

PHYS 698
Physics Seminar
Fall 2017

Seminar Hours: Wed. 3:30 – 4:30 PM, in Physics 401
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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.

As graduate students, you 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 a good 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. In some cases, faculty in the department with the same specialty as the speaker will arrange for a meeting with the speaker, which usually involves sending out a paper or review article to read beforehand. This is a great opportunity to speak with an expert in a field that you are considering for your future career (and to impress them with good questions that show you have been reading ahead!)

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 must participate in every talk in one of three ways listed below. Regardless of which way that you participate, you must register your participation using [this google form](#). You must fill out this form after **every** colloquium. It is due by the following Thursday at 5 PM.

Here are the three possible ways to participate:

- Ask a meaningful scientific question during or after 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 should be something more than, “Can you repeat what you just said?” or asking them to explain a graph, it must indicate that you were following the talk and hopefully bring about some insightful comments from the speaker.
- Participate in a meeting with the speaker, either one-on-one or as part of a group of students. If you’re part of a group meeting, you are expected to participate actively in the discussion – simply being present isn’t enough. Meetings can usually be arranged through the faculty member who is hosting the speaker. In order to get credit for doing this, you should (very generally) describe what you discussed in the meeting.
- Turn in a one-page (several paragraph) report about the talk. The report should contain the following elements:
 - 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 will result at a minimum in a failing grade in the course, and 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 Graduate School website.