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Prof. Andrew Lawrence
Institute for Astronomy
Royal Observatory
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Dear Andy,

On behalf of our respective organizations (Harvard University and Microsoft), we are looking forward to further pursuing our recently-born collaboration on research leading to the realization of a “Seamless” environment for astronomical research.

Thanks to our recent interactions, your colleagues in the UK have already updated the VODesktop software to allow it to communicate with other applications using the “SAMP” (Simple Application Messaging Protocol) methodology. This development means that VODesktop now joins a suite of other applications that have been either updated from the PLASTIC messaging approach to SAMP, or SAMP-enabled from scratch, so that they can all effectively “talk” to each other in ways that practicing astronomers do not need to actively worry about. We believe that this kind of modular approach to creating a research *environment*, out of just the software bits a scientist needs, is the way of the future—and that it will lead to the “Seamless Astronomy” we envision.

We are particularly pleased that both VODesktop and the WorldWide Telescope application are now both SAMP-enabled, as these packages’ capabilities complement each other extraordinarily well. The WWT group at Microsoft Research, and a diverse team of astronomers at Harvard have been working together since WWT’s inception (in 2007) to integrate WWT into the professional research environment, effectively creating “WWTPro.” VODesktop provides access to the quantitative analysis tools one *needs* to attach to a beautiful, intuitive, front end like WWT. Other applications commonly in use by today’s astronomers (e.g. ds9, also developed at the Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge), are being rapidly SAMP enabled, so that our applications and their descendants really are joining the new ecosystem at the right moment.

We would like to ramp-up our direct collaboration in the near future, so that we can even more tightly integrate and expand upon the work that each of our groups have done. Specifically, under the e-Science umbrella at Microsoft Research, Jonathan Fay will continue to work with Gus Muench and a group of interested astronomers and computationalists, at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and the Initiative in Innovative Computing at Harvard, to expand the capabilities of “WWTPro” to include more and more “seamless” links to software like VODesktop and its descendants. We thank you for all that you have already done to expedite this process.

Sincerely,



Alyssa A. Goodman

Professor of Astronomy

Founding Director, Initiative in Innovative Computing at Harvard



Tony Hey

Corporate Vice President of the External Research Division

Microsoft