

Pluto Demoted as Planet

A barrage of media stories, blogs, and buzz followed last week's announcement that Pluto is no longer considered our Solar System's ninth planet. At a meeting of its General Assembly in Prague, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) voted to adopt new guidelines defining what is—and isn't—a planet. According to an Associated Press story, Pluto doesn't make the grade under the new rules for a planet: "a celestial body that is in orbit around the sun, has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it assumes a...nearly round shape, and has cleared the neighborhood around its orbit." Pluto is disqualified because its oblong orbit overlaps with Neptune's and it will now be considered a "dwarf planet" in a new classification system. For now, membership is restricted to the eight "classical" planets in the Solar System: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

According to Gerry Wheeler, NSTA Executive Director, "Science is not a static set of facts. Our understanding of science is constantly changing as new evidence is added. This is a perfect teachable moment to show the dynamic nature of science."

To read news coverage in Scientific American Magazine about the IAU vote, visit

<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?chanID=sa007&articleID=000BAB90-0894-14EE-889483414B7F014C>. To read a CNN story featuring comments from NSTA Executive Director, Gerry Wheeler; NSTA President-Elect, John Whitsett; and former NSTA Pre-school-Elementary Committee Chair, Rich Hogen, visit

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/EDUCATION/08/25/pluto.reaction>.

