

Joseph Christensen  
Physics Department, Box 38  
McMurry University  
Abilene, TX 79697  
(325) 793-3877  
jchristensen@mcm.edu

Hello, Friend:

I hope this year has brought you a hopeful spring. There has been some big news here at McMurry. Dr. Thompson has decided that it is time for him to use his powers for the good of all and become an administrator. Unfortunately, there is no position available at McMurry and he has decided to accept a position as Dean of the School of Math and Science at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY. (<http://www.strose.edu/>) Back home, Dr. Bykov and I will be covering the physics courses. Since there is a hiring "season" for academics, we decided that it would be best to teach what we could for '05-'06 and hire somebody new beginning in '06-'07. As a further consequence, the department chair position falls to me as senior member of the department.

I have not yet seen the numbers for the incoming freshman class, but it looks like we will have at least twice as many sophomores as we did last year. While the new junior class has dwindled some from when they were freshmen, it is still a good group. Our senior class is still as large as it was when they were sophomores, and we have two names to add to the alumni list for the upcoming newsletter.

We are continuing our alumni-lecture series! Our first speaker this past spring was David Hammond ('72). He spoke about his life as Senior Physicist at Moncrief Cancer Center in Forth Worth, TX. A few weeks later, he hosted some of our physics and pre-med students in a tour of the Cancer Center. We had a total of 12 students explore the facility. The students really enjoyed it. Our second speaker this spring was Charles Curb, who came to us from Arkansas where he runs an antique dealership. He happened to be passing through on his way to an antique show and we set up a visit. He was also able to visit old family and friends in Merkel. His talk was a bit different than the others we have had and shared a unique perspective on the value of scientific literacy. Although some of the students were not quite sure what to make of it all, most of us enjoyed the topic. It has so far worked well having two people come per semester. I have two names for the Fall of '05: Roger Ward (around Homecoming weekend) and Weldon Bailey, who didn't make it out for the Spring. Since we will be wrapping up a faculty-search (which requires each candidate who is invited to campus to give a seminar), I think we will have to get by with only one alumnus in the Spring of '07. But I don't *yet* have any volunteers for that semester nor for Fall of '07...

We also invited down Jon Bredesen, the Chair of Texas Tech's graduate program in Electrical Engineering. We asked him to explain what it meant to be an electrical engineer, what types of jobs one could get in that area, and what it took to get into a graduate program. The students seem to gain some perspective on where their life can take them from the alumni and graduate talks.

The freshmen physics labs are going to be updated this summer. The department has purchased some lab equipment that includes sonic-rangers and force-probes. I know, it sounds dangerous; but, not to worry, the students are well-trained. These connect to a hand-held computer that interprets the data to plot Position v. Time, Velocity v. Time, Acceleration v. Time, and Force v. time. We hope these will

help the students focus on the underlying concepts. However, we understand the importance of making careful, detailed (read “tedious”!) measurements and so we will continue to keep some labs in which they get their hands dirty. This will be one of our summer projects.

Another summer project is to come up with ideas for student research projects. We are finding that the students have trouble initiating a project and we hope to give them at least a seed of an idea. If you come up with any ideas, even if they seem half-baked, we are open to suggestions. The only requirement is that it must be accessible to undergraduate physics majors and rely on some physics principle... heat transfer, kinetic energy, load-distribution, electricity, nuclear physics (!), etc. I'll keep you posted on which projects spark some interest.

So that you know, I have been trying to keep up with the people who have been emailing. We saw Carleton Thomas at graduation this May. He was in town to celebrate with friends. Ryan Henderson also stuck his head into the office briefly. And we got an email from Tom Helm about another alumnus in Austin. You might check the alumni webpage occasionally to see who else has checked in and sent us an update. Soon, I hope to post some photos of a project the students worked on in Advanced Lab and of the tour of Moncrief Cancer Center.

As always, if you're in the area, even if you don't want to give a presentation, we'd love to visit if you can spare the time. I expect our students would also be grateful if you could forward information about internship possibilities.

Enjoy your spring!

Joe Christensen - Tikhon Bykov  
The McMurry Physics Department  
Physics Department, Box 38  
McMurry University  
Abilene, TX 79697