

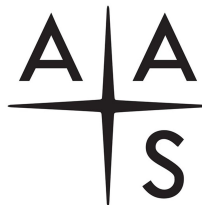
# Report from the AAS Graduate Admissions Task Force Working Group on Graduate Admissions (WGGA)

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Emily Levesque (University of Washington)

NATIONAL  
ACADEMIES

*Sciences  
Engineering  
Medicine*



WORKING GROUP ON  
GRADUATE ADMISSIONS

03.26.2026

# Report from the AAS WGGA

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## What is the AAS WGGA?

**Spring 2024:** Graduate Admissions Task Force formed

**Summer/Fall 2024:** GATF surveys and interviews the community

**Spring 2025:** GATF final report presented to Board and published

**Get the report here!** →



**July 2025:** AAS officially forms the WGGA

### WGGA Members

Emily Levesque (chair) (UW)  
Rachel Ivie (AIP)  
Courtney Dressing (Berkeley)

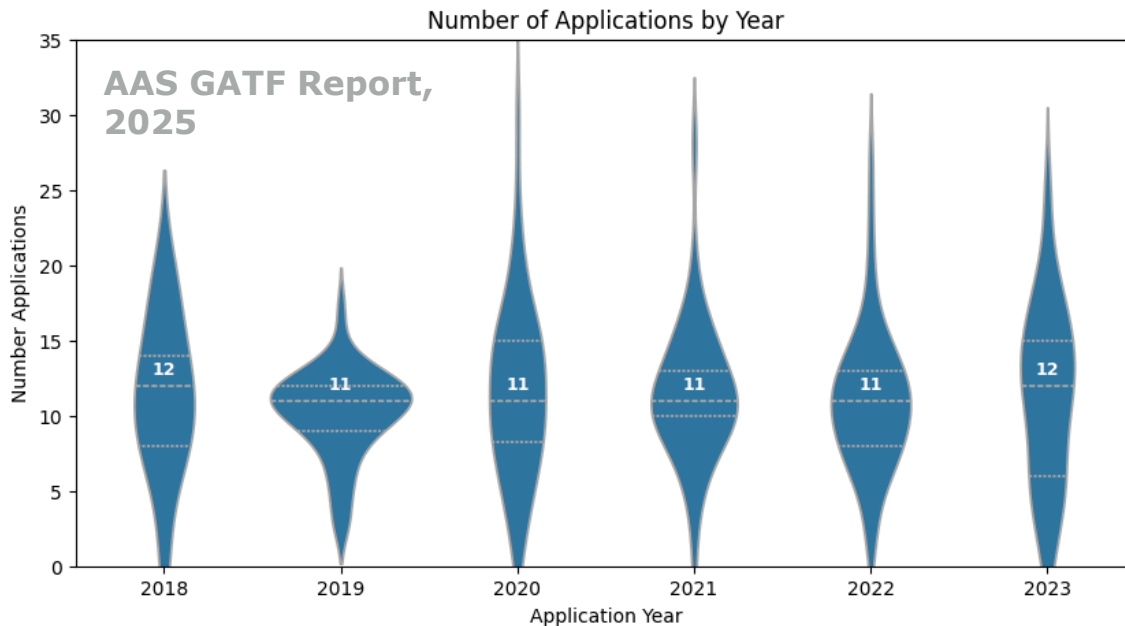
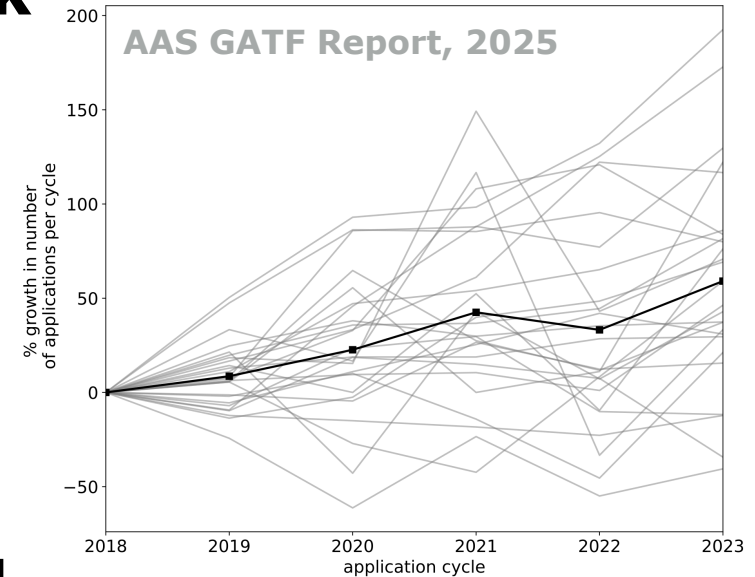
Grace Krahm (OSU)  
Meredith MacGregor (JHU)  
Daniel Piacitelli (Rutgers)  
Tom Rice (AAS)

**Summer/Fall 2025:** WGGA surveys community, hosts webinars, and begins gathering data on the rapidly-evolving astronomy admissions landscape

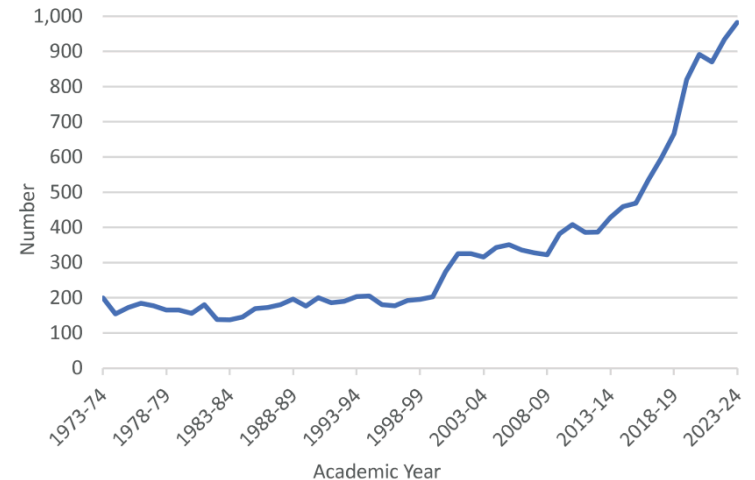
# Report from the AAS WGGA

## Key takeaways from 2024 GATF work

- From 2018 to 2023 applicant pools grew by **62%** on average (and ~200% in extreme cases). The number of first-year grads grew by **18%**.
- This increase was *not* driven by students submitting more applications; the total applicant pool is (still) growing



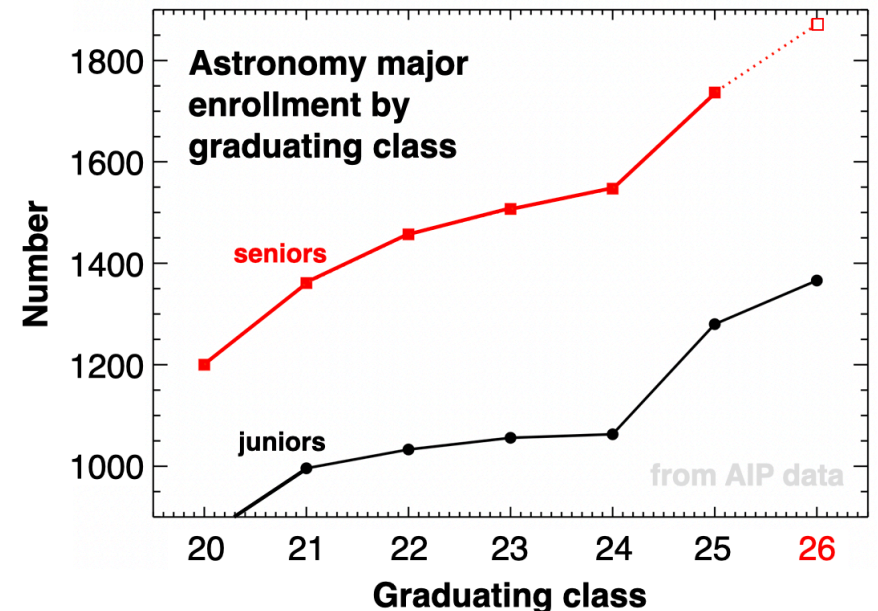
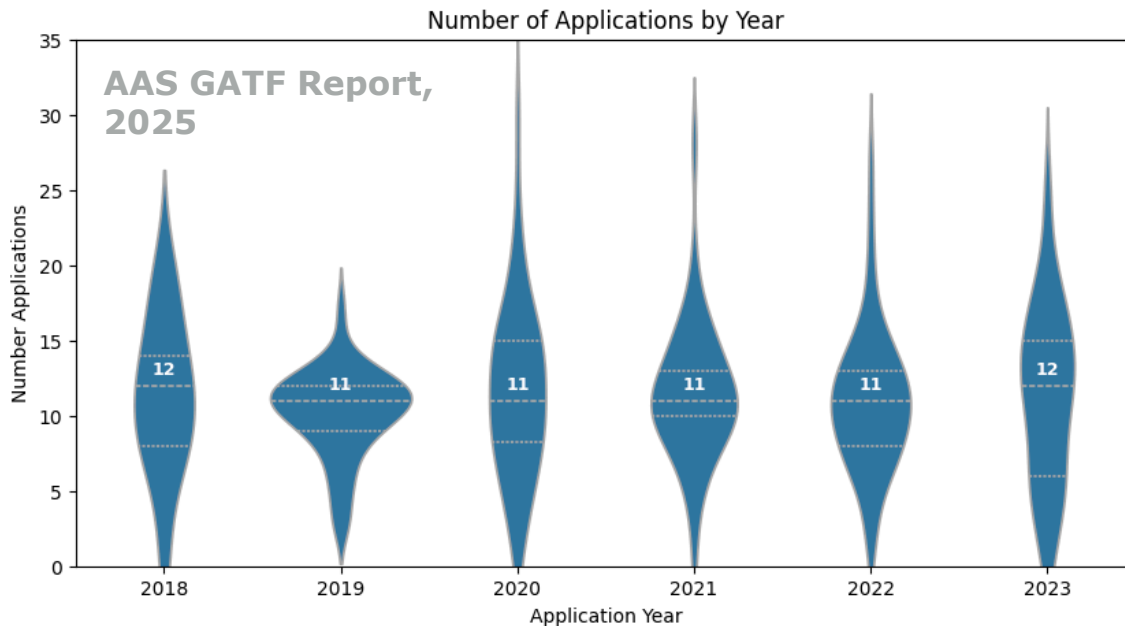
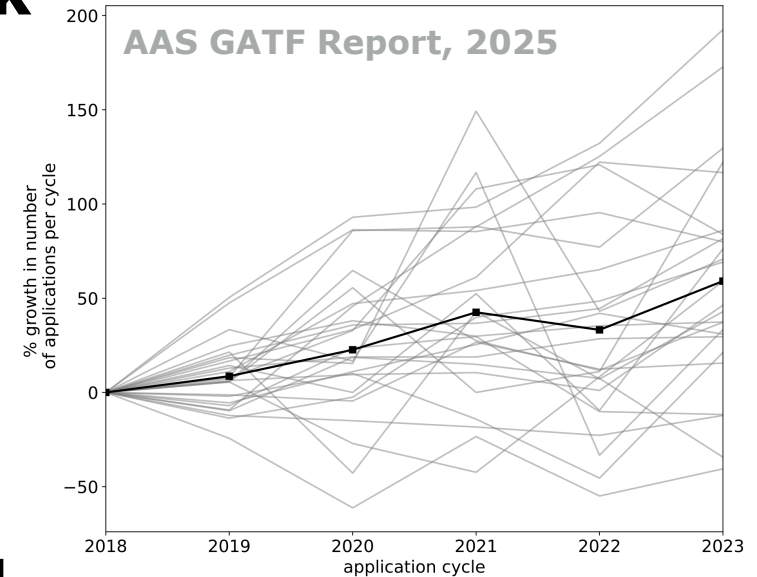
Number of Bachelor's Degrees Earned in Astronomy, Academic Years 1973-74 through 2023-24



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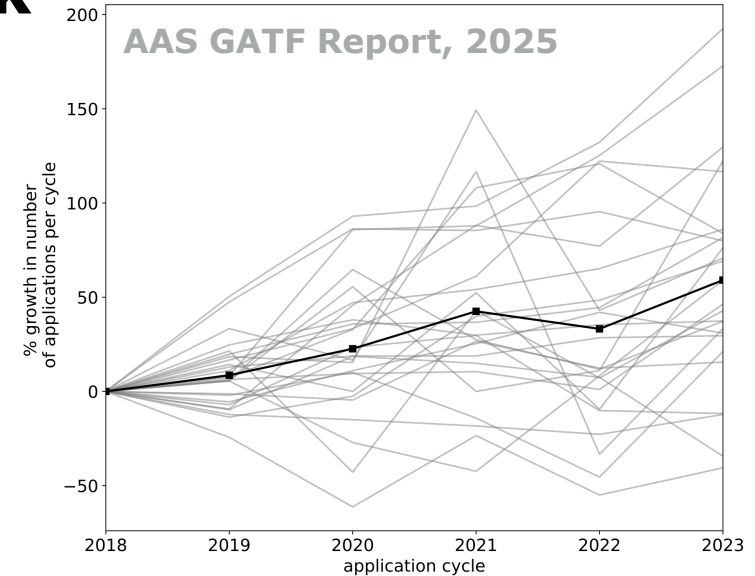
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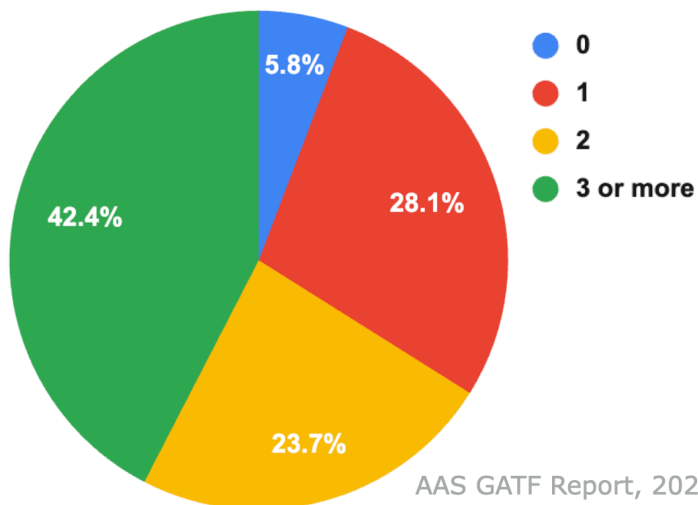
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- Programs struggle with both **growing applicant pools** and **low yields**.
- Applicants struggle with **expense**, **workload**, and **lack of transparency**.



Number of offers applicants received (2018-2023)



Prospective astro grads apply to 11-12 programs on average. The median application fee is \$75. A typical applicant spends ~\$900 applying to grad school.

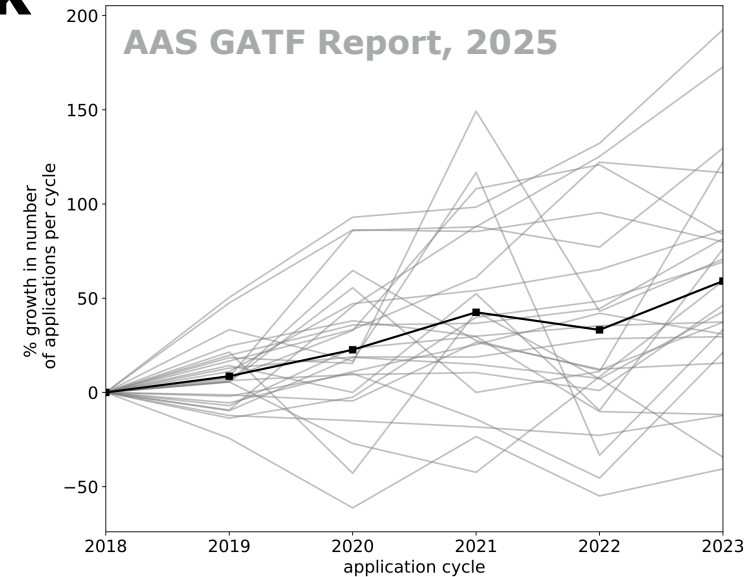
Applicants list “**volume of workload**”, “**lack of process transparency**”, and “**fees/financials**” as the most challenging parts of the graduate admissions process.

AAS GATF Report, 2025

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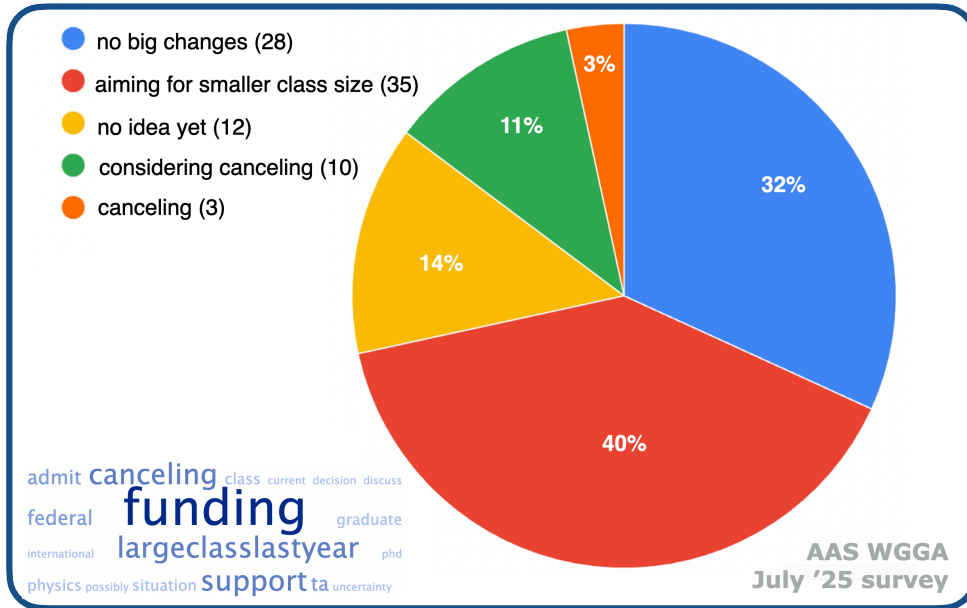


## Several major changes hit starting in Jan 2025...

- # of offers decreased midway through the AY24-25 process
- yields increased as a result, leading to large(r) class sizes
- we lacked immediate data, but many of problems noted in our report seemed to (and continue to?) get worse

# Report from the AAS WGGA

## WGGA mini-survey and admissions status spreadsheet



We gathered data from 102 programs:

49% = regular  
32% = smaller  
15% = TBD  
3% canceled

(1 is larger) (🇨🇦)

Program	Status	Date
Maryland (Baltimore C)	Physics	TBD
Maryland (College Pa)	Astronomy	Smaller
McGill	Astrophysics	No data
McMaster	Phys. & Ast.	Regular
Miami	Physics	Smaller
Michigan	Ast. & Astrophys	Smaller
Michigan State	Astronomy	Canceled
Minnesota	Astronomy	Regular
Minnesota Duluth	Physics	Regular
Mississippi	Phys. & Ast.	Regular
Minnesota State	Phys. & Ast.	No data
Mississippi State	Phys. & Ast.	Smaller
Missouri	Phys. & Ast.	No data
Missouri Science & T	Physics	No data
MIT	Physics	Smaller
MIT	EAPS	No data
Montana State	Physics	No data
Nevada (Reno)	Physics	Regular
New Mexico	Phys. & Ast.	Smaller
New Mexico State	Astronomy	Smaller
New Mexico Tech	Physics	Regular
North Carolina State	Physics	Smaller
North Texas	Physics	No data

## WGGA panels and webinars

**July:** discussion of mini-survey and astro-wide state of admissions

**October:** planning and decision-making process for AY25-26

**December:** managing large applicant pools and small class sizes

**January:** panel at winter AAS meeting on current and future challenges

**February:** best practices for waitlists and recruitment

**April:** AAS WGGA recommendations for future cycles

**May:** brainstorming admissions models

# Report from the AAS WGGA

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## Coming next from the AAS WGGA

- official recommendations for programs on best practices for applications and timelines+communication, including...

### Application content

- CV (2pg limit)
- **unofficial** transcripts
- **one** 1500-word application essay
- **two** 500-word recommendation letters

### Timelines and communication

- public communication/  
**notification** date(s)
- suggested “**down-select**”  
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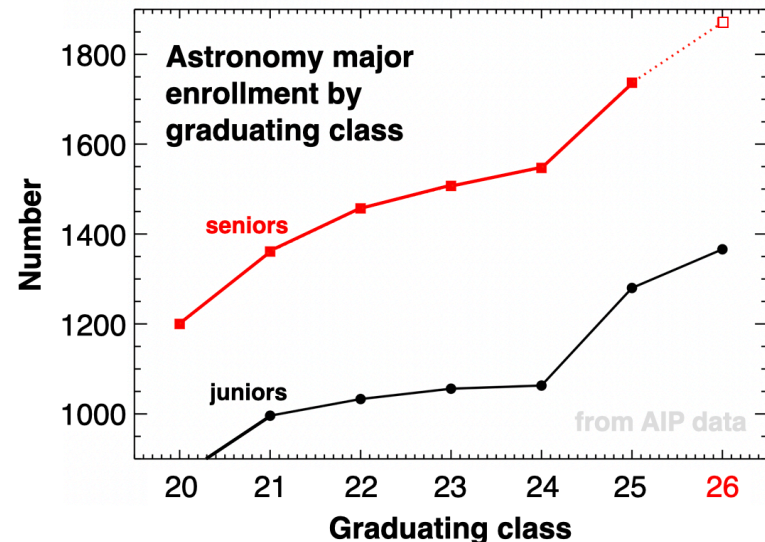
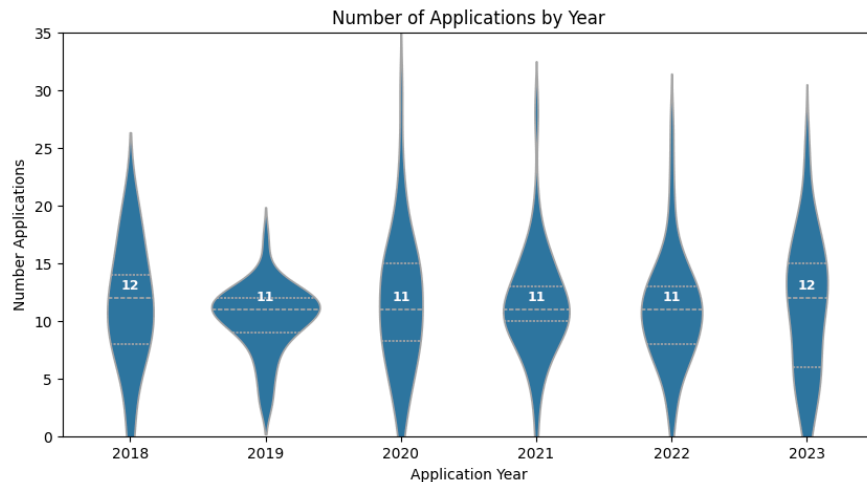
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  - we know how programs are reacting to current uncertainty; what about applicants?



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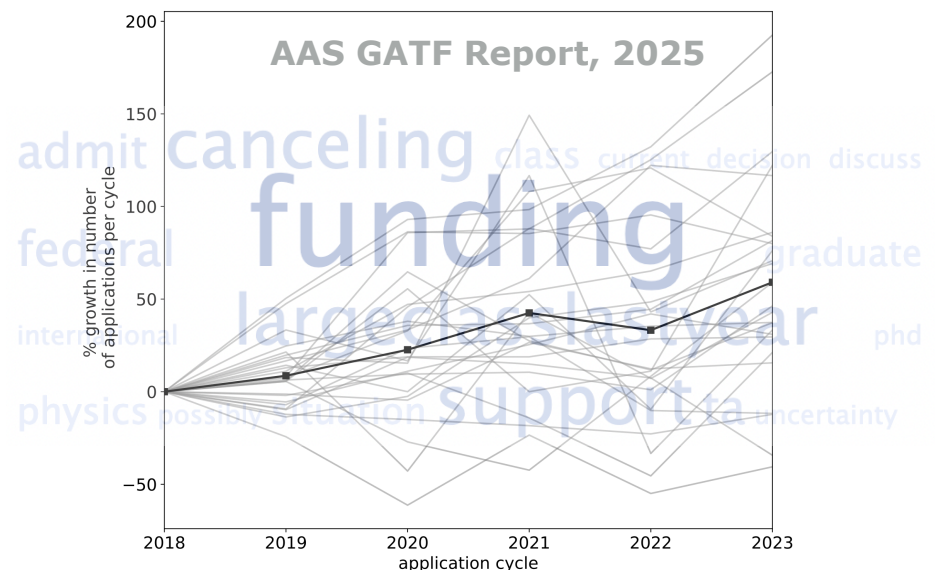
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— a surprising number of graduate programs held normal admissions; were they right? is this sustainable for new grads?



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- a clearinghouse for admissions data, community surveys, etc.
  - we know how programs are reacting to current uncertainty; what about applicants?
    - a surprising number of graduate programs held normal admissions; were they right? is this sustainable for new grads?
  - how can we continue improving admissions so that it best serves astronomy *and* *astronomers* as we face conflicting pressures?

# Report from the AAS WGGA

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Astronomy graduate admissions is a shared ecosystem.  
The AAS WGGA is a community resource.

## Questions from the WGGA

- what are astronomy, higher education, and the federal science funding landscape going to look like in **six years**?
- what can we do **as a community** to improve the current and future state of graduate admissions in astronomy?
- how can we (the WGGA) **collaborate** with other AAS committees (education, employment), funding bodies (NSF, NASA), and higher ed to best serve the community?

## Questions for the WGGA?