

Report of the Task Force on the Future of the April Meeting
Draft: October 6, 2006

In response to its charge, the *Task Force on the Future of the April Meeting* has examined the goals and outcomes of the April Meeting from the points of view of its constituencies, including divisions, forums, students, members of APS forums, and the society as a whole. We find that the meeting works well for a number of units large and small, plays a unifying role for the physics community, and provides a valuable forum for the interplay between physics and society. Nevertheless, the standing of the April Meeting has diminished over time. We believe that the meeting would benefit from greater coherence, and that it can serve more effectively as a celebration of our science and as an occasion to explore common interests with other scientific organizations. Our recommendations are intended to raise the profile of the meeting, to make it a more important occasion for the American Physical Society, and to enhance participation.

1. We recommend that APS continue to sponsor a yearly meeting organized principally by the units traditionally associated with the April Meeting. The meeting should bear a name that evokes the main scientific motifs and engages public interest. We propose “A Universe of Physics.”
2. We recommend that each year’s program identify three marquee themes to highlight rich threads in the agenda. The themes will describe topics treated in depth, but the meeting program will have all its traditional diversity. We believe that defining some headlines in advance will give prospective participants additional incentive to choose this meeting. [We list some example themes in an appendix.]
3. The nine plenary lectures, devoted to important topics in the areas that are the principal focus of the meeting plus a selection from the rest of physics, have been extremely successful. We recommend that plenary lectures be retained and given more emphasis in pre-meeting publicity. We encourage the continued use of these lectures to share the most exciting recent scientific results with the broad audience that we hope the reconstituted meeting will attract.
4. We encourage the society to continue to explore opportunities for joint meetings with other societies. We also feel that, under the new banner, the occasional participation of APS units other than the traditional April units should be encouraged. [Some examples are mentioned in an appendix.]
5. The task force is not of a single mind regarding the location and date of the meeting, but we would like to encourage experimentation. We note considerable enthusiasm for regular meetings in (or near) Washington, which might be prohibitively expensive in the springtime. We also note that the traditional April–May schedule might inhibit collaboration with other societies. Accordingly, we recommend that the society embark on a four-year trial, holding the meeting alternately in Washington and elsewhere at dates between January and May convenient for the chosen locations and joint undertakings. [One of the constraints will be an interval from the March meeting so that the APS staff is not unduly burdened.] The first year of the trial would be the 2010 meeting, to be held February 13 – 16 in collaboration with the American Association of Physics Teachers.
6. April Meeting program committees have performed well in arranging symposia and plenary lectures, but the meeting often appears to participants as a collection of independent streams, scheduled with insufficient mutual awareness. We recommend

- that the organizing committee take greater responsibility for the coherence of the program. One useful step would be to make what is now an informational gathering at the previous year's meeting into the first full working meeting, at which themes for the next meeting are identified and symposium topics are explored. We suggest that the overall program chairs be asked to serve as past chairs for a year or two, to serve as institutional memory and help ensure that themes reflect appropriate balance and diversity over time. We believe that listing members of the program committee on the meeting poster would build credibility among potential participants.
7. We would like to remind unit program organizers of the opportunities for creativity that exist within the APS meeting structure and have been used to good effect in the past. We encourage experimentation that might lead to larger and more engaged audiences for contributed papers (some may wish to try posters instead of ten-minute papers, for example) or the participation of research communities that have been under-represented in the April meeting (perhaps by creating themed mini-meetings within the overall meeting). The overall goal should be to serve the science and give our colleagues a reason to choose to attend.
 8. We suggest that the outreach, education, and celebration of science aspects of the meeting be amplified. One element in a more ambitious approach might be to engage physicists from nearby institutions and give them responsibility for planning some activities.
 9. We offer some comments on meeting logistics. A four-day meeting works well, and we see no reason for change. Opinion seems divided on whether the meeting should include a weekend. We suggest that plenary talk slides (and, ideally, streaming videos or audio recordings) be made available on the meeting web site. For now, we would leave to the units the decision of whether (and how) to make available slides of invited lectures. Most members of the task force feel that the paper *Bulletin* could be abandoned, provided the full program information is available on line, and that only the meeting epitome need be printed for participants.
 10. Among meeting amenities mentioned in our formal and informal surveys, we record the following for the information of meeting planners. Members express a desire for inexpensive hotel rooms, access to cheap, fast lunches, and coffee during breaks. There is a strong desire for free wireless internet access in public areas of meeting sites. The Task Force supports this, but does not advocate wireless access in the meeting rooms.

We thank Ken Cole and Judy Franz for their enthusiastic participation in the work of the task force. We appreciate comments and suggestions from Alan Chodos and Helen Quinn that helped launch our deliberations, and we are grateful for the support of the APS staff.

Appendix: Some Possibilities for Joint Meetings

AAPT

AAS

Medicine

Divisional Meetings

IEEE Divisions

Biological Physics

Public policy organizations

Appendix: Some Examples of Themes

“First light” from the Large Hadron Collider

The dark universe

Neutrinos (from accelerators, reactors, extraterrestrial sources)

The chemical history of the universe

The high-energy gamma-ray sky

Physics and homeland security

Global warming and physics of energy

Nuclear weapons and proliferation

Implications of the string-theory landscape

Observation of gravitational waves

Physics in medicine

Computational physics and the physics of computation

Symmetry and symmetry violations

Exotic acceleration techniques

High-energy density physics

The National Ignition Facility

Charge: The Task Force on the Future of the April Meeting will examine the goals and outcomes of the April Meeting from the points of view of its various constituencies, such as divisions, forums, students, members of APS forums, etc. The Task Force may suggest enhancements, changes in the structure of the meeting, or even termination of the meeting. It will report to one of the fall meetings of the Executive Board and may take recommendations to the Council.

Members:

James A Isenberg (GGR)
Institute for Theoretical Science
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
Phone (541) 346-4725
Fax (541) 346-5217
Email jim@newton.uoregon.edu

Benjamin F Gibson (DNP)
T-16 MS-B283
Los Alamos National Lab
Los Alamos, NM 87545
Phone (505) 667-5059
Fax (505) 667-1931
Email bfgibson@lanl.gov

Bradley M Sherrill (DNP)
NSCL
Michigan State Univ
East Lansing, MI 48824
Phone (517) 333-6322
Fax (517) 353-5967
Email Sherrill@nscl.msu.edu

John F Beacom (DAP)
Department of Physics
Ohio State University
191 W Woodruff Ave
Columbus, OH 43210
Phone (614) 247-8102
Fax (614) 292-7557
Email beacom@mps.ohio-state.edu

Joan Centrella (DAP)
Laboratory for Gravitational Astrophysics
Code 663
NSAS/GSFC
Greenbelt, MD 20771
Phone (301) 286-3966
Fax (301) 286-1682
Email jcentrel@milkyway.gsfc.nasa.gov

Andrew G Cohen (DPF)
Department of Physics
Boston University
590 Commonwealth Ave
Boston, MA 02215
Phone (617) 353-6051
Fax (617) 353-9393
Email cohen@andy.bu.edu

Chris Quigg (DPF)
MS 106
Fermilab
PO Box 500
Batavia, IL 60510
Phone (630) 840-3578
Fax (630) 840-5435
Email quigg@fnal.gov

Vincent S Chan (DPP)
13-311
General Atomics
PO Box 85608
San Diego, CA 92138
Phone (858) 455-4162
Fax (858) 455-3586
Email chanv@fusion.gat.com

Lawrence M Krauss (FPS)
Department of Physics
Case Western Reserve University
10900 Euclid Ave
Cleveland, OH 44106-7079
Phone (216) 368-4070
Fax (216) 368-4671
Email krauss@case.edu

Task Force Meetings

March 24, 2006: American Center for Physics, College Park, Maryland

Participants: Jim Isenberg (*GGR*), Ben Gibson (*DNP*), Brad Sherrill (*DNP*), John Beacom (*DAP*), Joan Centrella (*DAP*), Andy Cohen (*DPF*), Chris Quigg (*DPF*), Vincent Chan (*DPP*), Lawrence Krauss (*FPS*)

APS Staff: Judy Franz, Ken Cole

May 9, 2006: Conference Call

Participants: Jim Isenberg (*GGR*), Ben Gibson (*DNP*), John Beacom (*DAP*), Joan Centrella (*DAP*), Andy Cohen (*DPF*), Chris Quigg (*DPF*), Vincent Chan (*DPP*), Lawrence Krauss (*FPS*)

APS Staff: Judy Franz, Ken Cole

August 24, 2006: Westin O'Hare Hotel, Rosemont, Illinois

Participants: Jim Isenberg (*GGR*), Brad Sherrill (*DNP*), John Beacom (*DAP*), Andy Cohen (*DPF*), Chris Quigg (*DPF*), Vincent Chan (*DPP*); Lawrence Krauss (*FPS*) briefly by telephone

APS Staff: Judy Franz, Ken Cole