

Breakout Session: Recruiting, Retention and Funding

Reported by Michael Thoennesen, session chair

Keivan Stassun (Vanderbilt/Fisk) focused on the masters to Ph.D. bridge program that has been established between Fisk and Vanderbilt University (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/A&S/physics/bridge/>). The motivation for the program was primarily to increase the number of PhDs from underrepresented minorities. There is a statistical significant difference in the path to degree between the majority students and African Americans. While the majority of physics students go directly from their BS/BA institution to a Ph.D. program, African Americans preferably enroll in a masters program. The goal of the program is to capture these students and show them a continuous path that can lead to a Ph.D. in physics. The program is funded by federal agencies (“NSF broader impact”) and Vanderbilt supports the students during the ‘bridge’ year.

More general recruiting options were discussed. Networking and individual contacts with professors at other institutions seemed to be most effective. One way to contact prospective students directly is to offer to speak at SPS meetings. Representation at large recruiting meetings, for example the California Forum for Diversity in Graduate Education, (<http://www.ucop.edu/acadadv/forum-for-diversity/recruiters/>) is most effective when it is done by physicists and not by administrators.

The Division of Nuclear Physics (DNP) of the APS is organizing a Conference Experience for Undergraduates (CEU, <http://physics.westmont.edu/ceu/>) where students receive funding to attend the annual fall meeting of the DNP. The students present a poster of their research work, which they performed during a summer internship or during the regular semester. In addition, there are general overview talks scheduled especially for the CEU students, a graduate recruiting session and an ice-cream social. It is an effective, very targeted recruiting option.

It was generally felt that high-profile, large stipends do not have a large impact on the recruiting success (“Throwing money at students does not work”).

Finally, it was suggested that maybe a common applications procedure similar to application to college (<http://www.commonapp.org>) or medical school (<http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas>) would be useful. The following discussion was in general positive and - although many questions and possible roadblocks were mentioned – there was agreement that APS/AAPT should explore the feasibility of a common graduate school application.