



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Physics program ranks high in American Institute of Physics study

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EAU CLAIRE — The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire graduates more students with bachelor's degrees in physics than most other similar colleges in the country, according to a recent American Institute of Physics study.

UW-Eau Claire graduated an average of 13 physics majors per year during the three-year timeframe (2006-08) included in the American Institute of Physics study. Just 16 of the 505 bachelor's degree-granting departments at U.S. colleges and universities graduated more physics majors during that same time period, the study states.

The 13-per-year average is especially impressive considering that the AIP study shows that more than 70 percent of the physics departments that offer the bachelor's as their highest physics degree graduate five or fewer physics majors a year, said Dr. Erik Hendrickson, professor of physics and astronomy and chair of the physics and astronomy department [[www.uwec.edu/physics](http://www.uwec.edu/physics)].

Hendrickson said he also is pleased that 26 percent of UW-Eau Claire students who graduated during the three-year AIP study period were women, a rate that was above the 21 percent national average during that same period.

"The physics and astronomy department is attracting a growing number of bright and ambitious students because we offer strong academic programs, personal attention from faculty and interesting research opportunities," Hendrickson said. "Students recognize the value of these experiences and they like being part of a program that is so student centered."

Physics is a challenging major that attracts students who are willing to work hard and are excited to learn, said Dr. Tom Lockhart, a professor of physics and astronomy.

"Our majors are curious about the way things work, are imaginative in their thinking and very persistent," Lockhart said. "They tend to be passionate about their choice of major, despite the fact that not many people see it as a glamorous major. Our students want a small-school experience that includes close interaction with faculty in the classroom and in research."

Physics majors are encouraged to work with each other and with faculty from the start of their college careers, Lockhart said, adding that faculty work hard to maintain accessibility.

"Even though the faculty prides itself on research, we've all made a commitment to keep the teaching of physics as our primary focus, whether in the classroom, the research lab, outreach to the community, or in more casual encounters with students," Lockhart said.

Students do appreciate the faculty's willingness to work closely with them, said Oakley Moser, a senior physics and mathematics major from Tomah.

"The physics teachers are very friendly and approachable," Moser said. "They welcome questions anytime they are in their offices. In the department's seminar room, students gather to work on homework or hang out. Teachers often join us, creating a unique, friendly atmosphere."

Kate Kuehn, who came to UW-Eau Claire as a pre-architecture student, said her academic adviser — a physics professor — offered guidance as she developed her career goals.

"He listened to all of my thoughts and ideas about what I would like to do and helped me explore all my options," said Kuehn, a junior from Eau Claire. "I enjoyed my physics classes so much that I decided to be a physics major."

Kuehn said the support she has received from her adviser is typical of how faculty in the physics department interact with students.

"Every physics professor I've had knows me by name and gives individual help whenever students need it," Kuehn said. "They make themselves available as much as possible, and often stay late in the evening or come in on weekends so students get the help they need. They go above and beyond for every student. If they can't offer you research, they help you get research and internships across the country by sharing information and writing recommendation letters."

Faculty have high expectations but help students exceed those expectations, Kuehn said.

"If you show them that you are a serious student who wants to excel, they will do everything in their power to make sure that you have the best education and opportunities that will help you now and in the future," Kuehn said. "Several physics professors helped me get an engineering internship last summer. It was an amazing experience that gave me countless opportunities. I presented my research at the end of my internship and I will present it here on Student Research Day. Only one internship or research project is required for graduation, but I enjoyed the research so much that I have been applying for new internships this summer."

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