



UWRF

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Physics

Newsletter



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www.uwrf.edu/physics

Winter 2026

Physics Reunion Planned for March 27-28

This spring, on Friday and Saturday, March 27-28, the UWRF Physics Department will be hosting our first alumni reunion in 11 years, and we are hoping that we can get many alumni to come back for it. Based on survey results last spring, we will split the events over the two days to best fit the availability of as many people as possible, knowing that most can only attend one of the two days.

We anticipate that most of the events will take place in the new SciTech building - except for specific events that take us to North Hall, South Hall, or Centennial Science Hall. The reunion is planned for the weekend before the building's official Grand Opening event, so you'll all be getting an early look at the new spaces. A tentative list of events is below.

What we need most of all at this point is to get a better idea of how many people plan to attend on each day of the event, so we have prepared a short survey (<https://tinyurl.com/22zdnbe2>) which is also accessible via the QR code on page 3. Turnout is best when attendees help recruit other alums to come along, so please do reach out to people of your era to see if they are interested in attending.

We also encourage everyone to send in photos from your time in RF - we hope to create a video montage of the photos to be displayed throughout the event. We'll take photos in any format you'd like to send them - just email them to Lowell.McCann@uwrf.edu, along with any related information about them: approximate date/year, identities of the people in the photos, the event, etc.)

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UWRF Physics Students Attend PhysCon

At the beginning of November, seven UWRF Physics student travelled out to Denver, CO to participate in the Physics and Astronomy Congress (PhysCon), a 'global' meeting of mostly undergraduate physics students. The event is hosted by Sigma Pi Sigma, the physics and astronomy honors society, and happens once every three years.

At the congress, the students were kept busy with workshops, networking events, speakers, and tours of science labs in the Denver area. It gave them an opportunity to learn about a wide array of career pathways from people who took those paths themselves.

While the students applied for every grant they could to help cover the cost of the trip, we were able to guarantee they could go because of the support of our alumni, who have made donations in the past to support activities like these. Thank you!

The UWRF physics students in attendance were: Raidyn Bilotta, Alissa Frank, Brook Mclaird, Haylie Rasmussen, Jon Tabora, Balila Tesfamariam, and Ian Vanveen.



Left to right: Ian Vanveen, Raidyn Bilotta, Brook Mclaird, Balila Tesfamariam, Alissa Frank, and Haylie Rasmussen relax in Denver while attending the PhysCon Meeting. Photo: H. Rasmussen.

Interviews and ‘Real-life’ Advice: Alumni Connecting with Current Students

In the Physics Department’s Introduction to Internships course, students are shown ways to find internship or job opportunities and get practice building skills to improve their odds of obtaining an internship. One of the ways that we try to improve the effectiveness of this course is to bring in alumni to talk and work with the students. Because alumni were (not too long ago) in the same exact spot that the students are in now, and have successfully transitioned to the ‘real world’, students are very open to their advice.



In this fall’s version of the course, alumni not only came back (some virtually) to talk to students and

answer questions, a few also were able to lead ‘mock interviews’ with students. In these events, everything is like a real interview, except that no actual internship or job is on the line. The alumni who joined the event this year generously gave up an afternoon to interview and provide feedback to multiple students.

Another by-product of these interactions is the development of the students’ professional networks. In some instances, the alumni work at companies in the same fields in which the students plan to work, so making these connections with alumni can be highly impactful.



Above: **Kyle Swanson (2017)**, left, of Boston Scientific and **Adam Hendel (2017)**, who works in the AI and machine learning field, talk with Savannah Berg. Top, from left: **Sara Nafe (Noble) (2019)**, a materials manager at Bosch, and **Glen Gregerson (2014)**, a commercialization leader in the consumer business group in 3M, interview Lee Ericksen. Right: **Danica Alvarez (2014)** Analysis Manager at Collins Aerospace, and **Patrick Fillmore (2006)** Senior VP of Actuarial Pricing at Arch Insurance ask questions of Trey Cork.



...Physics Reunion March 27-28

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Here is a tentative listing of events during the reunion:

- Tour of new SciTech building
- Tours of North and South Halls, co-led by Archivist Morgan Paavola
- Tour of Centennial Science Hall
- Telescope viewing of the night sky in the Observatory (weather permitting)
- Planetarium show
- Advice for students - a chance to interact with current UWRF students
- Alumni reminiscences - share and record recollections of your time at RF
- Friday (March 27) evening dinner with an alumni speaker
- Saturday (March 28) lunch with an alumni speaker
- Physics Demonstration show
- Time to just chat with each other!



QR code to reach the survey, also found at <https://tinyurl.com/22zdnbe2>

We look forward to seeing everyone who can make it. Please reach out to Lowell.McCann@uwrf.edu with any questions you have.

Maintaining the South Pole Neutron Monitors



Prof. Seunarine and the South Pole Neutron Monitors. Photo: S.Seunarine/NSF

Performing science experiments isn't often glamorous work. As an example, this December our own Suruj Seunarine is down at the South Pole in order to do some snow shoveling. The picture above shows the South Pole Neutron Monitors atop a platform where they were installed some years ago. The platform was originally well above the surface of the snow, but the relentless snow accumulation (approximately 8" per year) quickly rose to the height of the platform. After some heavy equipment excavated the snow around the platform, as seen above, it will fall to Suruj and a crew of others to shovel out under the platform itself. Once that is done, they will remove the neutron monitors, move the platform to a new position, and then re-install and re-connect the neutron monitors. That should give the experiment another decade or so of continuous operation before more snow removal is needed. Through Prof. Seunarine's work, UWRF is responsible for the operation of the South Pole Neutron Monitor station, which is part of the Simpson Neutron Monitor Network supported by the National Science Foundation. The neutron monitors are sensitive to increases in the flux of cosmic rays hitting Earth, and are an integral part of systems to monitor space weather.

We Hear That....

Pat Miller (1961) died on Oct. 4. After earning an M.S. in Health Physics at the Univ. of Washington, he worked at their Experimental Nuclear Reactor before retiring to a second career as a tax professional. He was a lifetime participant in the “Wisconsin Longitudinal Study” of 1957 Wisconsin high school graduates.

Jeremy Tilsen (2005) is now the Principal Contract Administrator at Metro Transit in St. Paul.

Jesse Goebel (2009) is an engineer at Metalworx in South Carolina.

Will Gagliardi (2019) has moved to Dahlen Systems as an Automation and Controls engineer tier 2.

Dylan Frikken (2019) defended his Ph.D. in Physics at the Ohio State University in August 2025, and is now a post-doc at Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Brussels, Belgium.

Tony Caruso (2019) is a Senior AI Development Engineer at 3M.

Maddy Boettner (2020) is now a Principal Data Engineer at Reveal Security.

Rachel Farren (Schnell) (2021) recently passed the professional engineering exam. She works at A.M Structural Engineering in River Falls.

Tylor Howell (2024) is an IT Applications Analyst at Mason Companies, Inc.

Alexsia Gillstrom (2024) has started a part-time master’s program in Space Systems at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University while still doing aviation training as an officer in the U.S. Army.

Tori Gehling (2025) started work as an Optical Engineer at Banner Engineering.

Johanna Breyen (2025) is now the Lean Coordinator for Supply and Operations Leadership Development Program at nVent.

Mariam Asif (2025) is an R&D Engineer at Boston Scientific in Minnesota.

Austin Thom (2025) is a Senior Semiconductor Technician at Honeywell in Minnesota.

Scholarships help support student success. Students can focus on their academics and not worry about making ends meet financially. There are many named scholarships that support UWRF Physics students and anyone can contribute to these established funds at any time with any amount.

John and Beverly Shepherd Scholarship

Curt and Dee Larson Scholarship

Earl G. Albert Memorial Scholarship

Warren and Anna Campbell Endowed Scholarship

Dr. Michael Wiskerchen Memorial Scholarship

Dr. Henry Tranmal Scholarship – Physics

Physics Alumni Scholarship

In addition, if you are interested in setting up your own named annual or legacy (endowed) scholarship to support Physics students, please call the Office of University Advancement at 715-425-3505 or advancement@uwrf.edu.

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