

**PHYS 698**  
**Physics Seminar**  
Fall 2015

**Seminar Hours:** Wed. 3:30 – 4:30 PM, in Physics 401  
**Instructor:** Matthew Pelton  
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### **Course Description**

Departmental Colloquia are one of the most important ways that scientists communicate to one another about the research that they are doing. They are less formal and specialized than journal papers and conference talks, and a central purpose is to provide an opportunity for interaction between the speaker and the audience. Colloquia are also one of the few events that bring the entire department together on a regular basis, so participation in the Colloquia is an important part of being an active member of the Department of Physics.

You, as graduate students, are a central part of the audience, so speakers should try to present their material in a way that you can at least grasp the key points. This doesn't always happen, and you are certain not to understand everything that is presented. If you've been paying attention and you don't understand, then there's a good chance that the speaker hasn't been explaining the material at the appropriate level, so you should ask questions.

In order to get the most out of the talks, however, it's not a bad idea to come prepared. The Colloquium schedule is on the Department of Physics homepage, under "News & Events." For each talk, the name and home institution of the speaker, a title, and an abstract will be available. This will give you at least a general idea what to expect. You will likely be able to find a research homepage for most of the speakers that tells you more about what they do.

Any job that you eventually get as a professional scientist will involve standing in front of an audience and explaining your work – probably more often than you think. The Colloquium series is a good opportunity for you to observe what works, and what doesn't work, when giving a scientific talk, so that you can remember them when it becomes your turn.

## Grading

This course is graded on a pass / fail basis. In order to pass the course, you must attend *all* the talks, and much participate in *every* talk in one of two ways:

- Ask a meaningful scientific question during the presentation. All talks are followed by a question-and-answer period, but you should also feel free to raise your hand and ask a question during the talk. The question you ask doesn't have to be hugely profound, but it should be something more than, "Can you repeat what you just said?" In order to get credit for doing this, send me an e-mail after the talk reminding me what question you asked.
- Turn in a one-page report about the talk. You can send the report to me by e-mail, and it is due by the end of the Friday immediately following the talk. The report should contain the following elements:
  - The speaker, title, and date of the talk
  - A brief summary of the main points of the talk. What was the main thing that the speaker wanted us to learn?
  - An explanation of a way in which the talk is related to some other aspect of physics. This could be another talk that you've attended, material that you've covered in your course, a paper that you've read, the research you're interested in doing yourself, or anything else that you know about.
  - A brief comment on what was or was not effective in the speaker's presentation style.

If extraordinary circumstances mean that you cannot attend a particular talk, you must let me know about them as soon as possible.

## Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, the Faculty Handbook, or the UMBC Policies section of the UMBC Directory. Misconduct, such as cheating or plagiarism, will result at a minimum in a failing grade in the course and a report to the Academic Misconduct Reporting Database.