

Exploring Physics at UCLA Impact Report

1. Overview

On June 6, 2026, Exploring Physics at UCLA was hosted at the Fowler Museum at UCLA and was moderated and organized by Continuum at UCLA, an organization dedicated to cultivating true scientific mastery by championing the belief that clarity and rigor are inseparable, ensuring groundbreaking discoveries are understood and celebrated by all.

161 attendees, spanning 45 institutions and 30 different majors, registered for this first-of-its-kind event, featuring 5 speakers. Our new and improved format included speaker talks, fireside chats, and audience Q&A, which was aimed to keep students engaged throughout the event. From experimental quantum hardware to neurophysics to theoretical condensed matter to dark matter to plasma physics and more, we spent the day taking a small journey through the possibilities of the pursuit of physics.

2. Mission and Improvements Made

This event was organized to inspire community college physics and physics-adjacent majors with physics' real-world impact, provide clear guidance on pathways from community college to research and careers, showcase the breadth of physics at a rigorous but high level, share insights from Southern California faculty, UCLA graduate students, and successful physics transfers, and create in-person connections among physics students across Southern California.

Building on feedback from the Physics Transfer Summit, we implemented several key operational improvements for Exploring Physics at UCLA. First, to prevent scheduling fatigue, we introduced two additional 10–15 minute breaks and extended the lunch period from 30 minutes to a full hour. Second, we removed the lunchtime presentation, preserving this block exclusively for organic networking between attendees and faculty. Finally, we ensured all speakers were present during lunch, eliminating any ambiguity about when students would have the opportunity to connect with them.

3. Speaker Overview

3 physics faculty from UCLA and USC came to speak about their academic journey and research, including Derek Schaeffer (UCLA), Stephan Haas (USC), and Eli Levenson-Falk (USC). This included the chair of physics at USC, Stephan Haas, who gave a talk on condensed matter theory and the chair of physics at UCLA, Stuart Brown, who gave opening remarks welcoming students to UCLA. The concentrations of faculty talks included plasma physics, theoretical condensed matter, and experimental quantum hardware.

Krishna Choudhary, UCLA physics PhD alumnus and co-host of *From First Principles* podcast, gave a talk on neural networks. Riddhi Shedge, an undergraduate astrophysics student at UCLA, gave a talk on research opportunities for physics undergraduates at UCLA and her current research on dark matter detection.

4. Attendee Data

All institutions with at least one registration (A-Z):

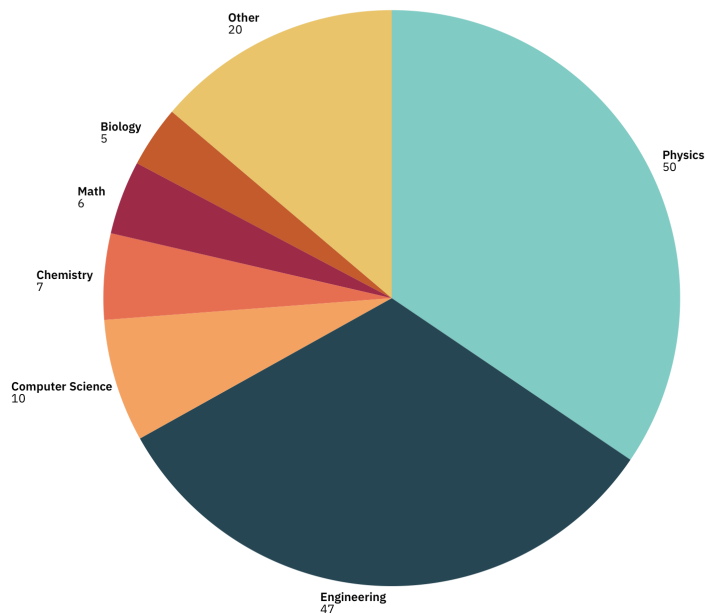
Anglia Ruskin University
Cal Poly Pomona
Cal State Long Beach (CSULB)
Cal State Northridge (CSUN)
Chaffey College
Citrus College
Coastline Community College
College of the Canyons
College of the Sequoias
CUNY
Cuyamaca College
Cypress College
El Camino College
El Camino Real Charter High School
Fullerton College
George Washington University
Glendale Community College
Long Beach City College
Los Angeles City College

Los Angeles Pierce College
Los Angeles Valley College
Mark Keppel High School
Mission San Jose High School
Moreno Valley College
OCAD University
Pasadena City College
Pasadena High School
Rio Hondo College
Riverside City College
San Diego Mesa College
Santa Ana College
Santa Monica College
UC Berkeley
UC Irvine
UC San Diego (UCSD)
UC Santa Cruz
UCLA
University High School
University of Washington
Victor Valley College

All majors with at least one registration (A-Z):

Aerospace Engineering
Applied Mathematics
Applied Physics
Astronomy
Astrophysics
Biochemistry
Bioengineering
Biology/Biological Sciences
Biophysics
Business/Management
Chemical Engineering
Chemistry
Civil Engineering
Cognitive Neuroscience
Computer Engineering
Computer Science

Cosmetology
Criminal Justice
Data Science
Earth and Environmental Sciences
Electrical Engineering
Fashion Merchandising
Film/Television
Liberal Arts/Studies
Materials Engineering
Mathematics
Mechanical Engineering
Neuroscience
Psychology
Public Health



Number of attendees by major

5. Feedback

An anonymous feedback form was sent out to all attendees the same day of the event to assess value and to obtain positive and negative feedback to improve future physics outreach events.

The results of the form were extremely important in identifying structural changes that could retain audience energy, engagement, and excitement throughout the event. We also wanted to quantify the value that individuals felt this event had on their academic journey and identify specific physics concentrations that students had more or less interest in. Finally, we polled students on their favorite session formats for the event, future topics, and event formats they would like us to execute on in the future.

5.1 Overall Value

We asked “Overall, how useful was today’s summit for you?” With a 1-5 star scale, the average rating was 4.71.

5.2 Key Positives

Overall feedback Exploring Physics at UCLA was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees consistently rating the event as highly useful. Attendees found the event’s length to be ideal, with several noting they would have welcomed an even longer schedule. We attribute this sustained engagement to the dynamic format, alternating between traditional technical talks and fireside chats, rather than the actual duration. Students highly valued the rare opportunity to explore diverse physics subfields in a single day, which helped broaden their career perspectives. The audience Q&A was a standout success, enabling students to address their specific academic concerns. Additionally, the newly introduced fireside chats received strong praise for providing an engaging, conversational, and informal dive into the speakers' careers and research. Finally, networking with fellow students and speakers was overwhelmingly cited as the most rewarding aspect of the day.

5.3 Selected Student Quotes

“I really enjoyed how the speakers were able to connect with the audience by storytelling. [It] helped me understand the material that was presented.”

“The most valuable part [were the] fireside chats. I especially liked parts about how to get [into] research and what professors actually expect students to have when applying for research positions.”

“The most valuable part was meeting such brilliant people passionate about physics.”

“Being in a place where many students are pursuing STEM and engineering fields creates an atmosphere that I find inspiring and intellectually stimulating.”

“I enjoy the talks because it’s pointing me in a direction of study I want to pursue.”

“Here was a lot of valuable information about cold emailing that I struggled to find elsewhere. Overall, this was a very informative event!”

5.4 Areas for Improvement

While it is difficult to fully satisfy every attendee at an event with broad ambitions, continuous improvement remains our priority. A couple student feedback responses mentioned the need for more structured networking, particularly for introverted students or those new to professional events. Although the open lunch was designed for flexible socialization, we recognize that guided activities can provide a more accessible introduction to peers and faculty. Furthermore, attendees suggested adding a dedicated networking block separate from lunch, ensuring participants can focus entirely on conversations without the overlap of a meal.

6. Actionable Changes

Based on attendee feedback, the following changes will be implemented in future events:

- Incorporate structured activities for first-time networkers and/or find a facility with a more intimate design that naturally encourages more conversations to be started, rather than a large and open outdoor space that leaves room for self-isolation.
 - Establish a dedicated networking session separate from lunch: Schedule a standalone block outside of the lunch hour, ensuring students have focused time to converse without the distraction or rush of eating a meal.
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Appendix A. Event Schedule

Exploring Physics at UCLA

Saturday, June 6, 2026

Fowler Museum at UCLA

8:30 – 9:15 AM

Check-In & Breakfast

9:15 – 9:20 AM

Overview

9:20 – 9:30 AM | Opening Remarks

Stuart Brown — Professor and Chair of Physics, UCLA

9:30 – 10:30 AM | Neurophysics

Krishna Choudhary — Physicist, Co-host of From First Principles, Princeton/UCLA Alumni

Format: Talk + Fireside Chat + Audience Q&A

10:30 – 10:45 AM

Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM | Plasma Physics

Derek Schaeffer — Assistant Professor of Physics, UCLA

Format: Talk + Fireside Chat + Audience Q&A

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM

Lunch/Networking Reception

12:45 – 1:15 PM | Astroparticle Physics

Riddhi Shedge — Undergraduate Researcher, Kamaha Lab, UCLA

Format: Talk + Audience Q&A

1:15 – 1:50 PM | Experimental Quantum Hardware

Eli Levenson-Falk — Associate Professor of Physics and Electrical and Computer Engineering, USC

Format: Talk + Audience Q&A

1:50 – 2:00 PM

Break

2:00 – 3:00 PM | Theoretical Quantum Theory/Condensed Matter

Stephan Haas — Professor and Chair of Physics, USC

Format: Talk + Fireside Chat + Audience Q&A

3:00 – 3:10 PM

Closing