



SOCIETY OF PHYSICS STUDENTS

An organization of the American Institute of Physics

Future Faces of Physics Award Proposal

Project Proposal Title	James Webb Space Telescope and Elevating Muted Voices
Name of School	University of Central Florida
SPS Chapter Number	SPS 1076
Total Amount Requested	\$500.00

Abstract

SPS-UCF will host a panel around the naming of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and broader matters of discrimination. The name has been criticized as former NASA administrator James Webb has been accused of discrimination towards employees. The panel will discuss the concerns of underrepresented minorities in physics.

Proposal Statement

Overview of Proposed Project/Activity/Event

NASA has been under public pressure to change the name of a major space telescope mission. The telescope, which is named after James Webb, a former NASA administrator, has been accused of deliberately removing NASA employees on the basis of their sexuality. NASA has said to have completed an internal investigation where they did not uncover evidence warranting a name change.

The specific goal of the panel is to bring awareness about the controversies regarding the naming of the JWST and why it is relevant to those in attendance, regardless if they are directly impacted by the choice of name. UCF-SPS believes that symbolic gestures such as the naming of a cornerstone project by a large governmental agency have meaning and broader impact. A broader goal of the guided panel is to host a forum where issues relevant to the LGBT+ community and other minority communities within STEM are discussed.

The panel will start off with a short presentation informing those in attendance about the current state of the JWST and the debate up to the present. After which, a moderator will be able to pose questions to the panel. Through the panel, both selected speakers and attendees will be able to converse about various topics such as instances of discrimination they or people they know have faced, specifically within the context of academia and industry. The audience will also get a chance to ask the panel members questions directly.

Although the science community has made progress towards eliminating prejudice and bigotry, projects like this one are necessary to increase awareness and promote effective conversation about the still very present obstacles minority groups face in succeeding in a STEM career. Recent surveys have found that scientists who identify as LGBT+ experience stress, minor health problems, insomnia, and depressive symptoms at higher rates than those who don't (Cech and Waidzunus 2021). Further findings saw that LGBT+ scientists who belong to minority ethnic groups face more discrimination than those who are white.

The audience of the panel is anyone who is interested in solutions to breaking the barriers pertaining to LGBT+ and other minorities in the physics community. The intended audience includes undergraduate and graduate students, as well as other relevant student organizations. These include the Women In Physics Society and the Astronomy Society. UCF-SPS will be the primary organizers for this event.

The event will take place in a large venue, such as a lecture hall, and will have accommodations for speakers who are in person as well as virtual. Anyone may choose to attend in person or virtually. By holding this event, we are able to build on the strong work accomplished last spring by our past FFOP award. From that event, we were able to glean useful information about what worked well and what improvements we can make currently.

How Proposed Activity Promotes Physics Across Cultures

The event will promote physics across cultures by curating the discussion about systematic issues which only certain groups are directly impacted by. The event will be used as a tool to educate attendees across cultures who are not aware of the societal hindrances placed on those who are part of minority groups. The standardized coursework of our SPS members (as well as other students in different STEM departments) places no emphasis on how matters of discrimination and prejudice impact not only the workplace environment but also how it impacts access to funding and preferred research approaches. Through the FFOP award, the JWST panel will be able to start to fill the gap.

The event intends to catalyze important conversations surrounding the relationship between societal issues and matters concerning those in academia. When comparing how leaders in STEM related fields such as a physics department tackle structural concerns with leaders in the social sciences, they tend to fall behind. Through the Future Faces of Physics Award, we will be able to help educate and inform the next generation of physics leaders to not shy away from controversies around the health and wellbeing of their most vulnerable populations.

Plan for Carrying Out Proposed Project/Activity/Event

Rajib Chowdhury, the Vice President of the SPS chapter, will be the event lead and in charge of contacting all potential panel speakers. Throughout the year, he will relay the planning progress with SPS Faculty Supervisors Dr. Adrienne Dove and Dr. Costas Efthimou. Other members of the officer board for SPS at UCF, Spencer Tamagni, Olivia Bitcon, and Madisyn Brooks, will be involved in the planning of the structure of the panel.

Marketing for the event will be present through a variety of mediums. Posters will be placed in all of the major message boards around campus. Emails informing all those in this physics department will be sent out to inform about the event. SPS-UCF at this moment in time has been working on increasing its social media presence through Instagram and Discord, both of which will be involved in the marketing campaign.

Most of our SPS members are expected to participate, either as an attendee or as a volunteer. There will also be major collaboration with other organizations on campus with similar interests in engaging with the student body on structural issues, such as the Astronomy Society and the Women in Physics Society.

There are many people participating in the planning of this event who are also concurrently involved in the planning of other similar events, including the planning of the 2022 CUWIP which will be held at the University of Central Florida. In addition to the expertise from those who are planning CUWIP, many of those involved were also involved in last year's FFOP event which was a major success.

Project/Activity/Event Timeline

Timeline

October 2021 – December 2021

Reach out to possible speakers for the panel

January 2022 – February 2022

Confirm speaker list for panel

Initial list of possible candidates: Christina Kreisch, Shirley Ho, Agnes Ferte

Reach out to potential panel attendees for preferences

April 2022 – March 2022

Hold panel

Collect survey responses from attendees

Activity Evaluation Plan

The success of the event will be measured through multiple surveys, including an RSVP two weeks before the panel, as well as an attendance survey. After the panel is concluded, a survey will be sent to collect reviews about the execution of the event, as well as how the panel changed or added to their existing viewpoints. The chapter will use this information in the planning of future events. We will also take notes on the recurring concerns brought forth by students and will relay these concerns to the physics department and College of Sciences leadership.

Budget Justification

SPS-UCF is requesting \$500.00 which will be the only source of funding for the event. The budget will be used in part to provide an honorarium for the speakers. The remaining funds not used will be put into snacks and refreshments for those who attend the in-person component of the event. SPS-UCF has found through experience that snacks are an effective manner of bringing in attendees. There will also need to be adequate filming and lighting equipment for the venue where the panel will be held. Funds will be placed towards the printing of posters advertising the event. These posters will be placed around the university campus to advertise to those not in the physics department.