Discussion Question Answers
The National Society of Black Physicists

1. Why was it important for the founders of the NSBP to create such an organization?
The first meeting was really to honor three “elders” who had trained many of the black physicists who would go on to get PhDs. The enthusiasm for this meeting led to other meetings, and the NSBP was founded in order to provide support for, and increase the number of black people in physics. They wanted a society in which they would have the role of creating activities “themselves for themselves.”

2. Why is it significant that the organization began to take shape in the late 1960s and was formed in the 1970s?
The 1960s was a decade of mass awakening in the black community. It was when the Civil Rights movement was most active and successful. The 1970s saw less progress (or even reversal) on some measures of civil rights (re-segregation, White Flight, etc.). One way to improve the lot of Black Americans was to employ more in high status jobs such as research scientists.

3. Who are some of the senior physicists that founded what became the National Society of Black Physicists?
Ronald E. Mickens, Carl Spight, Walter Massey, James Davenport.

4. What role did Dr. Ronald E. Mickens play in the organization of African-American physicists?
He took over the Roster of Black Physicists from Howard Foster. He was the lead organizer of the First National Physics Fellows Award Dinner. He founded the National Society of Black Physicists.

5. While the National Society of Black Physicists was founded in 1977, the work leading up to this milestone began with an event held in 1972 under what name?
The First National Physics Fellows Awards Dinner (later called the First Annual Day of Scientific Lectures).

6. Dr. Ronald E. Mickens continued the work of which physicist with his efforts in extending the “Roster of Black Physicists”?
Howard Foster, Alabama A&M University Physics Chair started the list.

7. Brainstorm some possible reasons why it was important for Dr. Foster, Dr. Mickens, and others to develop a “Roster of Black Physicists”?
The Roster allowed African American physicists to learn of mentors and opportunities to study with experienced researchers. It also allowed anyone who examined it to realize the number of prominence of minority physicists.

8. What other groups was the National Society of Black Physicists “not intended to supplant”?
Why do you think the NSBP organizers were explicit in stating this?
The NSBP “is not intended to supplant” the American Institute of Physics, American Astronomical Society, and many others. ¹ The organizers want to make it clear they have the same goals as other societies, but they desire an organization in which black people are both the audience and developers of the society’s activities. Otherwise, it could be interpreted that the NSBP was a competing organization, rather than a complementary one.

9. **What is the scope of the NSBP? Why did the NSBP develop connections with the National Society of Hispanic Physicists?**

The organization seeks to develop and support efforts to increase opportunities, numbers, and visibility for African Americans in physics. According to the American Association of Hispanic Physicists, there are common challenges and opportunities facing both organizations (these might include less visibility for minority scientists, lack of funding for training minority scientists, and inadequate numbers of minority physics majors).²

10. **What kinds of issues does the NSBP advocate for on behalf of African American physicists?**

The 16 sections of the NSBP plan lectures and meetings, as well as provide information about funding for research and training. Their meeting in 2015 focused on training more minority science students to expand America’s technical manpower. The organization researches the challenges faced by minority students in an attempt to alleviate them.

---

¹ [https://www.aip.org/member-societies](https://www.aip.org/member-societies)
² [http://www.hispanicphysicists.org/history.html](http://www.hispanicphysicists.org/history.html)
Discussion Question Answers
The National Society of Black Physicists

(Possible) Group Presentation Answers

a. NSBP Mission: What is the mission of the NSBP? How do they try to accomplish that mission?
   - The NSBP promotes the professional well-being of African American physics students within the scientific community and society.
   - The NSBP holds conferences where both undergraduate and graduate students can connect with senior researchers. It also provides information about scholarships, funding sources, and research opportunities to African American physicists.

b. Black Physics Community: What are some of the scientific interests of the NSBP which have their own scientific sections at the annual meeting?
   - (16 possible answers): Acoustics (ACOU)
   - Astronomy and Astrophysics (ASTRO)
   - Atomic, Molecular and Optical Physics (AMO)
   - Chemical and Biological Physics (CBP)
   - Condensed Matter and Materials Physics (CMMP)
   - Cosmology, Gravitation, and Relativity (CGR)
   - Earth and Planetary Systems Sciences (EPSS)
   - Fluid and Plasma Physics (FPP)
   - Health Physics (HEA)
   - History, Policy and Education (HPE)
   - Mathematical and Computational Physics (MCP)
   - Medical Physics (MED)
   - Nuclear and Particle Physics (NPP)
   - Photonics and Optics (POP)
   - Physics Education Research (PER)
   - Technology Transfer, Business Development and Entrepreneurism (TBE)
c. NSBP Conference: What have been some of the previous themes of the NSBP conferences? Why might a physicist want to attend these events?

- 2016: “The Value of the Minority Physics Student: A Talent Source for America’s Technical Future
- 2015: Re-Visioning the Future of Scientific Leadership
- A physicist might attend to learn what is happening in their field, network with other scientists, meet current and future students, or present their scientific results.

d. Scholarships and Prizes: What scholarships and prizes does the NSBP award? What are these scholarships for?

- The NSBP has the Carl Albert Rouse Undergraduate Research Fellowship, which supports an undergraduate to study astrophysics at Caltech. It is named after Carl Rouse, who was the first African American to become a professional astrophysicist.