

Bridges:

A Report on the Sigma Pi Sigma Chapter Award for Ramapo College of New Jersey

FEATURE

— Contributed by Brian Knorr, President of the Physics Club at Ramapo College of NJ, April 23, 2007

On Saturday April 21, 2007, the Physics Club of Ramapo College of New Jersey (RCNJ) presented an event entitled Bridges: A Connection Across Ramapo Generations. Approximately 25 people were in attendance. These included the science supervisor from Ramapo High School as well as several high school students from the Mahwah district. We also had the former convener of the physics program at RCNJ, currently retired; several RCNJ faculty and a large number of physics majors.

The event was opened at 1:00 pm by Dr. Daniela Buna. She began by explaining that the purpose of the gathering was twofold: First, to bring former Ramapo graduates and current Ramapo students together in order to foster the transfer of knowledge, advice, and encouragement; and second, to stay informed about the current research being done. Following this, Dr. Buna credited both Sigma Pi Sigma and Ramapo College for financially supporting the event. After this introduction, three Ramapo College Physics graduates spoke.

The first speaker was David R. Russell, who currently teaches physics at Ramapo High School in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey. David spoke on “Getting started teaching HS science; It didn’t kill me, so I must be stronger....Why teaching is not for everyone but it could be for you!” He highlighted the “traditional route” to getting a teaching license and some of the



Federico Halpern presents his research in “Computer simulations of the next step ITER fusion reactor.”

Photograph courtesy Ramapo College of New Jersey

struggles and triumphs of being a first-year teacher. He talked about having a significant course load which included a range of levels from Introductory Physics with freshman to AP Physics with seniors. David ended his talk by showing various humorous comics drawn by students which also included physics knowledge they learned in his class.

Jennifer Hetzler spoke second about “Teaching After College.” Jennifer, who teaches Chemistry and Physics at Palmyra High School in Palmyra, New Jersey, also spoke about being a first-year teacher. Jennifer, however, explained the “alternate route” to getting a teaching license and her experience teaching in an underprivileged area.

Lastly, Federico Halpern, a graduate student at Lehigh University, presented some of his research in “Computer simulations of the next step ITER fusion reactor.” Federico described how tokamak fusion reactors work and their potential benefits along with various problems foreseen in the design. He further explained the results of his research and its implications on the operating parameters of the ITER fusion reactor currently being constructed in southern France.

All three talks were very interesting and informative and those present enjoyed them thoroughly. Each of the three speakers fielded questions on their respective topic before the gathering was concluded with a sit-down meal and finally the induction of all three speakers into the Sigma Pi Sigma Honor Society.



Jennifer Hetzler, Federico Halpern, and David Russell are inducted into Sigma Pi Sigma.

Photograph courtesy Ramapo College of New Jersey