

# Back to School, Back to SPS

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## Top 5 tips for a great SPS year

### #1 Decide that your SPS Chapter will be an AWESOME force in your department!

The physics department is home base for physics majors. As you plan your SPS year, think about the role that SPS can play in the department. A strong and active SPS chapter can make earning a physics degree more fun, fulfilling, and productive for everyone involved, and help departments meet many common needs, including:

- A cohesive student group: If your department does not have a place for students to work and relax together, consider leading the effort to establish an SPS student lounge.
- A morale boost: Remind everyone why studying physics is fun! Plan tours of places where science and technology take center stage, physics-inspired social activities, and science outreach events in the local community to engage and inspire members.
- More majors: An active SPS chapter can be the best recruiting tool in the department! Visit introductory physics classes during the first few weeks of class and invite students to SPS events. Participate in campus fairs, homecoming events, and other activities to attract those already on campus.
- Student engagement in research: Invite faculty to give short presentations about research opportunities. Ask faculty or senior level students to provide tours of lab facilities or give research talks. Use Physics Today as discussion material in meetings.

### #2 Have PURPOSE

Before you get started for the year, decide on some chapter goals. In addition to those mentioned above, your chapter might focus on increasing SPS membership, recruiting new physics majors, hosting outreach activities or developing new outreach tools, being more involved on campus, or attending more physics meetings and raising money to offset travel costs. If you need help in finding direction, meet with faculty in the department!

Post the goals in a prominent place and revisit them at each meeting to stimulate and celebrate progress.



### #3 Join the SPS NETWORK

SPS is more than just local activity. SPS has thousands of members and chapters at 761 different institutions! Be inspired, challenged, and encouraged by SPS members from around the world virtually through Facebook and Twitter, and in person through SPS Zone meetings, joint chapter activities, and professional physics meetings. These students are likely to be your future collaborators, peers, employees, and bosses, so start making connections now. Every geographic “zone” has an elected student and faculty representative whose job is to facilitate connections within their region, so reach out to them! Make sure you find out about SPS activities, meetings, awards, scholarships, internships, and more by being a dues paying member of SPS National.

### #4 Be CONSISTENT

Make SPS a highly visible, important and REGULAR part of the life and culture of your department. Whether weekly, monthly or something in between, meetings should be at a regular, fixed time so that attending becomes a regular habit. Always invite faculty! Meetings are usually more fun with food, so add pizza, cookies, tea, or whatever your chapter prefers. With consistent meetings you are more likely to accomplish your chapter goals and build a strong community.

### #5 Be VISIBLE

Be visible in your department community. Make sure that everyone in the department—faculty, students at all levels, and staff—knows about SPS events and feels welcome. Research has shown that a strong departmental community increases recruitment and retention, making the challenging process of earning a physics degree more enjoyable and rewarding for everyone involved.

Be visible in your campus community. SPS chapters have a history of hosting great campus events. Physics departments are usually small, but they can have a large impact on the culture of their institution.

Be visible in your local community. Reaching out through events provides a larger purpose for your chapter and is a great way to build community, give members teaching experience, and re-inspire homework laden physics students.

Be visible in the physics community. Start building your professional network by attending meetings, visiting laboratories and companies, joining professional physics societies, and being active in online forums. You will be amazed at the opportunities available in the broader physics community.

# Ideas for...

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## SPS Meetings

- Feature student speakers, such as those practicing their talks before going to zone meetings, or those who recently completed a summer research project. Make a schedule for the semester and post abstracts in advance, but also be flexible as new opportunities arise.
- Take on a physics research project as a chapter. Give updates at meetings throughout the semester.
- Eat lunch together while a speaker describes a project or recent trip to a conference. Discuss resume writing, job interviewing, and the job market. Invite someone from the career services office on campus to come for a discussion about physics related career options.
- Discuss a recent physics discovery or journal article, or current issues related to physics.
- Invite the department chairperson and have an informal discussion about what the department is doing and what goals the department has for recruitment and retention.
- Invite recent alumni to talk about their graduate school or employment experiences.

## Outreach activities

- Take the activities from an SPS Science Outreach Catalyst Kit into local classrooms.
- Participate in a science festival or host a science café.
- Hold a pumpkin launch, egg launch, or rocket launch contest for area children or community groups.
- Hold a demo show at a local school or community center, or hold one on campus and invite local groups. (Be sure to practice first!)
- Arrange for public viewing of astronomical objects through the department's telescopes.
- Work with other campus departments to arrange for tours of your campus laboratories for high schools students.
- Hold "haunted" lab tours around Halloween.
- Volunteer to judge science fairs in your local schools.

## Service to the physics department

- Conduct problem-solving sessions or tutoring sessions for students in introductory physics courses.
- Prepare bulletin boards and window displays for your department illustrating physical phenomena, historical personalities, the influence of physics in society, or the department's programs and personnel.
- Host or attend an SPS zone meeting.
- Publish a departmental newsletter for alumni, prospective students, donors, university administrators, students, colleagues, and other friends of the department.
- Help organize physics department colloquia.
- Collect information about graduate schools and summer research opportunities (your department receives stacks of this stuff in the mail), and then organize and post this on bulletin boards in your



department.

- Help organize a Sigma Pi Sigma induction ceremony.
- Build a float for the homecoming parade.

### Social events

- Hold a student-faculty picnic at the beginning of the academic year, and another at the end of the year. Be sure to include an icebreaker-type game to get faculty and students talking to each other!
- Go on a chapter camping trip, hike, or other outdoor bonding event.
- Have parties at holiday times (don't forget Pi Day!).
- After a big exam, have a "decompression party" at a faculty member's house.
- Host cheesy science movie night and serve liquid nitrogen ice cream.
- Challenge other groups on campus to bowling, ultimate Frisbee, or trivia games.
- Build a float for the homecoming parade or other campus events.

### Recruiting members

- Place prospective majors on your email list during new student recruitment.
- Participate in freshman orientation and other programs that acquaint students with campus organizations.
- Visit introductory physics classes and invite the students to SPS events.
- Involve interested freshmen in all SPS activities.
- Encourage non-physics majors with an interest in physics to join SPS.
- If your department has them, invite the graduate students to SPS functions.