

Perambulating Among the Posters

By LAURENCE A. MARSCHALL, *Kai'aleiaka*

Very few astronomers travel to meetings expressly to *view* poster papers, but almost everyone goes to meetings to *present* them. You've probably already recognized your fellow astronomers at the airport or on your plane by the black plastic tubes they were carrying.

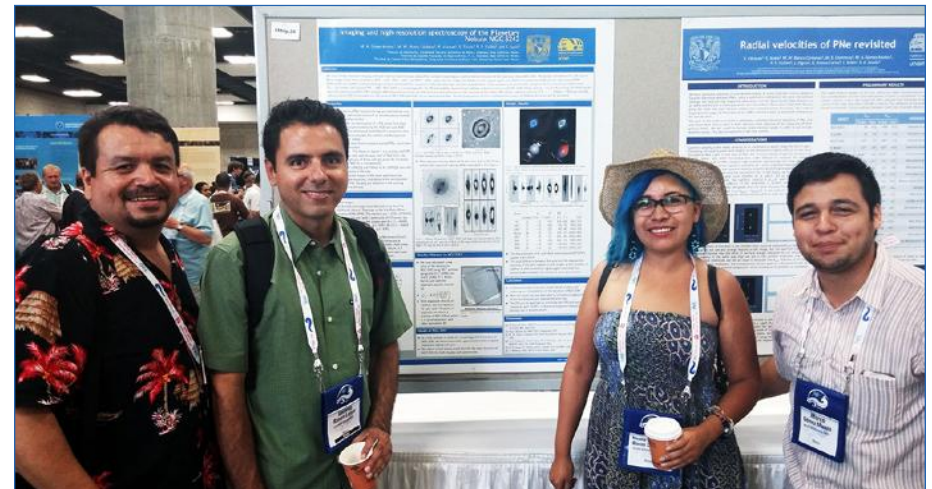
Here in Honolulu at the IAU General Assembly, long ranks of mounting boards crowd the Exhibit Hall to accommodate the roughly 1,900 scheduled posters, but most of the time the aisles are empty, with only a solitary reader here and there, or a little knot of people gathered in animated discussion. This changes, of course, during morning coffee breaks and evening happy hours, when the Exhibit Hall becomes a lively place. Wandering among the posters I noted a variety of presenters and readers, and it soon became clear that, while the poster paper is an important form of scientific communication, its function goes well beyond the mere transfer of information. Posters give notice of work in progress, provide justifications for travel, and thus serve as catalysts for the intellectual and social interactions that keep our science alive.

In one aisle Kazimierz Sliwa of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, stood by a poster he'd prepared with collaborator Christine Wilson. He was discussing the analysis of molecular gas in merging galaxies with George Privon from the University of Concepción, Chile. Both are workers in the same field, and Privon, who models the mergers, was commenting on both the poster itself and on the further research it suggested. "George has already given me some ideas to explore on processes that light up the gas," noted Sliwa.

For young scientists, posters offer a first experience in academic publishing. Early Wednesday morning I met Nicholas Lopez-Canelas, a 2015 graduate of Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was entering the Convention Center with a poster describing work he'd done as an undergradu-



Wendy Hagen Bauer explaining her poster on an "old friend," the star VV Cephei. [All photos: Larry Marschall, *Kai'aleiaka*]

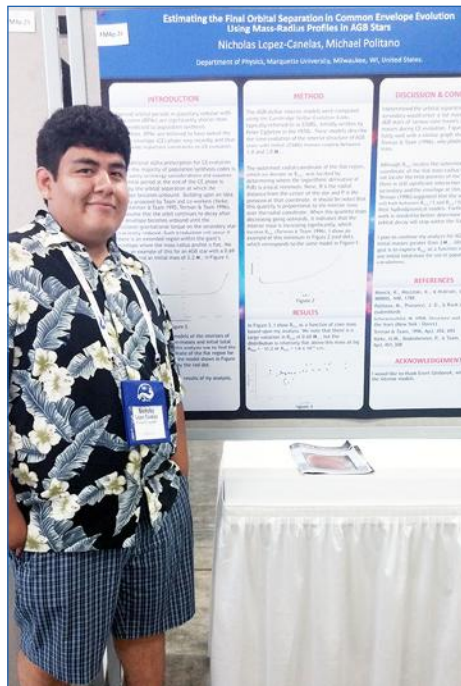


Marco Gómez-Muñoz and some of his collaborators at his poster paper. Left to right: Roberto Vasquez, Gerardo Ramos-Larios, Monica Blanco Cárdenas, and Marco Gómez-Muñoz.

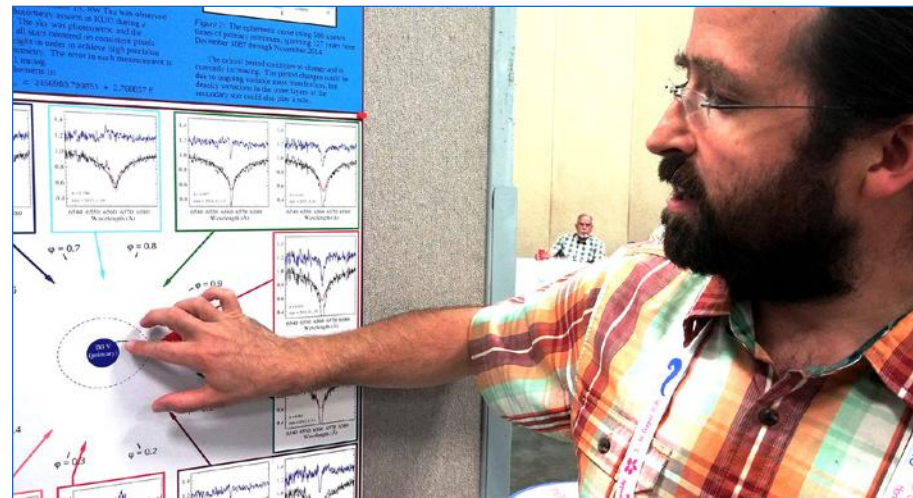
ate with Professor Michael Politano on modeling binary orbits of stars in planetary nebulae. This was his first opportunity to mingle with professional astronomers at an IAU meeting, a step on the way to a hoped-for Ph.D. in astrophysics, and, no doubt, a welcome change of climate from his native Chicago.

At another poster later in the day, Marco Gómez-Muñoz was talking shop with his collaborators Monica Blanco Cárdenas and Roberto Vasquez, all from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, along with Gerardo Ramos-Larios of the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Gómez' poster reports his thesis work, an analysis of the structure of a planetary nebula, and this is his first IAU General Assembly, too, though his advisor, Vasquez, has been to many AAS meetings in the past.

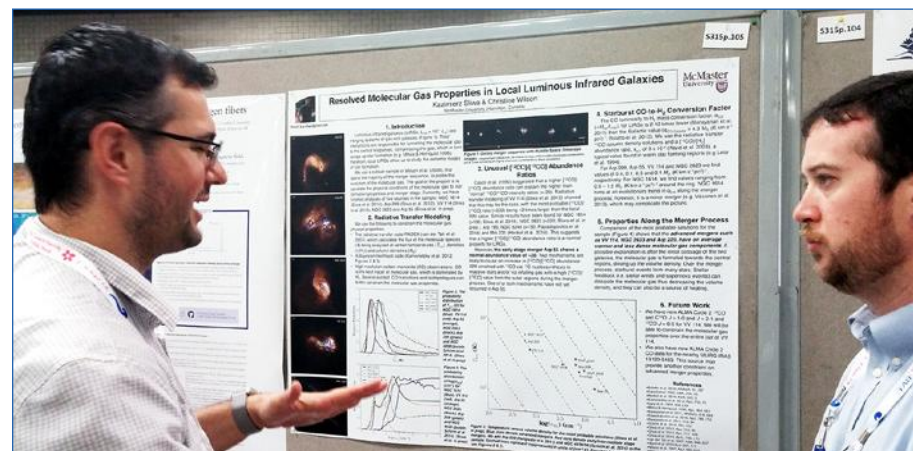
Phillip Reed, Associate Professor of Astronomy at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, is further along in his career. He received his Ph.D. in 2008, and though he's at a primarily undergraduate institution he's established an active program of research and publication. Here at his first IAU GA, his two poster papers highlight work that he and his students have done using their on-campus 24-inch (60-cm) telescope, notably spectroscopy done with a newly installed fiber-fed spectrograph. "There's been a lot of response to my posters," Reed told me, "and many people are amazed that we can do such good spectroscopy using an on-campus observatory."



Nicholas Lopez-Canelas and a poster of his undergraduate research work at Marquette University.



Phil Reed describes spectroscopy results from the Kutztown State University Observatory.



Kazimierz Sliwa discusses galaxy mergers with George Privon.

At the other extreme of a career, Wendy Hagen Bauer, Professor Emeritus at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, was returning to the island where she did her graduate studies. She was presenting a poster on a star she's gotten to know intimately over many years: the eclipsing binary VV Cephei, but that wasn't the principal draw of the IAU General Assembly. "These meetings are wonderful," she commented, "because I get to see a whole career worth of colleagues, collaborators, and friends." 🌸