

Inaugural Conference for Undergraduate Underrepresented Minorities in Physics

by Donna Hammer, Director of Education and SPS Advisor, University of Maryland

On October 7–9, 2016, the University of Maryland (UMD) Department of Physics and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) hosted the first Conference for Undergraduate Underrepresented Minorities in Physics (CU²MiP).

During the inaugural event, students from across the mid-Atlantic region were invited to participate in networking, career advice, research opportunity workshops, and seminars.

Through this conference, students networked with their peers and employers, and had the opportunity to present their research and experience to a leading national laboratory through the partnership with NIST.

This community-building conference provided undergraduate underrepresented minority students with information about

graduate programs and professions in physics, peer connections to others within the community, and for some, their first experience at a professional conference. As evident from the multitude of research by the American Institute of Physics, women and ethnic minority students are consistently underrepresented within many STEM fields, but are particularly sparse within physics undergraduate programs and careers. Building a sense of community and inclusion is vital to cultivating a diverse and representative society of physicists. CU²MiP encouraged a sense of connection among attendees and promoted awareness of the different career opportunities available to them.

The conference opened Friday with a welcoming address by Nobel laureate and distinguished university professor Bill Phillips, who spoke about having fun while pursuing a physics career. He also spoke with sadness of Katharine Blodgett Gebbie, the retired director of NIST's Physical Measurement Lab, who was pivotal in helping to organize the CU²MiP, but who had passed away earlier



LEFT: Donna Hammer, Director of Education and SPS chapter advisor, with Sarah Monk, SPS president, at the CU²MiP Poster Session. Photo courtesy of Troy Crosby, University of Maryland.

BELOW: CU²MiP participants share outcomes from group discussions during the "I, too, am..." Stereotyping and Microaggressions Workshop. Photo courtesy of Donna Hammer, University of Maryland.



that year. She had greatly looked forward to meeting the students of CU²MiP, Phillips said.

After a full afternoon of NIST lab tours, the conference attendees enjoyed dinner and talks by UMD distinguished university professor Jordan Goodman, NIST director Dr. Willie E. May, and University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) professor of physics Anthony Johnson. Saturday's activities included a welcome by alumna Delilah Gates, '15, now a graduate student at Harvard, and a talk by mathematician and UMBC County president Freeman A. Hrabowski III, which received a standing ovation. Interactions with representatives from professional societies and workshops on graduate school, research opportunities, and career paths ensued. A poster session preceded dinner, and regents professor Jim Gates gave the evening address. The UMD chapter of the Society of Physics Students then sponsored a physics trivia night.

Sunday's agenda included a talk by Dr. Tabbetha Dobbins of Rowan University, a community-building session, and an address by UMD department chair Steve Rolston. Several UMD physicists participated in "Exploring Careers in Physics," which highlighted the many ways that the analytical skills, knowledge, and technical expertise that accompany physics degrees can be put to use in academia, government, and industry. UMD undergraduates Paula Rodriquez and Myles Poole offered closing remarks.

Due to the great success of the inaugural event, Hammer and others are already hard at work planning the 2017 CU²MiP. Slated for October 6–8, the upcoming CU²MiP will once again provide a safe space for community members to discuss topics that most affect them. The SPS National Office will partner with the University of Maryland and NIST to provide opportunities for greater participation across the entire country. //



LEFT: Speakers Brad Conrad, Robert Brown, and Ted Hodapp with CU²MiP organizers Donna Hammer UMD and Angie Hight Walker NIST. Photo courtesy of Troy Crosby, University of Maryland.

BELOW: CU²MiP participants touring the NIST Center for Neutron Research. Photo courtesy of Donna Hammer, University of Maryland.

