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**Senior Review and the NOAO Mission**

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I would like to convey a few thoughts I have about the implications of the Senior Review for the NOAO mission and its relationship to the Decadal Survey which has guided us over the past several years.

Although the Senior Review was basically an exercise in examining scientific priorities, and the budget balance within the Astronomy Division, a great deal of attention was focused on the mission of the National Observatory. Despite some of the cost and budget issues, which were a necessary part of the discussion, it is very evident that the National Observatory is seen now as more important than ever. In every possible place, the Senior Review encourages NOAO to take a leadership position--

- In playing an enabling role in developing the “System”
- In combining its capabilities and those of the university community to address instrumentation needs,
- And, most importantly in sustaining the astronomical community by making sure there is access to telescopes of all apertures. Our access today is one to ten meters. In the future there will no doubt be 20,30 or 50 meter telescopes and NOAO will need to bridge this gap.

There is nothing in the Senior Review that suggests that the vision of the Decadal Survey is misguided or unachievable. The Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope, and LSST are still seen as some of the most compelling science machines of the future. There is no question that NOAO has dedicated itself to achieving this vision and has fulfilled every expectation in doing so.

The Senior Review has taken a broader view in judging the overall pace that we should expect in achieving these goals, and the balance that should be maintained in the community in the interim. There is no question that the community will depend on NOAO for observing opportunities at CTIO, Kitt Peak, access to Gemini, and access to independent telescopes. They have called attention to this reality and this is a good thing for all of us. NOAO’s role will be to ensure a healthy system today, and to work with the community to ensure that the system evolves to one that enables the entire US community to plan and carry out front line research with tomorrow’s telescopes.

The Senior Review spent a considerable effort looking at the landscape for the GSMT. They observed that coordinating the design and technology development for major projects like the GSMT, and expediting passage through the various phases of the NSF approval process and ultimately preparing of the operations and science phases requires leadership and planning at a level unprecedented in NSF. The NSF has approached AURA to discuss the most productive approach to carrying out this process in a manner that best serves U.S. astronomy and capitalizes on the basic purpose of the national observatory.

NSF has asked that NOAO act as the "Program Manager" for the GSMT Technology development effort at a national level in a manner similar to NASA's major Centers. There is much to be done to restructure and re-tool for this new approach and AURA and NSF are working together with the two projects to lay out a clear path.

We do not want to squander any of the good work that has been done so far, and it is critical that we continue the activities such as identifying and working towards the establishment of new observing sites in Chile. Some of the specific things we have discussed involve

- Assuring that the national needs are understood, and that TMT and GMT subscribe to them as a requirement for federal participation in an eventual public-private partnership for the construction and operation of either telescope.
- Performing independent evaluations of technical progress by both projects
- Providing a strong, respected and consistent point of contact for international partnership interests
- Finally, assuring the community support for the GSMT as a national priority and for a healthy scientific enterprise in the GSMT era. This may become the real focus of the "system" as we develop it.

AURA, NOAO, and the community should find much to be encouraged about in the Senior Review.