

Kick-Start Your SPS Chapter!

by Elizabeth Hook, SPS Communications Specialist

As you shake off the last vestiges of summer vacation, it occurs to you that you have more to think about than just classes: What about SPS? As you get back into the swing of a new school year, it can be easy to put starting up your chapter on the back burner. But if you want your SPS chapter to have an outstanding year, you need to get started sooner rather than later. Luckily, it doesn't take much effort with these helpful suggestions!

Start by working with your chapter leaders to organize plans for kicking off the year. First on the docket should be setting up regular meetings. (Note to chapter leaders: Running the chapter goes much smoother if you meet regularly and often outside of standard meetings to plan what will occur.) It's important to have a regular day and time for your chapter meetings, and you need to know when your first meeting will be. Also, use this time with your leaders to discuss basic goals, ideas, and plans for the semester. Discuss activities that worked well last year and those that didn't. Ask questions like – What events were successful? Are we retaining members? Do we have more freshmen or more seniors? What groups should we target for recruiting?

Now that you're equipped with basic information, consider representing SPS at your school's student organization fair. Go with a small flier that explains SPS, why students should come to your meetings, and when that first meeting occurs. Take some demos with you! These can range from small tabletop demos like a mini lava lamp (plastic coke bottle, vegetable oil, water, and a tablet of alka seltzer), to demonstrating a bed of nails – whatever's appropriate for your event.

You have thought about the general outline for SPS this year and you've been to a student activities fair – what else should you think about doing? Swing by some physics classes! Ask professors if SPS members can briefly visit introductory classes for a few minutes to promote SPS, and remember to talk with upper-level physics majors who may not be in SPS. Tell students about the fun activities coming up, and communicate effectively to students what SPS is and what it has to offer them.

Now that you've done some basic recruiting, what should you do with these new members? Think about that first SPS meeting again. Make it fun! This first meeting is not like the others. Avoid discussing a ton of business: have demos, promote SPS membership, have signup sheets so new members can volunteer for roles, discuss potential speakers, and mingle. This first meeting makes a strong impression on new students, so make them want to come back and be involved. In addition to that first meeting, organize a social event. This can be a great way to hook freshmen. They're already trying to get to know more people on campus, so introduce them to some lovers of physics! Host a dinner and "bad physics" movie night so that students can hang out, or have a picnic where students and faculty can interact outside the classroom.

However your SPS chapter chooses to start off the semester, enjoy a new year in SPS! Have the traditional events and plan some new ones, take advantage of SPS scholarships and awards, take your demos into the local community, host a Cosmic Café, plan a hiking trip. And don't forget to branch out from your immediate community: meet fellow majors at Zone meetings, get together with nearby chapters for lab tours or parties, and organize a trip to regional or national physics conferences. It's the start of a new year, and we hope that you have a truly outstanding* one!

"We have a day for showcasing school clubs, and have brought flashy demos to attract new students. And get organized early!"

–Evan Nelsen, Rhodes College.

"As a welcome back to all the SPS students, our chapter jump starts the year with a SPS gathering. We do a short one to two minute presentation on students' summer experiences while mingling with old and new students."

–Anderson Hayes, Hampton University

"To start our year and recruit new freshmen, we have a back to school picnic on the porch of our department where we grill fajitas, eat watermelon, and make liquid nitrogen ice cream. We usually finish off our extra nitrogen with a 'bomb' or 'instant thundercloud' demonstration!"

–Travis Barnett, Angelo State



Photo courtesy of Utah State University's SPS Chapter

SPS member Kristen Rock "walks on water" by running on a pool of non-Newtonian fluid at Utah State's back to school social.

*Remember to show us how awesome you are by applying for an Outstanding Chapter Award at the end of the year. www.spsnational.org/programs/awards/chapter.htm