

## RECENT EFFORTS AT CORNELL TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN IN THE SCIENCES

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As a Cornell graduate student in physics (concentrating in astronomy), I have had ample opportunity to design and participate in various programs to encourage young women and girls to pursue science. My original poster presentation included programs for K–12 girls, but I will not emphasize these for this abridged version.

### 1. WOMEN IN PHYSICS AND RELATED FIELDS

Women in Physics and Related Fields is a group composed mainly of graduate students in physics, astronomy, chemistry, math, and engineering. We have weekly meetings open to anyone; people bring their lunches and the physics department funds the cookies.

The purpose of the group is to create a friendly, non-threatening environment to learn about the research of female colleagues, to discuss women's issues, and in general to have the opportunity to meet other female grad students, post docs, and professors. Our meetings provide a unique chance for female scientists to practice giving talks to an audience of people who are not specialists in their own field. Typically, about ten people show up to any given meeting. Once in a while, we have a surprise—last spring, physics professor Barbara Cooper led a general discussion of women's issues in academia to which more than 50 people came. Men occasionally attend, but the speaker or discussion leader is always a woman.

Besides our weekly meetings, many of us participate in activities geared towards younger women and girls. One such program is “Expanding Your Horizons,” when 6–8th grade girls and their parents participate in hands-on science and math experiments for a day. This year, we would also like to start a “mentoring” program for female junior and senior physics and astronomy majors, offering advice about graduate school and beyond.

### 2. WOMEN IN SCIENCE—FOR THE FUN OF IT

This was a conference held in Oct. 1991 to which all undergraduate women were invited to explore math and science as a major. The day consisted of a keynote speaker, small working groups by major, and a general discussion. I consider the conference to have been partially successful. Here are some comments:

About 50 or 60 undergraduates attended, plus at least that many volunteers (mostly grad students and profs).

The keynote speaker, Mae Jemison (who very recently was the first black woman to fly in space) was FANTASTIC. She was very enthusiastic and encouraging.

Some of the small groups (one per major) had very constructive and well-attended discussion, while others had no one show up, INCLUDING PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY.

The discussion on “Options and Networking” featured three “unconventional” graduate students. One was a former high school biology teacher who got bored with teaching the same material, and is now in graduate school. Another was a math major at Cornell who drifted for a few years after graduating, but finally started working with a professor in computer science, and is now a grad student. The third speaker got tired of her business programming job, followed her husband to Wells College, started substitute teaching, and is now in graduate school at 40 years old in biology.

Suggestions for the future as a result of this conference included:

- Sending out a response form to incoming freshmen women during the summer to assign them to a “family-like” advising structure, which will include one or more professors (one female if possible), a female graduate student, and a female undergraduate to help them in any academic or social problems that may arise. The advising would be strictly voluntary.
- Establishing a speaker series, especially including women who are in industry.
- Setting up a social event in the spring before declaration of majors for sophomores by department or college for female students considering scientific majors.

If anyone has any questions or comments, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the address below, by phone (607-255-4083) or e-mail ([stolovy@astrosun.tn.cornell.edu](mailto:stolovy@astrosun.tn.cornell.edu)).

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