

PHY 517 / AST 443: Observational Techniques in Astronomy

Lecture 6:

Proposals
Time Allocation Committee

Telescope time / data analysis proposals

- writing (successful) proposals is an essential part of being a researcher
- ... at the latest, when you need to apply for funding
- observational astronomers need to submit proposals for telescope time
- can also submit proposals for funding to analyze existing data

Example: Hubble Space Telescope

- proposal deadline once per year (~April)
- typically ~1000 proposals: time, archival, theory
- ~20% success rate
- open to anyone

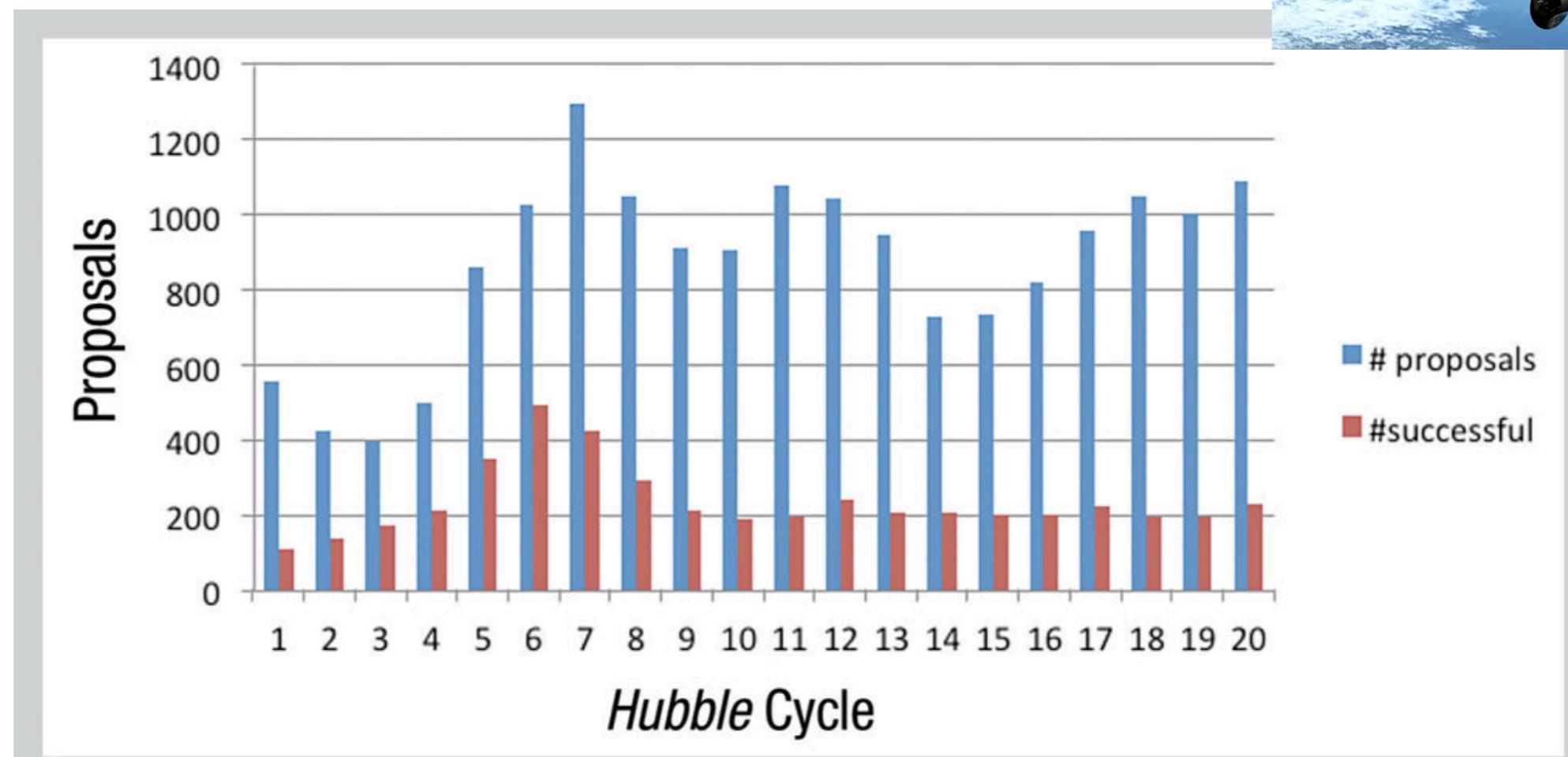


Figure 1: Hubble proposal pressure by number of proposals. The blue histogram shows the number of proposals submitted each cycle; the red shows the number accepted. The Cycle 7 statistics include the cycle 7N and 7AR proposals. The oversubscription ranges from 2:1 in Cycle 6 to more than 5:1 since SM4.

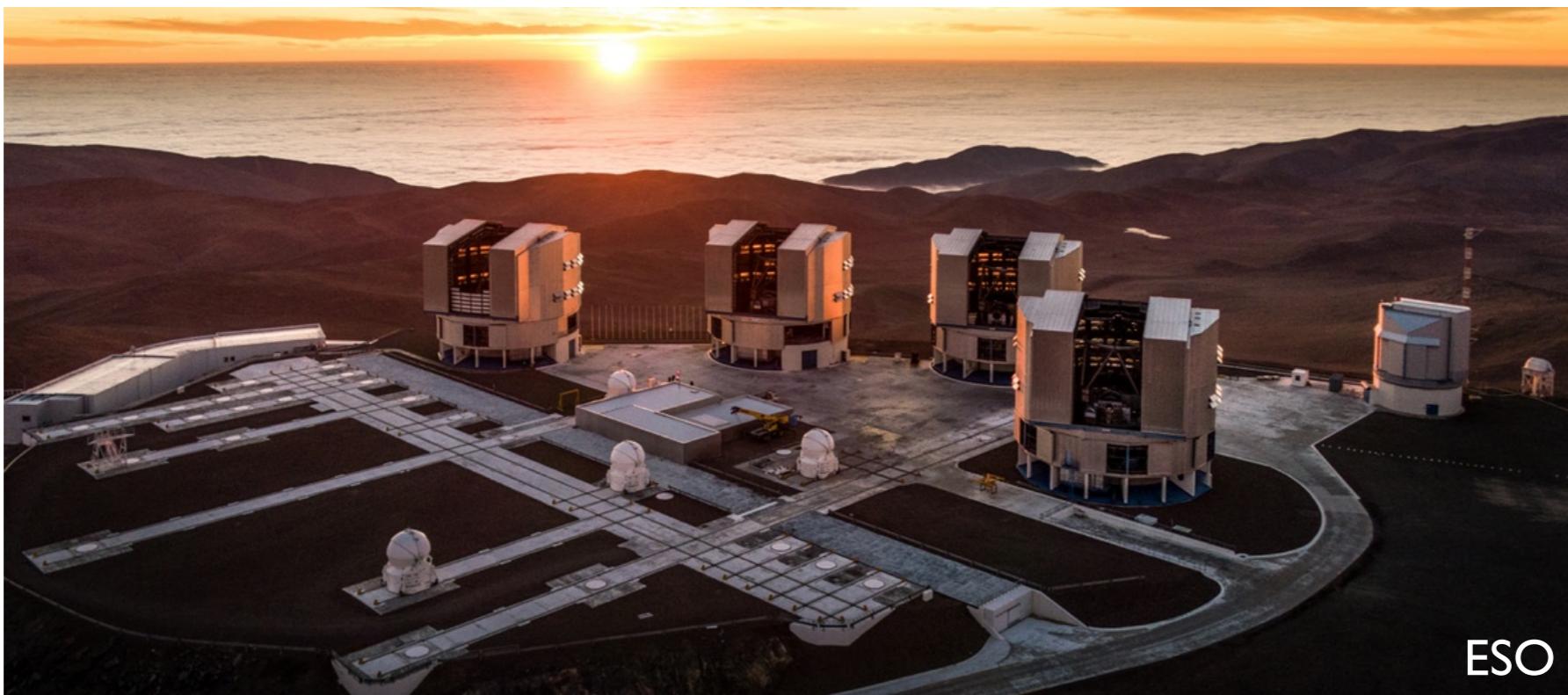
NOAO

- NOAO = National Optical Astronomical Observatories
- US national research & development center for ground-based night-time astronomy
- manages most telescopes with US-wide access
- own facilities: Kitt Peak National Observatory (KPNO, Arizona), Cerro-Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO, Chile)
- Calls for Proposals 2x per year; deadlines end of September and end of March



ESO

- ESO = European Southern Observatory
- manages the Very Large Telescope (VLT; Chile)
- also open to anyone; preference for European projects only in direct conflicts
- Calls for Proposals 2x per year; deadlines end of September and end of March



ALMA

- ALMA = Atacama Large Millimeter Array
- multi-national project
- proposals through respective managing facilities, e.g. for US: NRAO = National Radio Astronomy Observatory
- proposals ~1x per year



Other telescopes

- some facilities are not open-access, but only available to researchers at the institutions / countries who built / finance them
- for example:
 - Keck telescopes (mostly CalTech, University of California + University of Hawaii)
 - Subaru telescope (mostly Japan + University of Hawaii)



PHY517 / AST443 proposals

- each of you will write a *telescope proposal* for your Lab 4
- you will then review the other students' proposals (~10-12 proposals to read, grade and evaluate)
- we will hold a Time Allocation Committee (TAC) meeting to discuss and rank the proposals
- each group will conduct their top-ranked project

PHY517 / AST443 proposals

- Proposal deadline: **Tuesday, Oct. 12, 3pm (strict !)**
- Initial reviews deadline: **Monday, Oct. 18, 11:59pm**
- Time Allocation Committee: **Wednesday, Oct. 20**

Possible resource: AAVSO

American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO):

- “alert”: call for observations by small telescopes, issued by scientists
- could pick one (or more) of these as basis for your proposal
- try to maximize science output (1 single 10-minute observations probably not very exciting)
- note: you will have to research the topic to write your science case

AAVSO Alert Notices for Observing Campaigns and Discoveries

Note: This page, together with the AAVSO Target Tool Alerts/Campaigns target list, replaces the following AAVSO webpages: AAVSO Alert Notice Archive, AAVSO Special Notice Archive, and the original Observing Campaigns webpage. - July 2017

[Click here for Active Alert Notices.](#)

There are two types of AAVSO Alert Notices:

- Observing Campaign
 - to announce an [observing campaign](#) of short or long duration on one or more astronomical objects, at the request of an astronomer or the AAVSO;
 - to provide additional information about a campaign or the target of a previous Alert Notice
- Object of Interest
 - to announce the [discovery](#) of an object such as a nova or a bright supernova;
 - to report on noteworthy or unusual stellar behavior

An AAVSO Alert Notice for an [observing campaign](#) is issued as soon as a professional astronomer tells the AAVSO about a new, urgent need for special variable star observations, usually in connection with their research.

An AAVSO Alert Notice for an [object of interest](#) is issued in response to a discovery or other stellar activity that AAVSO HQ believes warrants in-depth coverage.

By subscribing* (free of charge) to the Alert Notices, you will receive them in your email inbox so that you can contribute crucial observations when they are most needed!

* To subscribe to the Alert Notices, log in to your AAVSO account (free), click "My account" at the top of the page, then click the "Profile" tab, then the "Email Settings" tab. Check the box next to "Alert Notices" and save your settings.

AAVSO Alert Notices are also posted on the AAVSO website.

Below are links to AAVSO Alert Notices, ordered by issue number with the most recent issue first. Links are also given to AAVSO Special Notices, which were issued when needed (now discontinued) to provide supplemental information about an observing campaign or a discovery, or to provide information about other stellar activity. [Observers should use the page below, along with information in the AAVSO Target Tool Alerts/Campaigns target list \(button at right\), to see what targets are in need of observations to support current observing campaigns and to help plan their observing schedules.](#)

Alerts/Campaigns target list

Note that a *Special Notice* is located under the *Alert Notice* with which it is associated. *Special Notices* that are not associated with events covered in *Alert Notices* are listed at the end of the year in which they were issued. Please note that, as of July 2017, AAVSO *Special Notices* are no longer being issued.

The format below is date (yyyymmdd), Alert or Special Notice number, Alert or Special Notice title/subject. (Missing dates to be added.)

For Alert Notices and associated Special Notices, jump to: [Active](#), [2021](#), [2020](#), [2019](#), [2018](#), [2017](#), [2016](#), [2015](#), [2014](#), [2013](#), [2012](#), [2011](#), [2010](#), [2009](#), [2008](#), [2007](#), [2006](#), [2005](#), [2004](#), [2003](#), [2002](#), [2001](#), [2000](#), [1999](#), [1998](#), [1997](#), [1996](#), [1995](#), [1994](#), [1993](#), [1992](#), [1991](#), [PEP Alert Notices](#), [un-numbered Alert Notices](#)

For AAVSO Special Notices that are not associated with AAVSO Alert Notices, jump to [SpNt2017](#), [SpNt2016](#), [SpNt2015](#), [SpNt2014](#), [SpNt2013](#), [SpNt2012](#), [SpNt2011](#), [SpNt2010](#), [SpNt2009](#), [SpNt2008](#), [SpNt2007](#), [SpNt2006](#), [SpNt2005](#).

ACTIVE before the date means that the observing campaign is active or that the target of an object of interest Alert Notice warrants continued coverage. All active Alert Notices for campaigns or objects of interest are grouped together below. When the campaign is concluded or the target no longer warrants coverage, the Alert Notice will be moved to the year in which it was issued.

The text in square brackets following the title of the Alert Notice refers to the [AAVSO Observing Section](#) under which the target falls.

Active Alert Notices for Observing Campaigns and Objects of Interest

- [ACTIVE 20210914 Alert Notice 754](#) - Monitoring requested for 15 VY Scl cataclysmic variables in support of HST observations [CV, Spectroscopy]
- [ACTIVE 20210823 Alert Notice 753](#) - Monitoring requested for seven intermediate polars [CV]
- [ACTIVE 20210809 Alert Notice 752](#) - Rare Outburst of Recurrent Nova RS Ophiuchi [CV]
- [ACTIVE 20210803 Alert Notice 751](#) - RU Lup and BP Tau to be observed by HST and XMM-Newton [YSO]
- [ACTIVE 20210803 Alert Notice 750](#) - T CrB photometry and spectroscopy requested for HST and XMM-Newton observations [CV]
- [ACTIVE 20210730 Alert Notice 749](#) - Nova in Vulpecula: N Vul 2021 = TCP J20210770+2914093 [V606 Vul] [CV]
- [ACTIVE 20210720 Alert Notice 747](#) - V627 Peg photometry and spectroscopy requested [CV, Spectroscopy]
- [ACTIVE 20210618 Alert Notice 746](#) - High-resolution spectroscopy and photometry requested for rho Cas study [SPP, Spectroscopy]
- [ACTIVE 20210614 Alert Notice 745](#) - Nova in Hercules: N Her 2021 = TCP J18573095+1653396 = ZTF19aasfsjq [V1674 Her] [CV]
- [ACTIVE 20210608 Alert Notice 744](#) - V1117 Her observations requested [YSO]

More resources on transient events

- Zwicky Transient Facility: <https://www.ztf.caltech.edu/>
- Latest supernovae: [https://www.rochesterastronomy.org/
supernova.html](https://www.rochesterastronomy.org/supernova.html)
- Transient Name Server: <https://www.wis-tns.org/>

Your data + archival data

- your observing proposal will be to make measurements with our roof-top telescope
- for the scientific analysis, you can *add* data from other sources
- examples:
 - AAVSO database -> lightcurve
 - spectroscopic information (Simbad, NED)
 - Gaia parallaxes -> distances
- see wiki tab “Astronomical Data Archives” for a list of resources

Possible project resource: basic astronomy

- think back to your introductory astronomy class (e.g. AST203)
- there are some “classic” measurements, e.g. color-magnitude diagrams, period-luminosity relations, etc.
- you could choose one of these
- make sure that there is a measurement goal!

Possible project resource: astro-news

- check astronomy news (e.g. Sky & Telescope)
 - is there something that inspires you?
 - research the scientific background
-
- make sure that there is a measurement goal!
 - example: “*I want to make a pretty picture of this galaxy*” is not a quantitative measurement goal

Possible project resource: your own idea!

- come up with your own idea!

Spectroscopy ?

- for bright stars, we can probably get our spectrograph to work
- come talk to me if you're interested

Possible resource: Astronomical Ring for Access to Spectroscopy (ARAS):

- observing campaigns and alerts, specific for spectroscopy
- could pick one of these as basis for your proposal
- note: you will have to research the topic to write your science case

The screenshot shows the ARAS Spectroscopy Forum homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Board index', 'Retourner sur le Site', 'FAQ', 'Register', and 'Login'. Below the navigation is a search bar with a 'Search...' placeholder and a 'Search' button. The main header features a colorful gradient background with the text 'ARAS Spectroscopy Forum' in white. On the left, there's a logo for 'Astronomical Ring for Access to Spectroscopy' with the acronym 'ARAS' and a star. The page content includes a 'FORUM PRESENTATION' section with three topics: 'Forum Description and General announcements', 'General Topics, Annoucements, Forum Life', and 'Petites Annonces'. Below this is a 'FORUM' section with several categories: 'Current Campaigns', 'Outbursts and alerts', 'Spectra, results, information on activity ...', 'Spectroscopes and Softwares', and 'Astrophysics, Theory, Publications ...'. Each category has a brief description and a table showing the number of topics, posts, and the last post. Red arrows from the previous list point to the 'Current Campaigns' and 'Outbursts and alerts' sections.

TOPICS	POSTS	LAST POST
4	4	by admin Thu Jul 26, 2018 10:20 am
83	239	by Francois Teyssier Wed Sep 25, 2019 4:09 am
3	5	by etienne bertrand Sun Nov 11, 2018 10:24 pm
316	1542	by J Labadie Bartz Tue Sep 24, 2019 4:56 pm
228	3052	by umberto sollecchia Wed Sep 25, 2019 3:52 pm
557	2670	by Robin Leadbeater Mon Sep 16, 2019 11:14 am
538	3074	by Serge Golovanow Tue Sep 24, 2019 7:46 pm
43	130	by David Boyd Thu Sep 05, 2019 8:01 am

Time Request

- the target observing period is Oct. 25 - Nov. 15
- make sure your targets are observable!
- we will schedule (at least) 3 nights for each group to make sure that you get good weather; nights can be shared
- try to be flexible in your time request
- if targeting transient sources: we cannot accommodate real Target-of-Opportunity requests (where your observations override somebody else's on a timescale of hours) - make sure you can do something with the nights you're given
- specify the nights you are *not* available (e.g. night before a mid-term / GRE); specify whether weekends are ok

Proposal Structure

- Cover Sheet
 - title
 - abstract
 - ~~PI and Col names~~
 - telescope / instrument / set-up request
 - time request
- Scientific Justification
 - limited to 1 page
- Technical Justification
 - limited to 1 page
- Figures, Tables, References, Object lists
- Observing Run Details

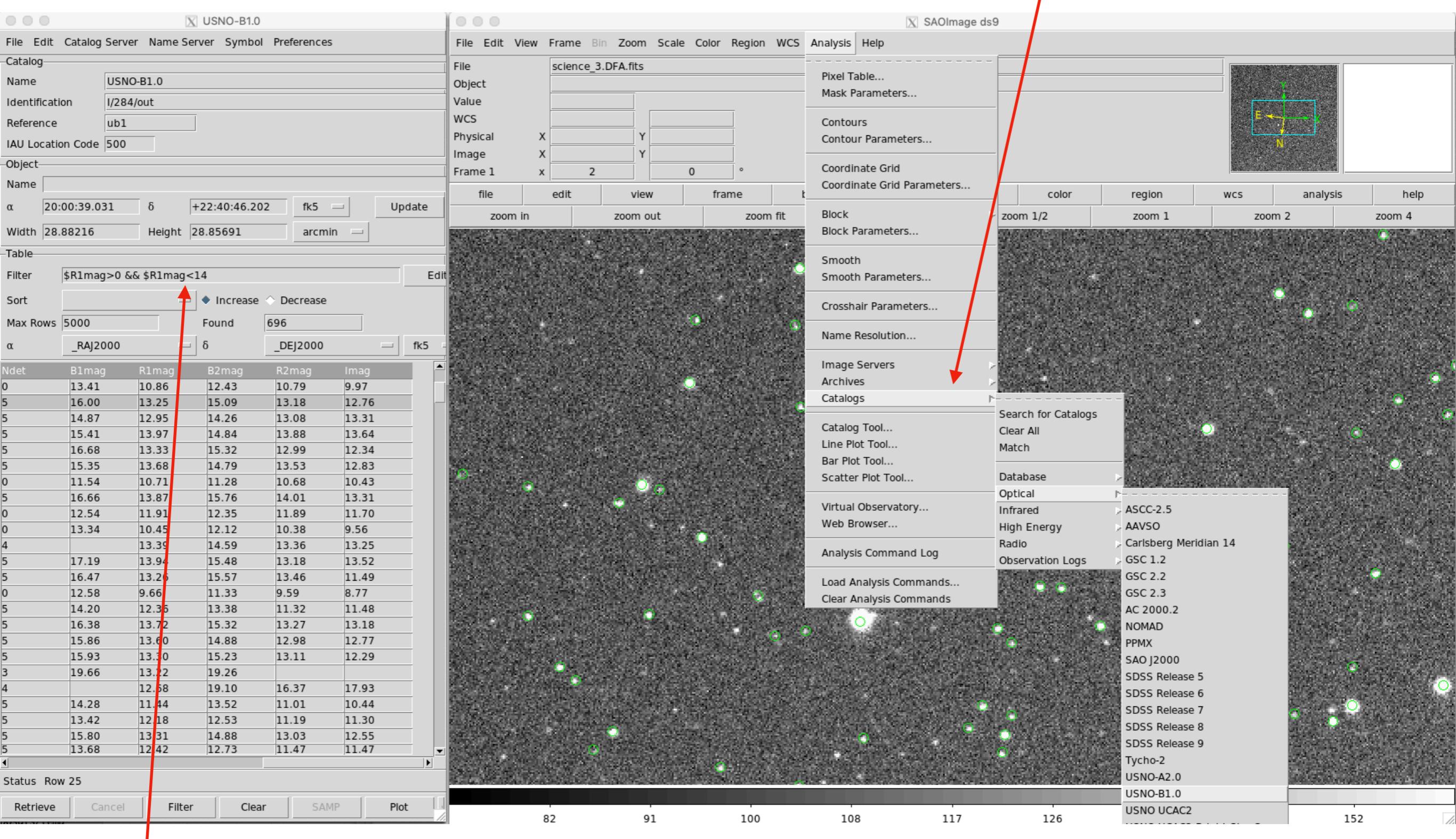
Scientific Justification

- describe your project to a knowledgeable, but non-expert audience
- provide background information / motivation
- what is the goal of your measurement?
- make it exciting / important!
- polish the text - typos and carelessness are distracting

Technical Justification

- as important as your scientific justification is the technical justification
- if your project is not feasible, it will be rejected
- from the exoplanet lab, you have an idea of what magnitude star requires what exposure time
 - can scale to other magnitudes with CCD signal-to-noise equation (recall that $\text{mag} \propto \log[\text{flux}]$)
 - make sure to justify choice of filter(s), too

to overlay external catalogs:



might need to filter results

AST 443 / PHY 517 proposals

proposal template available on github:

https://github.com/anjavdl/PHY517_AST443/wiki/Your-own-telescope-proposal

blind review: list only your SBU ID as author!

your labmates are your Co-Is, list their IDs too

github page includes links to example telescope proposals

Time Allocation Committee

Time Allocation Committees

- proposals are reviewed by panels of researchers, chosen by the responsible agencies (e.g. HST - STScl)
- panels are assembled by topical groups (e.g. cosmology)
- every panelist has to read every proposal assigned to that panel, typically ~80
- preliminary grades submitted online
- 2-day meetings to discuss all proposals and finalize grades

AST 443 / PHY 517 TAC

- you will be assigned a list of ~10-12 proposals to evaluate and grade
- you will have to send in grades and comments for all proposals on your list a few days before the TAC meeting

AST 443 / PHY 517 TAC

- you will be primary reviewer for one proposal, and secondary reviewer for another proposal
- during the TAC meeting, the primary and secondary reviewers will lead to discussion of each proposal, but *everybody will be expected to take part*
- the PI of the proposal and their collaborators, as well as PIs of directly competing proposals, will leave the room

AST 443 / PHY 517 TAC

- after each discussion, you will re-grade the proposal via secret ballot
- we will rank the proposals based on the final grade
- *each group will work on its top-ranked project*
- after the TAC meeting, the primary and secondary reviewer will collate the comments into a final evaluation of that proposal

Blind reviews: avoiding unconscious bias

Avoiding unconscious bias

- Unconscious / implicit bias: our judgment is biased by stereotyped expectations
- has been well documented in much of society

Image: Texas Medical Center



Example: Racial Bias in Job Applications

Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination
Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan
NBER Working Paper No. 9873
July 2003
JEL No. J7, J71, J23, J24, J63, J82, C93

ABSTRACT

We perform a field experiment to measure racial discrimination in the labor market. We respond with fictitious resumes to help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago newspapers. To manipulate perception of race, each resume is assigned either a very African American sounding name or a very White sounding name. The results show significant discrimination against African-American names: White names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews. We also find that race affects the benefits of a better resume. For White names, a higher quality resume elicits 30 percent more callbacks whereas for African Americans, it elicits a far smaller increase. Applicants living in better neighborhoods receive more callbacks but, interestingly, this effect does not differ by race. The amount of discrimination is uniform across occupations and industries. Federal contractors and employers who list “Equal Opportunity Employer” in their ad discriminate as much as other employers. We find little evidence that our results are driven by employers inferring something other than race, such as social class, from the names. These results suggest that racial discrimination is still a prominent feature of the labor market.

This study analyzed differences in student ratings of their instructors¹ from an online course, independent of actual gender. The course professor randomly assigned students to one of six discussion groups, two of which the professor taught directly. The other four were taught by one of two assistant instructors—one male and one female. Each instructor was responsible for grading the work of students in their group and interacting with those students on course discussion boards. Each assistant instructor taught one of their groups under their own identity and the second group under the other assistant instructor's identity. Thus, of the two groups who believed they had the female assistant instructor, one actually had the male. Similarly, of the two groups who believed they had the male assistant instructor, one actually had the female (see Table 1). At the end of the course, the professor asked students to rate their instructor through the use of an online survey. This design created a controlled experiment that allowed us to isolate the effects of the gender identity of the assistant instructors, independent of their actual gender. If gender bias was present, than the students from the two groups who believed they had a female assistant instructor should have given their instructor significantly lower evaluations than the two groups who believed they had a male assistant instructor.

Example: Gender Bias in Student Teaching Evaluations

MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt 2015
DOI 10.1007/s10755-014-9313-4

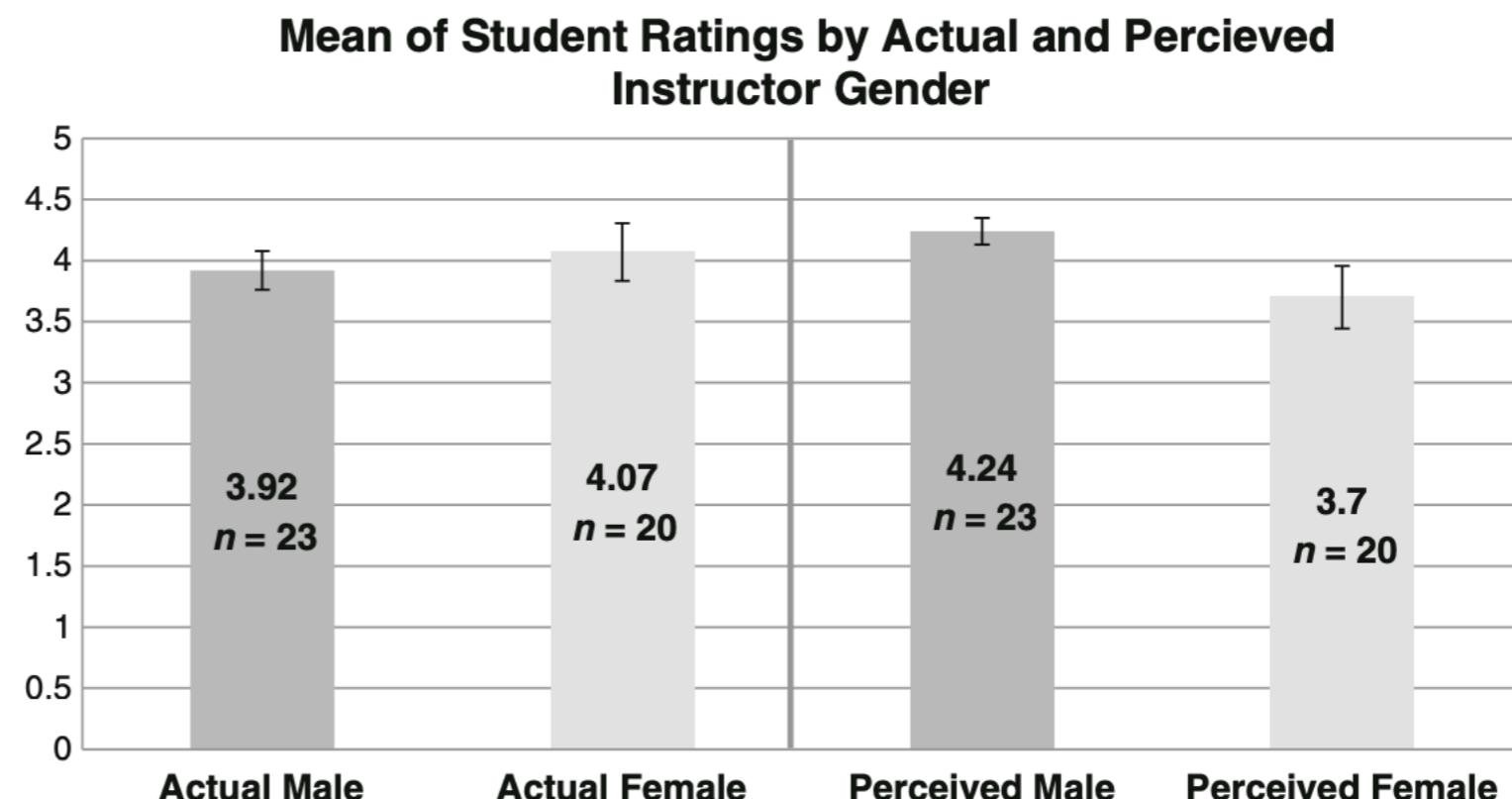


Figure 1 Comparison of the mean of student ratings across actual instructor gender (left two columns) and perceived instructor gender (right two columns). The difference between the right two columns is significant to the $p \leq 0.10$ level.

Avoiding unconscious bias

- Unconscious bias is “unconscious” - there is no malicious intent (unlike racism / sexism etc.)
- Result of how humans make decisions → difficult (but not impossible!) to avoid



Affinity Bias

Feeling a connection to those similar to us



Perception Bias

Stereotypes and assumptions about different groups



Halo Effect

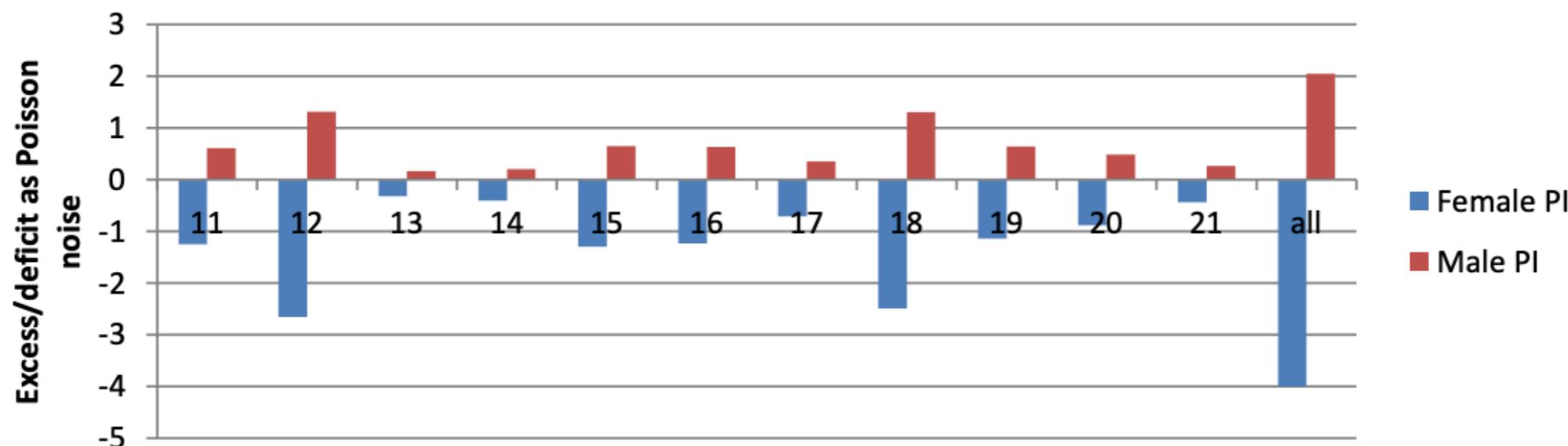
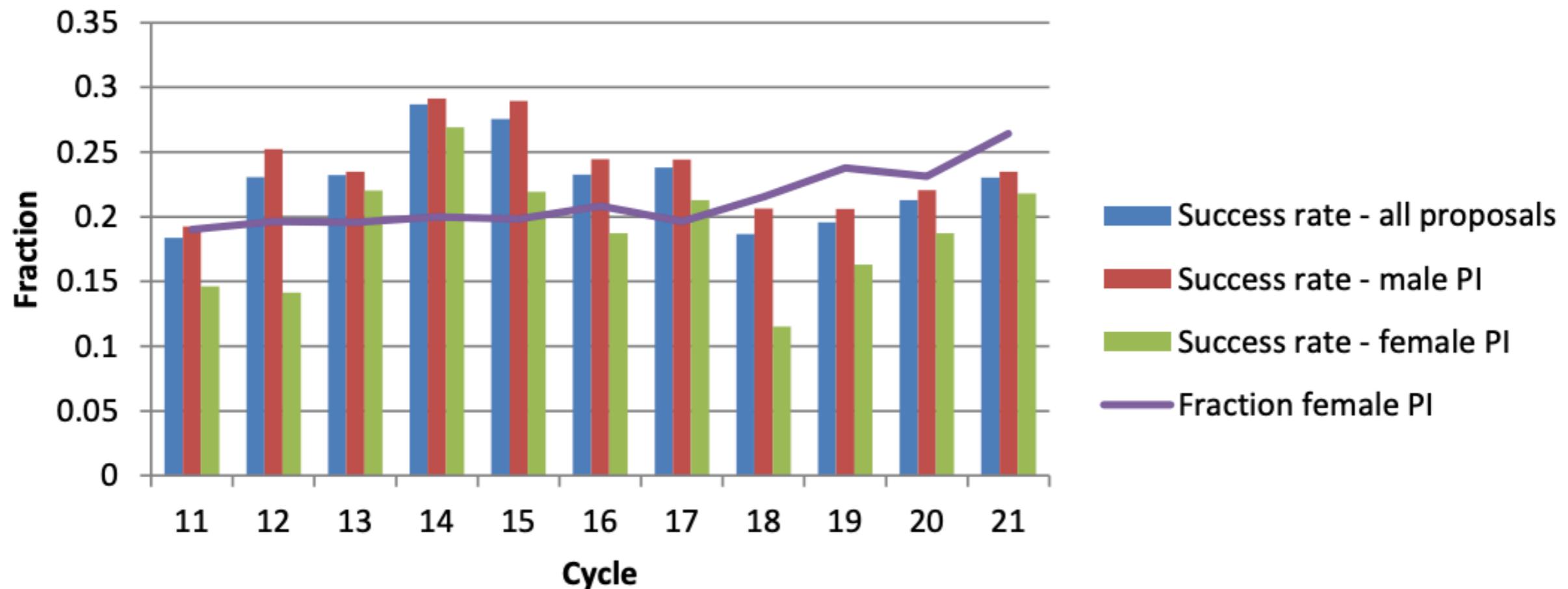
Projecting positive qualities onto people without actually knowing them



Confirmation Bias

Looking to confirm our own opinions and pre-existing ideas.

Gender bias in proposal success rates



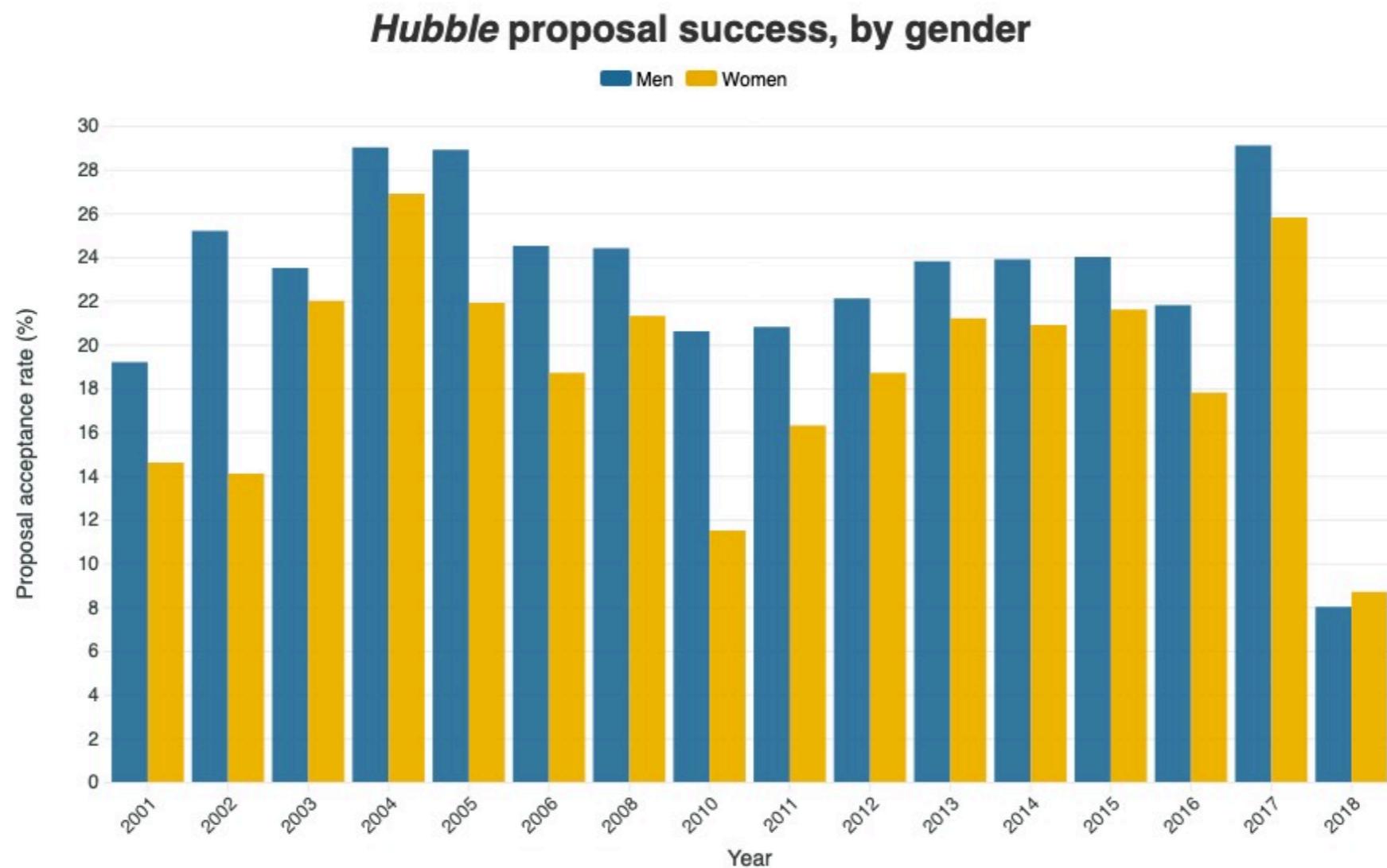
Reid 2014

Avoiding unconscious bias

- In 2018, the Hubble TAC was conducted dual-anonymously
- PIs were not identified; had to avoid identifying themselves in the narrative
- Reviewers were told not to guess the proposers

Avoiding unconscious bias

- In dual-anonymous review: male/female success rates were even!



Strolger &
Natarajan 2019

- Implemented also for several other review processes

Therefore:

- class TAC: double-blind
- class grading: as blind as we can make it
- “we” are still trying to figure this out
- be conscious of biases when you get into advisorship / leadership roles

Further Reading

- Reid 2014: Gender-based Systematics in HST Proposal Selection. <https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2014PASP..126..923R/abstract>
- Strolger & Natarajan 2019: Doling out Hubble time with dual-anonymous evaluation. <https://physicstoday.scitation.org/do/10.1063/PT.6.3.20190301a/full/>