

Brooke Chuzles

International Conference of Physics Students
Coimbra, Portugal
August 2005

I attended the ICPS in Portugal during August 2005. This was a fantastic experience and one I would strongly recommend to other Physics students throughout the world, and especially those in America since we were fairly underrepresented. There were many different aspects of the conference that contributed to the overall experience, including the international atmosphere, presentations of research projects, social programs, and learning more about the International Association of Physics Students (IAPS).

One aspect I really enjoyed was the international nature of the conference. Although there were people from 37 countries, some of which don't get along, everyone was very friendly and eager to learn about everyone else's culture. It was very interesting to meet students from around the world, all gathered to commemorate Physics, and to see that the experiences of a Physics student don't vary too much across borders.

At any conference of Physics, there are always a wide variety of topics covered in presentations. This conference was no different. I was one of over one hundred students to present. There was great variety in subject as well as level of difficulty. While most students presented their own research, there were a few who were more general, for example "A Brief History of Magnetism." It was exciting to see the different projects being researched throughout the world and to pick up on common interests. Some students from Turkey even asked for a copy of my presentation as they thought it would be relevant to their research. The possibility for international collaborations as a result of a conference like this one was intriguing.

In addition to the presentations on research, there were some workshops aimed at youth outreach programs. Although UW-La Crosse is fairly involved in this type of activity, there were quite a few demonstrations presented by a Danish group that I will take home with me. The sharing of ideas on how to get youth interested and the importance of college students in this endeavor are something I hope will be continued in this conference's future.

Although the main focus of the conference was to share and increase knowledge of global Physics activity, there were also a variety of social activities included in the program. Every evening, there was some sort of party or concert. Participants chose between an organ concert in the university chapel and a jazz concert. Other nights held the Welcome, National, Costume, and Farewell parties. At the National Party, to represent the United States, I served peanut butter sandwiches. Many students had "heard about it and seen it in movies" but had never tasted it. It was a surprising success. In addition to the social activities held in the department, there was also a walking tour of Coimbra, a trip to the beautiful beach town Figueira da Foz including a barbecue and traditional song and dance performance, a tour of local Physics industries, and a free day in Sintra. Overall, there was a good balance of academic and social activities throughout the conference.

Finally, I served as the representative at the IAPS general meeting. It was nice to be able to learn more about this organization, through the meeting. Votes were taken on various aspects including membership fees, changes to the charter, the location of ICPS 2007 and elections for the next term's executives. It was decided that membership fees will now be prorated according to each country's GDP in order to make it more affordable for poorer nations. This means that the USA will now pay 300 Euro instead of 240 for its national committee. It was also decided that London would be the location of ICPS 2007. A few asked if the US would consider hosting a conference but quickly changed their minds after thinking about flight costs. There was a general interest in the USA becoming more involved in IAPS. One idea that I feel has possibilities would be to arrange an exchange program, perhaps through chapters of SPS. The communications executive is interested in a semester length research, and/or coursework, exchange program. Since many American universities are very supportive of "global experiences," perhaps this could be one way we could become more involved in IAPS. I would be willing to help in any way I could if this is something of interest for SPS (or if there is something else you would like assistance with).

Parts of ICPS 2005 were a bit chaotic, as should be expected with a group of nearly 400. Overall, I felt the conference went extremely well. I would strongly recommend participation in this conference to any student of Physics. If possible, I would like to attend again in 2007. I am very grateful for the SPS Outstanding Student Researcher Award and the opportunity to participate in such a wonderful program.

