



All Things Ignatian



Heartland Jesuit Physics Retreat

presented by Michael Cherney for the Creighton Physics Department



Gordon Ramsey from Loyola of Chicago shares his insights with instructors from Rockhurst, Marquette and Creighton. Photo Credit: Thomas Zepf

History

In 2003, Dr. Ruth Howes of Marquette University suggested a joint meeting of the Physics Departments from Marquette, Loyola of Chicago and Creighton to discuss teaching issues. Dr. Robert Kennedy, who was then chair of the Creighton Physics Department, suggested that Jesuit Mission be part of the discussion. The first joint meeting of faculty from the three departments took place at a central location for the three institutions, Camp Wyoming, in Wyoming, Iowa. Fr. Larry Gillick served as the facilitator for this meeting.

The Physics Departments continued to meet on an annual basis always in the Dubuque area. The meeting was expanded to include both faculty and staff. Representatives from St. Louis University and Rockhurst are also regular participants. Other individuals who have served as facilitators include Fr. Gregory Carlson, Fr. Michael Morrison and Br. Guy Consolmagno from the Vatican Observatory.



An informal gathering following Mass in the lounge. Photo Credit: Thomas Zepf

Structure

The retreat begins on a Friday evening with most participants leaving for the meeting after their last class. The retreat begins with an extended social hour. This often allows individuals to showcase spirits and other libations from their culture. (Physics Departments are often the most ethnically diverse departments on campus.) This has proved effective in getting individuals to open up at an early stage in the meeting.

Saturday normally begins with Mass for those wish to attend. The morning session tends to have the attributes of a workshop meeting of physics teachers that one might encounter at a national or regional conference. The afternoon session generally focuses on how we can work together to create the best experience for our students.



A discussion about the expectations for physics majors at Creighton, Loyola and Marquette with input from Br. Guy Consolmagno of the Vatican Observatory. Photo Credit: Thomas Zepf

Sometimes a Challenge

Each department has its strengths. Loyola of Chicago is particularly effective in recruiting undergraduate physics students. Creighton is the leader in obtaining external funding. Marquette has the best developed service learning courses. Creighton faculty tend to be much more explicit in terms of being partners in the mission, while the other institutions have a sense that mission concerns are more the realm of campus ministry. This results in a general openness to, but less of an eagerness for discussion about the faculty's role in the mission.

Moving Forward

Collaboration among the schools has improved. The meetings have resulted in the development of common seminars shared over the web. More significantly it initiated a series of voluntary departmental reviews. As these reviews were not mandated by the administration and were carried out by individuals who already were aware of issues in the department, they were able to confront issues that might remain hidden to an outsider.