

Department of Physics Name Change
Submitted on behalf of the Physics Department

WHEREAS, the Department of Physics wishes to change its name to the Department of Physics and Astronomy

WHEREAS, Astronomy has always been a branch of Physics

WHEREAS, the majority of Astronomy programs around the world are housed in Departments of Physics and Astronomy

WHEREAS, many prospective students searching for Astronomy programs do not associate that with a Department of Physics

WHEREAS, the proposed name change does not involve any curricular changes to existing Physics programs

WHEREAS, the proposed name change does not involve any resources and has been reviewed and approved by CLAS

WHEREAS a detailed justification is attached

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Department of Physics is now known as the Department of Physics and Astronomy

October 25, 2023

Re: Departmental name change from the Department of Physics to the Department of Physics and Astronomy

Dear Dean Kristin Croyle,

The Department of Physics at the State University of New York at Oswego would like to change its name to the Department of Physics and Astronomy. We have discussed this in our monthly meetings over the last year, and support for this decision is unanimous. We show below that the nature of our discipline, our recruitment and retention, enrolment in the Astronomy classes, growth of the Astronomy minor, Astronomy faculty scholarly activities, and interest in the digital planetarium warrant this change.

Physics and astronomy are inseparable. Both disciplines study the ways various forms of matter and energy interact. While the majority of Physics studies terrestrial objects and interactions, and the majority of Astronomy studies celestial objects and interactions, technological advancement has blurred the division between the two disciplines. As a result, Physics and Astronomy has evolved into sharing the same vision: developing a cogent theory and model to explain the properties of the natural world, such as the force of gravity or the formation of sub-atomic particles.

Recruitment of high quality students and retaining them is a major challenge for all Physics departments nationwide and is especially for SUNY Oswego. Every year during Admission Open Houses, Campus Visits, and through emails we receive significant number of students expressing interests in Astronomy. When prospective students visit the department physically or online through our website, they don't see the word Astronomy and we believe this lowers the visibility of our Astronomy courses and various Astronomy related career opportunities that we offer. We strongly believe the visibility of our Astronomy component, our student recruitment, and retention will be positively impacted if the proposed name change is approved.

The Department of Physics' offering of Introductory Astronomy AST100 is a major success of the department and general education at SUNY Oswego. The number of students taking AST 100 on a yearly basis is close to 500 and, according to Association of Physics website, is consistently similar to SUNY R1A institutions (e.g., Stony Brook) and significantly above our peers (e.g., SUNY Geneseo). In addition, the department offers an Astronomy minor with the average number of students in the minor being fifteen per year. This is a distinguishing feature of the department and needs to be acknowledged through the proposed name change.

Ultimately, we anticipate that this change will have the positive effect of more accurately reflecting our program's research, teaching, recruitment, retention, and community outreach. We do not anticipate any negative effects to students or alums nor to our budget given how little printed/purchased material we currently possess.

Md Anwarul Islam, Chair, 10/26/23

Mohammad A Islam, Ph.D.

Department Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Physics
State University of New York (SUNY) at Oswego