



53rd Annual Conference of the South African Institute of Physics

Student Meeting

University of Limpopo, 10th July 2008.

Minutes of the meeting held on the 10th July at the University of Limpopo at 16:00

Chairman: Mr. G.W. Bosman

Co-opted Secretary: Mr. P.H. Neethling

1. The chairman welcomed everyone present to the meeting. No apologies were offered.
2. An attendance list was circulated. 47 delegates signed the list (20 members, 27 non-members).
3. The following items were added to the agenda under general:
 - a. The chairman was requested to explain the advantage of SAIP student membership.
 - b. The issue about the inferior recognition that poster presentations receive at the SAIP conference should be addressed.
 - c. MSc and PhD funding should be discussed – Sifiso Ntshangase
 - d. Student representation on the NRF – Lebogang Kotsedi
 - e. Evaluation of SAIP conference – feedback mechanism
 - f. Department of Science and Technology camps
 - g. PhD Project camps
4. The minutes of the 2007 meeting was ratified without correction (Proposed: Jacobus Diener, Second: Nicolas Erasmus).
5. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the 2007 meeting.
6. The chairman gave a brief overview of the proposals that have been put to the SAIP council from the SAIP student members over the last few years:
 - a. 2004: A request was put forward that students should have access to information about career and research opportunities. Subsequently a page with relevant information was linked to the SAIP website.
 - b. 2005: A request was put forward that students would like to opportunity to interact more with the invited plenary speakers. From the following year (2006) a special lunch was organized for students and plenary speakers where they could interact on a social level.
 - c. 2006: The issue about insufficient NRF funding (both in duration and quantity) was again raised. This is an ongoing issue which is raised nearly on an annual basis.
 - d. 2007: There were no serious issues raised at the 2007 meeting.
7. Dr Peter Martinez addressed the meeting, on behalf of Dr K Govender, on the upcoming international year of astronomy (2009). He also wished to express council's appreciation of its student members. The United Nations has proclaimed 2009 the international year of astronomy. This serves as the 400 year anniversary of Galileo first looking at the stars with a telescope. Events will be planned across the country, the details of which will be published on the SAAO website. All the students were urged to become involved in the various activities.
8. A database containing information about physics students is being developed. This is a NRF and SAIP initiative. The database will contain information about a student's qualifications, personal information, etc. The idea is that this information be made available to prospective employers. The questionnaire that will need to be completed is yet to be finalised.
9. Publishing of SAIP conference proceedings: Sampson Mamphweli. It was noted that there was an intake of manuscripts from the SAIP conference in 2007 for publication in the South African

Journal of Science. This was a pilot program and was not repeated in 2008. Students are however encouraged to submit their research to the SAJS for consideration.

10. General

- a. The chairman explains that student membership of the SAIP provides access to the SAIP council (through the student chairman). This provides a mechanism where issues and complaints, pertaining to students, can be raised at council meetings.
- b. The issue about recognition of poster contributions was raised. Most of the subgroups are quite large and therefore a large number of poster presentations are presented at the annual SAIP conference. Not enough emphasis is placed on the poster presentations and the feeling exists that poster presentations are inferior to oral presentations. The general feeling was that this can only be addressed if the location and the timing of the poster presentation are such that it encourages delegates to attend. Having refreshments available, as has been done in the past, can help address this problem. A further question regarding the mechanism for deciding whether a presentation will be an oral or a poster was raised. It was explained by the chairman that the decision lies with the management of the subgroup, and that the decision is often forced by the quantity of the oral presentations that are applied for.
- c. The issue of NRF funding for post-graduate studies was raised. There was a general feeling that the funding was insufficient considering the costs of attending university. Clarity on the criteria used to award bursaries was also requested. There was also feeling that 3 years of support is insufficient, especially for obtaining a degree in experimental physics, since often delays (power cuts at national facilities where experiments are planned months in advance) can cause a degree to overrun this time. At least there must be a mechanism where extended funding is available due to unforeseen circumstances. There was also a suggestion that all PhD students, especially with the NRF's goal of increasing the number of graduating PhD students, should automatically qualify for a NRF bursary.
- d. There was a request that students be represented at the NRF. This would improve transparency in the decisions from the NRF and will ensure that the NRF policies are in line with the expectations of the students. Feedback on this issue was requested.
- e. A request was made for a feedback mechanism for students and delegates to evaluate SAIP conferences. Dr Peter Martinez stated that, on behalf of council, he appreciates the comments. He pledges that such a feedback mechanism will be designed and will be distributed through the chairman (GW Bosman). In this way issues can be addressed. He also requested suggestions on possible questions that can be place on such a questionnaire.
- f. DST camps: There are DST camps active in every province. The information on these camps is available on the DST website. There was a general complaint that people were finding it difficult to partake in these camps and that advertisement about the camps should be increased. Dr Peter Martinez confirmed that the SAIP council is the correct channel to approach the DST on this issue. The role of the DST camps, to help high school learners, was also stated.
- g. There was a request that the PhD Project camps be distributed in the various provinces. This would cut costs and allow more delegates to attend. It was suggested that a national camp be held bi-annually, which would allow everyone to attend one such camp during their post-graduate degree.

11. The chairman thanks everyone present and closed the meeting at 16:40.