



Austrian Society for Astronomy and Astrophysics

João Alves, on behalf of the board

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ÖSTERREICHISCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR ASTRONOMIE UND ASTROPHYSIK

Founded 2002 (to pursue ESO membership)

Bringing together the interests of Austrian astronomical institutions and individuals, fostering and supporting astronomy in research, education, and the public. It acts as the contact point for the public, politics, economy and the press and coordinates common concerns and initiatives of Austrian astronomers.

The OeGAA is affiliated with the EAS and is a partner of the “Astronomische Gesellschaft” (D, CH, A).

OeGAA membership is open to professionals and amateurs.

Astronomy in Austria

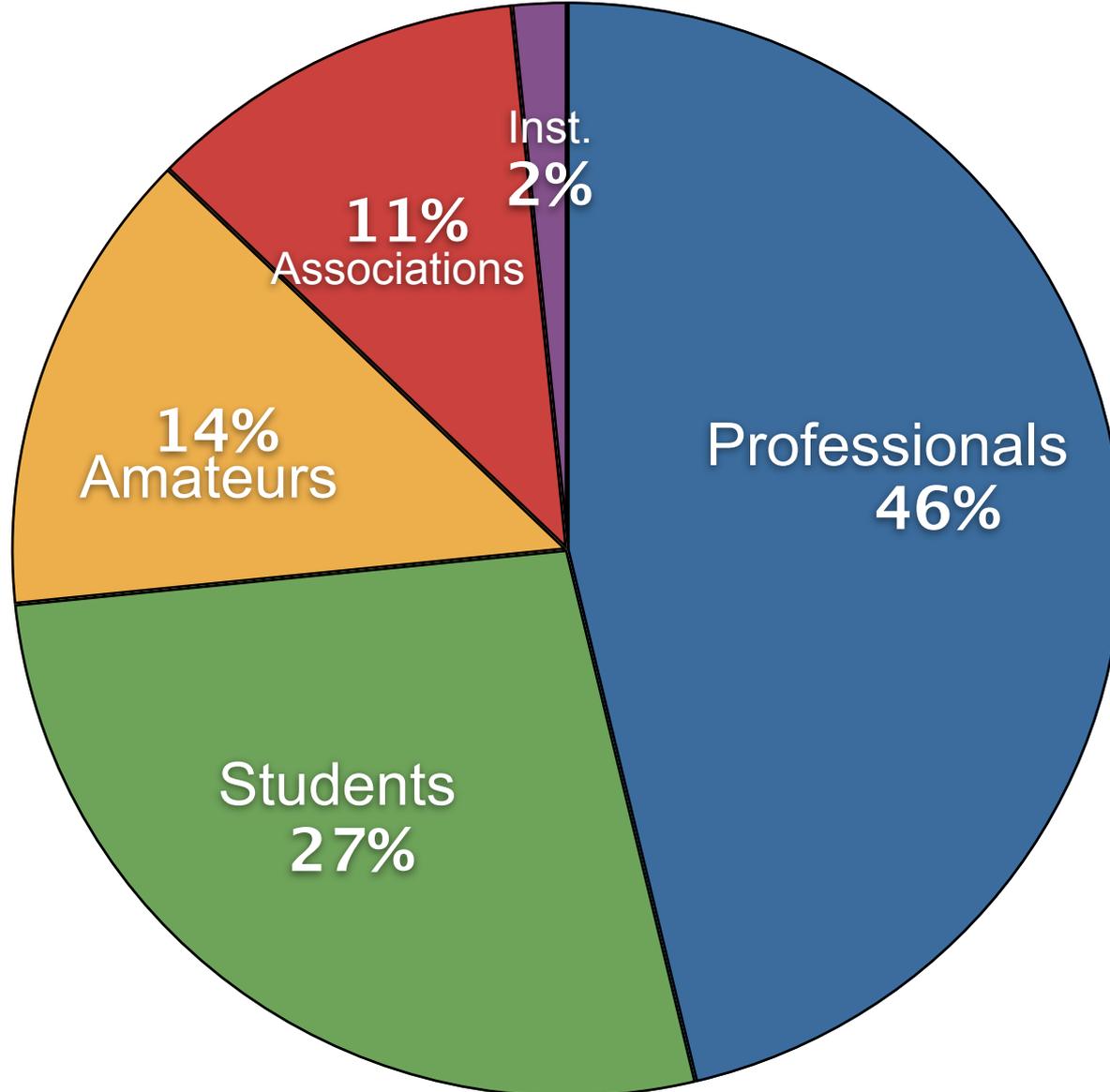


Vienna

Innsbruck

Graz

Statistics: 188 members (Feb 2012)



Highlights

ESO

The OeGAA was instrumental for the preparation of Austria's membership in ESO. It was essentially founded with the goal of the future ESO membership in mind.

Full membership in ESO was achieved in 2008. ESO has become one of the fundamental pillars of Austrian astronomy.

Highlights

ESO Committee

The OeGAA maintains a dedicated ESO committee coordinating national ESO activities and acting, through the OeGAA itself, as the contact point to the ministry and to ESO (e.g., for ESO committee membership). There have been fruitful discussions about our role in ESO, future plans, and the role of Austria in future ESO projects.

Highlights

OeGAA Prizes

Two OeGAA prizes are awarded every year:

- Diploma thesis award for an outstanding Austrian diploma in astronomy (Award: Certificate, invited talk, travel costs, but no prize money)
- Prize for astronomy paper in the framework of final exam at pre-university schools (partial fulfillment of “Matura” exam).

Challenges

Purpose and Goals of the OeGAA

What are the main activities of the OeGAA now that the ESO membership procedures have succeeded?

Annual meetings are not enough to define the purpose of the OeGAA. Further possibilities:

- Coordinate Austrian astronomy
- Public relations
- Foster contacts between institutes
- Foster national collaborations
- Act as contact point to the ministries
- Organize bi-national meetings
- Organize summer/winter schools

Challenges

Membership solicitation:

Candidates ask about purpose of membership and, in particular, personal profit from being a member. (This problem is certainly not only the OeGAA's; recognition of profit already received from an organization is generally poor; e.g. profit that Austria's astronomy now draws from new ESO membership is not seen by young astronomers who are asked to apply for membership.)

The OeGAA remains invisible to the members for most of the year. The immediate return from membership is not recognized.

Challenges

Amateurs vs. Professionals (A vs P):

- interest in international relations (P) vs. national activities (A)
 - financial support from ministry (P) vs. private, personal funding (A)
 - “scientific drivers”:
 - competitive frontier astronomy (P) vs. personal achievements (A)
- Amateurs wish better involvement in national astronomy, programs offered to them by the professional institutes, and national meetings. The diverging interests of the two groups and the lack of volunteers dealing with these problems will make this a very difficult task. One should think about separating the two groups; at least, one should ask especially the amateurs to come up with their own initiatives and their own contributions to solve these problems.

Challenges

Subcommittees:

The OeGAA supports several subcommittees receiving rather limited attention (apart ESO). There are not enough volunteers to work on all issues, nor are the problems sufficiently well communicated. Other committees are:

- Public relations and documentation: coordination of initiatives, organization of contacts between professionals and the public; involved in the public “Astronomy Day”.
- Light pollution. Presently some activity by two individuals, one more related to public information via web sites, the other being active in the framework of IAU and UNESCO.
- Pseudosciences. Education, information, and advising of the public concerning pseudosciences.

Future tasks

Roadmap for Astronomy (Planning is under way)

National coordination and collaboration as well as the increasing integration in international organizations and networks (e.g., ESA, ESO, EAS, IAU, etc) require a national plan for next decade. This is now being organized by the OeGAA. Visible problems to overcome:

- Established traditions against new trends.
- National coordination and agreements against traditional niche thinking.
- Engaging Austria as a nation in increasingly big projects rather than splitting into numerous sub-critical activities. Focus on activity centers.
- Lacking competence for a national agreement in view of the autonomy of universities and their institutes.
- Role of a roadmap for the ministry: requires support from the ministry.