

## The current status and future problems of the Junior Session in the Astronomical Society of Japan

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It has passed rather long time in Japan since such things were pointed out that students were moving away from the sciences and that students did not like sciences. This situation is almost same at present. On the contrary, there are many experience-based science events held by universities, institutes, and science museums. The students at present are in a good environment of science, because they can easily see and feel the most advanced sciences.

In this current situation, Astronomical Society of Japan (ASJ) organizes Junior Session in its meeting from the spring of 2000. This is an attempt that students (junior high school and high school students) make presentation in the meeting of professional (and amateur) astronomers. This session gives students an opportunity to present their studies of astronomy in their club activities, their experience in science events, and their personal research works. There are contests of science studies for students in local regions or nationwide, but when Junior Session was started it was rather unique because the academic society has a session for students. If presentations are done in a meeting of an academic society, then it is not for contest but for open discussion in the field of academy. In this sense, students are on the equal standpoint as researchers. Therefore, Junior Session can be said to be an innovative attempt and we are proud of it. Recently there are several attempts similar to Junior Session in other academic society.

Up to the spring of 2006, we had Junior Sessions for eight times. The numbers of the presentations in each time has been increasing and recently there are about 35 presentations. The total number of the presentations from the beginning is about 180. ASJ has two semi-annual meeting in spring and autumn. The spring meeting is just during the spring vacation of school, so it is convenient for students to attend the meeting. Therefore we have the oral session in spring. The number of attendances to the oral session is usually 200 to 300. For those students who cannot attend to the meeting, we have a poster session. We also encourage student to bring their poster even if they make oral presentation, so they can discuss well with researchers.

Junior Session has three purposes. First one is to encourage the students' studies or activities related to astronomy. We hope students will be motivated by the fact that they talk in ASJ. Second one is to make students feel the atmosphere of the most advanced world of astronomy in ASJ. Perhaps it is difficult for them to understand the subjects discussed in ASJ, but it is enough that if they can feel that something splendid are discussed or studied. Third one is to know the fascinate aspect of astronomy. We hope they find this by talking professional researchers in ASJ. Most of the students who attend Junior Session will not be researchers of astronomy in future, but it is important to make them know that astronomy is interesting and fascinating. We hope that more and more children will come to like astronomy and sciences in general.

When we attend Junior Session, we always feel students' strong interest and passion toward astronomy. It is said that at present students are moving away from the sciences and they do not like sciences. However, this is not true at least for Junior Session. The level of presentation in Junior Session is sometimes much higher than that we are expecting. This means that Junior Session is functioning well for the students who are higher level in Science. This is one of the advantages of Junior Session, but we do hope that much more students will have interest in astronomy. We hope that such students that have no interest in astronomy or sciences will fell that universe is interesting. Maybe this is very difficult, and it is impossible to do it just by Junior Session. We would like to do this difficult attempt with many other people who has interest in science educations.