Director's Matters

By Sean Bentley, Director of Society of Physics Students and Sigma Pi Sigma

Light and inspiration for a better world

As someone who has spent over two decades studying and researching optics, I was excited to learn that 2015 had been designated the International Year of Light. With an impressive list of sponsors, including AIP and three Member Societies (APS, OSA, and AAS), it was clear that the year holds great potential. Kicking the year off right, I had the opportunity to attend the opening ceremony held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France, on January 19-20.

A celebration of light in the City of Light was certainly one to remember. Located near the shimmering Eiffel Tower, both the UNESCO globe and the building itself were lit in bright colors for the event. Ambassadors and other dignitaries from around the world discussed political and cultural implications of light. Leading scientists, including five Nobel laureates, highlighted major advances that have shaped our modern world. Speakers covered the spectrum from France Cordova, Director of the National Science Foundation, to Gianfranco Cardinal Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture.

There were art exhibits, as well as cultural, historical, and educational displays honoring the work of Ibn Al-Haytham, an 11th century scientist who wrote the first major text on optics. We were even treated to the musical mastery of Joshua Bell, who performed pieces from the score of the upcoming film Einstein's Light. If these two days would be any indication, the International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies was going to make quite a splash.

Heading into the event, however, I held one major question—what would the positive outcomes of the International Year of Light truly be?

Read more.
Building relationships on the Hill

Amidst the release of the President’s FY 2016 budget request, reauthorization of NASA as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the House Science Space and Technology Committee hearings on topics ranging from supercomputing to major research facilities of the National Science Foundation (NSF), AIP Government Relations staff has been supporting many of its Member Societies as they prepare to bring physicists to Capitol Hill. These congressional visits come at a time when Congress is considering funding for federal agencies including the NSF, NASA, NIST, DOE, and DOD. Having the physical sciences community discuss their research on the Hill helps congressional staff members as they go about the process of deciding which programs will receive funding increases and which will receive decreases.

Read more.

Who teaches high school physics? What do they teach?

During the 2012-13 school year, 27,000 teachers taught at least one physics class in U.S. high schools. In two reports recently posted by the Statistical Research Center, we examine the demographics, academic backgrounds, and teaching assignments for these teachers. In one report, we take a closer look at the teachers themselves. Over one-third are women, and about one-third have a degree in physics or physics education. Two-thirds of the teachers who teach physics in U.S high schools also teach classes in other subjects, so in a separate report, we look at the classes — both the variety of physics classes and classes in other subjects — that these teachers teach. The data for both of these reports come from our 2012-13 Nationwide Survey of High School Physics Teachers.
The SPS Observer, Winter 2014-15 issue

In this issue we meet students and scientists involved in policy and governance at the local, regional, and national levels.

Coming Up

February 24

- Brown Bag lunch talk, "Shaping a Middle Ground: Emergence of the AGU Committee on Environmental Quality, 1970-1974," given by Gabriel Henderson, Ph.D., Post-doctoral Historian, Center for Science Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark (College Park)

February 25

- AIP Publishing Board of Managers meeting (New York, NY)

February 25-28

- NSBP 2015 Annual Conference (Baltimore, MD)
- AIP Education Advisory Committee meeting (Baltimore, MD)

February 26-27

- Physics Resources Advisory Committee meetings (College Park)

February 28

- Physics Resources Policy Committee meeting (College Park)

March 2-6

- APS March Meeting (San Antonio, TX)

March 7-10

- AAPM Spring Clinical Meeting (St. Louis, MO)

March 11

- AIP and AIP Publishing birthday celebrations (College Park and Melville)

March 13

- AIP milk-and-cookies social (College Park)

March 22-26
March 24

- Einstein Fellows meeting (College Park)

March 26

- AIP Public Lecture. Charles Falco of the University of Arizona will present, “The Science of Optics; The History of Art.” A reception starts at 5:30 pm, and the talk starts at 6:30 pm. (College Park)

March 26-27

- AIP Board of Directors meeting (College Park)