

November 22, 2017

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Dear Joe, George and members of the NED team,

This is a report from the phone conference of the NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database (NED) User's Committee (NUC) held on November 16, 2017. As you know, the major agenda item was a discussion of the new user interface (NUI), and whether it is ready to become the default for the NED website. In brief, we were very happy with the direction that this interface is taking; it incorporates many of the recommendations we have made in previous meetings, and represents a very big step forward. However, we found a number of bugs in the system, and have given you suggestions for improvements in layout and capability. We think that the problems remaining are substantial enough that we would not recommend a rush to making this the default quite yet. We recommend that the site undergo extensive testing from external folks (we of course are happy to help) before it goes public. But before that, if some of the most egregious bugs are addressed, the NUI can be made available to the community as a "sidecar", as you phrased it.

Many of our comments are specific to the table formats as currently presented. However, we understand that there is to be a transition to Firefly-based tables fairly soon, making many of our comments moot (and perhaps bringing up a whole new set of concerns). We would like clarity on the timing of all of this, especially given our finding that the current version has not yet been vetted enough (and has enough problems apparent on the cursory review we have given it) that it should not yet be made public.

We look forward to seeing the changes we have recommended incorporated into NED. We emphasize the need for more extensive testing of the interface than we were able to do in the short period we were given. While we found a number of problems, we are far from confident that once they have all been addressed, that the interface will be error-free.

On a separate note, we were very impressed by the growth of the NED holdings in the last year or so. It is exciting to see so many important large datasets becoming available in NED!

Happy Thanksgiving!

The NED User's Committee:

- Dr. Michael Blanton, New York University
- Dr. James Condon, National Radio Astronomy Observatory
- Dr. Tod Lauer, National Optical Astronomy Observatories
- Dr. Andrea Prestwich, Center for Astrophysics, Harvard University
- Dr. Anna Sajina, Tufts University
- Dr. Mark Seibert, Carnegie Observatories
- Dr. Ohad Shemmer, University of North Texas
- Dr. Michael Strauss, Princeton University (Chair)