



National Radio Astronomy Observatory

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MEMORANDUM

To: Adam Cohen, President, AUI

From: Tony Beasley, Director, NRAO

Date: 13 October 2020

Subject: Emeritus appointment for Jim Condon

I recommend Dr. James (Jim) Condon for appointment as Emeritus Astronomer. Jim will retire on March 26, 2021, with over 41 years of continuous service to NRAO, and reaching back further to 1972, including his earlier appointments at the Observatory.

Jim is a tenured astronomer at NRAO who works on radio surveys, evolution of star-forming galaxies, including the far-infrared (FIR) / radio correlation, radio emission from quasars, supermassive black holes, cosmology, as well as educational materials for students of radio astronomy, including the textbook *Essential Radio Astronomy*, by Condon, J. J., & Ransom, S. M. (2016), published in the Princeton Series in Modern Observational Astronomy.

Jim did his graduate work in astronomy at Cornell University before beginning his professional career as a postdoc for eight months at Arecibo Observatory in 1972. His first appointment with NRAO was from 1972 – 1974, when he was a Research Associate. In the fall of 1974, he became an Assistant Professor of Physics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI), where he served until 1979. In 1977 and 1978, he was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge, UK, and also a Visiting Assistant Scientist at NRAO. In 1979, he was an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation fellow, and he also became an Associate Professor of Physics at VPI, before leaving to become an Associate Scientist at NRAO, starting his uninterrupted service at the Observatory. In 1980, he was promoted to Scientist (Astronomer). During his tenure at NRAO, he has served as Acting Deputy Director and Special Assistant to the Director. He currently holds a Visiting Research Professorship at the University of Virginia.

Jim has been an exceedingly productive scientist, with over 230 refereed publications, including five to date in 2020. His plan to continue his research as an Emeritus include aspects of the FIR / radio correlation using new data from the MeerKAT radio telescope in South Africa, with relevant pathfinding work for the ngVLA. He also plans to update the *Essential Radio Astronomy* course website, with collaborator Scott Ransom, starting with recent results on fast radio bursts and other transient sources. Given his continuing activity in research, I am confident Jim will remain a productive scientist in his Emeritus role.

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- Growth of D&I initiatives since early 2000s; acceleration from 2012.
- Strong opinions voiced publicly/privately by Jim Condon against D&I ideologically, and in terms of Observatory implementation (federal/state laws, recruitment).
- Long list of grievances (back to 1970s), including recent staff actions and Fred Lo moments. Multiple meetings/opportunities with D&I staff held/offered. Considerable aggravation w/ Faye.
- Poor behavior (refusing to sign annual agreements, including anti-harassment) began ~2015. Annually, I forced him.
- Several debates; no outcome. In 2018 I suggested he document his arguments ... took a year, created 70-page manifesto. Created silence.
- Emeritus request Oct 2020; retired as of March 2022.



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November 18, 2020

Dr. James (Jim) Condon
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Dear Jim,

I am very pleased to inform you that at the recent October 29-30, 2020 meeting of the AUI (Associated Universities, Inc.) Board of Trustees, the Board unanimously approved your appointment as Astronomer Emeritus effective March 21, 2021.

The Trustees and I extend our gratitude to you for your long and distinguished service to the National Radio Astronomy Observatory and to AUI, after a career spanning almost five decades. Your work on radio surveys, evolution of star-forming galaxies including the far-infrared (FIR) / radio correlation, radio emission from quasars/supermassive black holes, and cosmological studies, as well as the development of educational materials for students of radio astronomy, continues to make significant contributions to the field of radio astronomy.

As Astronomer Emeritus, you will not have any specific obligations to the Observatory, and while you are involved in research activities, we will provide you access to scientific facilities, support for travel and publications and the opportunity to apply for outside grants on the same basis as regular scientific staff members. Similar to active employees, you will be required to complete successfully all mandatory annual trainings, and follow general workplace requirements.

We wish you well in your retirement and look forward to our continuing relationship. AUI thanks you for your many years of dedicated service to NRAO.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Cohen'.

Adam Cohen,
AUI President/CEO

cc. A. Beasley, Director NRAO
E. Wilcots, Chair AUI Board of Trustees

November 2020 Letter from AUI Board

AUI-000783

Emeritus roles

- Mutually-beneficial arrangement – creating enhancement of scientific environment.
- NOT an employment agreement; NOT a significant benefit (in Condon case – few \$k/yr maximum).
- “Follow general workplace requirements” .. specifically added for JC.

Change in Status

- On the basis of his net contribution to the NRAO scientific and workplace environment – I am withdrawing my recommendation of Emeritus status for Jim Condon.
- This is NOT a response to his ideas/concerns about diversity and equality – which I completely reject – it is in response to his continued abusive and disrespectful behavior towards AD/HR Giles.
- He has acted disrespectfully in meetings; identified her for special attention in his manifesto; and now released private emails and attempted to malign her to the scistaff.
- At an AD meeting 9/15 the overwhelming consensus was that Jim had violated our workplace conduct policy, and was creating a hostile work environment for our HR and ODI team. I concur.
- Jim's position has been publicly criticized by UVA; the NRAO scistaff are underway preparing a petition rejecting his views. Under these circumstances, I cannot agree in future to Jim representing the Observatory, nor am I comfortable allowing him to advise/mentor students or junior staff members. Although he's been quiet for 2-3 years, these arguments and his position have not shifted since 2013/2014.

Change in Status

- His positive scientific contributions are negated by his comments/conduct/behavior toward Observatory goals and senior staff.
- **I now reverse my recommendation that Jim Condon be awarded emeritus status;** I believe his overall contribution to the Observatory is negative, and I will not stand for further attacks on Faye, on a topic supported by 90% of the Observatory.
- **I believe the AUI Board should note my reversed recommendation, and revoke his Emeritus status, without comment.** The Board responds to my recommendation...
- **The subjective element here is: the NRAO Director's recommendation.** That can be withdrawn. We are not obliged to respond to requests from non-employees.
- We are accused of tolerating poor performers; not here.
- This is not a flowchart, it is a line of dominos...

Possible Next Steps

- I will write a letter to AUI President indicating my revised recommendation.
- We schedule a 30 min Close Executive Session discussion where I will present a short history.
- The AUI Board moves to revoke his Emeritus status, based on my revised recommendation.
- You send a letter revoking his Emeritus status, based on the revised NRAO Director recommendation.
- I will send a letter clearing up any issues (laptop?).

To be clear – we are not revoking his status in response to his ideas – only to his prolonged behavior and intransigence, and violation of workplace conduct.