

Report on Panel Session on Climate and Diversity prepared by session chair Chandralekha Singh, University of Pittsburgh

The panelist in the session were Dr. Margaret Murnane from JILA/University of Colorado, Boulder and Dr. Vincent Rodgers from University of Iowa. First, both panelists gave presentations. Dr. Murnane's presentation focused on the status of women in physics and how to make graduate study in physics more appealing to women physicists. Dr. Rodgers presentation focused on how to promote diversity in physics education by heavily including under-represented groups in research projects via special programs developed to increase their enthusiasm for higher studies in physics. The programs that he and Dr. Jim Gates from the University of Maryland have developed, called the Student Summer Theoretical Physics Research Session, provides intensive academic support to prepare students for higher studies and focuses on inclusion on under-represented groups into research as opposed to separating them into different programs. Their summer research groups include American women, minorities, white Americans and international students working alongside each other on various projects.

In the discussion session, Dr. Rodgers explained that they do not provide stipend to students who attend their summer program but pay for their travel, room and board. He noted that their team is so committed to assisting the students of the program to carry out physics research that the students are empowered to work comfortably in graduate programs. Many of the students in their program pursue higher studies including at institutions such as Cal Tech. He also noted that in their summer program, social activities are included to help students get to know each other and the instructors or coaches.

Dr. Murnane was asked about the fact that they have eliminated comprehensive exam for

physics graduate students at the University of Colorado Boulder. Instead, they consider graduate students' performance on the core courses to determine if the students should continue in the program. She explained that many students spend the first two years studying for the exam and do not start their research. Too many exams are particularly difficult for women because this extends the time to degree. She noted that they have found very good correlation between students' performance on the core courses and how they performed on the comprehensive exam (when they used to require both things). This finding motivated them to eliminate the comprehensive exam.