research/>. The "McDonald Observatory Telescopes and Instruments" table summarizes the tools that are available for astronomers at the Observatory.