



SOCIETY OF PHYSICS STUDENTS

An organization of the American Institute of Physics

Sigma Pi Sigma Award Proposal

Project Proposal Title	Spring Awards Banquet
Name of School	University of Tennessee Knoxville
SPS Chapter Number	92
Total Amount Requested	\$500

Abstract

The University of Tennessee Knoxville is excited to celebrate physics students, staff, faculty, and alumni with our first ever spring awards banquet! It is an honor to be able to invite our department out for a night of recognition, socializing, Sigma Pi Sigma inductions, and physics awards.

Proposal Statement

Overview of Proposed Project/Activity/Event

Description: The University of Tennessee Knoxville is hosting our first ever spring awards banquet to recognize all of the hard work over everyone through the past two years of Covid, and host an in-person Sigma Pi Sigma induction. We are inviting alumni back to celebrate the Sigma Pi Sigma inductees.

Goals of the project: We will highlight Sigma Pi Sigma inductees and general physics awards. This banquet will promote a sense of community in the department and create a stronger bond with alumni.

Intended Audience: This is targeted to the UTK physics department, alumni, and focus on Sigma Pi Sigma inductees. Donors are also invited. The entire department and alumni will be impacted, and if the donors are impressed, will further donate to the physics department and help its improvement for coming years.

Background and Motivation: Like many departments across the country, we are facing a hard time in regards to retention rate, and SPS and Sigma Pi Sigma memberships. We will have our Sigma Pi Sigma inductions at this banquet, and will do a formal in-person induction which we have not been able to do for two years. By ensuring that this banquet is a success and memorable, more students will recognize that they are valued and cared for in the department. Almost every other department at UTK has an end of the year banquet, but the physics department currently does not. Especially for this being our first year, we want to set a strong precedent for an end of the year activity that is unforgettable, and looked forward to in following years. We will also build a connection with alumni, and invite them to the banquet. They did not have the send off last year like normal, so we want to ensure that they still feel valued and welcome in our department. It is important to maintain connections with alumni, as we have had many students ask alumni questions- especially in regards to industry or a particular graduate school they would want to attend.

How Proposed Activity Promotes Interest in Physics

This project is worthwhile because a sense of community is imperative in physics. Sigma Pi Sigma is a great way to start students in a physics and leadership based community. Retention rates are down across the country and in our own department, and promoting a better sense of community will encourage students to remain in physics, and encourage them to be more involved within the department. If they feel more involved and valued, they will actively participate in research more, be more active in SPS and Sigma Pi Sigma, and be motivated to participate in outreach to local schools.

Plan for Carrying Out Proposed Project/Activity/Event

Personnel: Jesse Farr (President of SPS chapter and AZC Zone 8), Hanno Weitering (Department head), Kate Jones (Assistant department head), Chrisanne Romeo (Front office secretary), Catherine Longmire (Department outreach), Maxim Lavrentovich (SPS advisor). Currently, Jesse Farr, Chrisanne Romeo, and Hanno Weitering are speaking to a coordinator for Rothchild's Catering in Knoxville, TN, to begin planning the menu and talk about budget. We already have the date of May 6th, 2022 set, and are getting ready to sign paperwork. Catherine Longmire will be in charge of marketing to alumni and donors, and will actively monitor the amount of outside people pledging to attend.

Marketing: We will begin advertising this in the beginning of the spring semester. Catherine Longmire will reach out to alumni, as well as recurring donors for our department, to let them know well in advance that this banquet is happening. It will be actively promoted weekly in SPS meetings, and posters will be hung around the department. Emails will be sent out to the department as well, and word of mouth will help it spread. This banquet is offsite, and we already have students who have agreed to drive UT vans for any student who may not have a car but still wants to attend.

SPS Member Participation: All SPS members are invited. SPS members will volunteer to make cheesy physics decorations suitable for a banquet space. We will need volunteers within the club to get to the banquet site early to set up the decorations. Ahead of time, SPS members will also come up with funny physics awards (think the Dundees if you've seen the office), and at the banquet will hand them out.

Expertise: Chrisanne Romeo has helped plan faculty retirement dinners at Rothchild's before, so she knows people there and the logistics of planning a large event. Kate Jones and Catherine Longmire will take initiative in preparing gift bags for the students and ordering merchandise. They have previously ordered UT physics merch, so it is no issue to reorder it or put in a request for a new product. Catherine Longmire is our department outreach person, so she can very easily get in touch with alumni and donors. The SPS members have the expertise of being students and so we can offer student input.

Project/Activity/Event Timeline

May 6th, 2022: Banquet (Evening)/Students set up decorations and swag bags/drive fellow students if need be to the site (Afternoon)

May 1st, 2022: Students make "paper plate awards" and bag swag/merch, complete decorations, awards close

April 1st, 2022: Funny awards are created and voting for awards begins

March 1st, 2022: Merch is ordered and Sigma Pi Sigma announcements go out

February 1st, 2022: Alumni and donors are notified of the event

Mid December 2021: Menu is chosen, paperwork is signed for Rothchild's, flier made for the event

Activity Evaluation Plan

We aim to have at least 15 inductees this year. Our goal is to have 60-70% department participation for the banquet. This includes undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, faculty, and staff. We also aim for 10 or more alumni to come to this event. This participation amount will be a sufficient amount to reinvigorate the momentum that was lost in our department during Covid, and show the members that they are valued and rewarded for their hard work. By establishing a sense of community, this will encourage students to have a renewed interest in physics if they were feeling burned out or on the fence about switching departments. We will ask for feedback via a survey after the event to improve for future banquets.

Budget Justification

The banquet room costs ~\$1800-\$2200, depending on the food menu. The department is covering ~\$1300 of that budget, and we are asking for funding from this award to offset the room cost. We will continue to fundraise for items for swag for our students, and possibly raise enough money to have a DJ. We want to ensure we can provide those extra fun items for the banquet, so we would use the \$500 for the initial room and food cost. By ensuring we have a room and food, we can focus our attention on fundraising for swag, which will increase the sense of community among our department.