



SOCIETY OF PHYSICS STUDENTS

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February 28, 2011

Dr. Joseph L. Dehmer
Division Director, Physics
The National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Dehmer,

On behalf of the Society of Physics Students and the associated honor society of physics, Sigma Pi Sigma (collectively referred to as "SPS" below), we are writing to urge the Physics, Astronomical Sciences, and Materials Research Divisions of NSF to maintain their support of Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) programs and to increase the level of REU support over the next decade.

In December of 2008, the governing Council of the SPS led the physics community in approving an official policy statement on undergraduate research:

We advocate that every student majoring in physics and/or astronomy engage in a meaningful undergraduate research experience.

We have seen (and independent research shows) that this kind of experience often is the watershed event during which many proto-scientists begin to identify themselves as part of the scientific community, and is thus critical to the health of the discipline.

Our recommendation of support for REUs is clearly aligned with the NSF Strategic Plan: *Investing in America's Future* (FY: 2006-2011) which includes, as part of its second Strategic Outcome Goal, the text "Learning: Cultivate a world-class, broadly inclusive science and engineering workforce, and expand the scientific literacy of all citizens." Undergraduate research provides a concrete and tested way to cultivate the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics workforce.

The SPS has a long history of advancing undergraduate research opportunities through the establishment and maintenance of research awards, the production of the Journal of Undergraduate Research in Physics, and the support for students to present research at physics conferences, often in close partnership with other physics associations. Perhaps most significantly, tens of thousands of physics students each year utilize the SPS Undergraduate Research Clearinghouse (www.the-nucleus.org/research), housed within ComPADRE, the NSF-funded digital library physics pathway project, to select summer research opportunities at hundreds of institutions.

We deeply appreciate the National Science Foundation's past and current efforts in promoting and funding REU programs. Looking to the future, we are concerned to find a slight decrease in funding totals for REUs in the NSF Select Cross-Cutting Programs FY2012 Request to Congress; we strongly urge the Physics, Astronomical Sciences, and Materials Research Divisions of NSF to maintain their support of REU programs at or above the FY2010 Omnibus levels, and to increase support over the next decade. We are eager to continue the dialogue in support of undergraduate research at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Chris Faesi, Student Representative
SPS Executive Committee

Toni Sauncy
SPS President

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cc: D. Caldwell, D. Henry, K. McCloud, S. Gitomer, M. Goldberg, B. Berger, B. Keister, J. Whitmore, B. Schneider



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