

SPS Zone 6 Meeting Report

March 28, 2025:

Registration started Friday evening at 5:00 PM. At 6:00 pm opening statements started with the Dean Dr. Pierre-Richard Cornely and the Valdosta State University chapter President Jordan Hewins giving statements. After opening statements, Dr. Renee Horton gave a presentation on how physics affected her life. The last event of the first day was a planetarium show and sky viewing.

March 29, 2025:

The second day started at 9:00 am with a light breakfast. The first event of the day was a poster competition with the judges being Dr. Sesha Srinivasan, Dr. Renee Horton, and a few Valdosta State University professors. After the poster competition there was an hour and a half lunch break. After the break concluded, the next event was a guest speaker panel. The participants were Dr. Alejandro de la Puente and two Valdosta State University alumni. After the guest speaker panel, both Dr. Sesha Srinivasan and Sofia Jolley gave their own talks. The final event of the day was a fox hunt where participants had to track down a signal, giving them an impromptu tour of the VSU campus.

[Itinerary](#)

List of Chapters:

University of South Florida
Georgia State University
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
Florida State University
University of Florida
Oglethorpe University
Valdosta State University

Number of Attendees:

23 people signed up for the conference, but there were at least 5 extra people who attended.

Recommendations for Future Zone Meeting Planning:

- Streamline communications with possible attendees.
- Do more table advertising events throughout the months before the conference to encourage attendance from the hosting student body.

Narrative:

Friday, March 28th, 2025:

The 2025 SPS Zone 6 Meeting at Valdosta State University kicked off with a warm welcome and a sense of community as students, faculty, and physics enthusiasts from across the region came together to celebrate science, collaboration, and curiosity. Over the course of two days, attendees had the opportunity to engage in outreach, attend presentations, and connect with fellow members of the Society of Physics Students, all while exploring the vibrant campus of VSU.

The weekend officially began Friday evening with registration at 5:00 PM in the Magnolia Room of the VSU University Center, where guests were greeted with coffee, donuts, and conversation. The atmosphere was energized as students and faculty prepared for the exciting events ahead. The evening opened with welcoming remarks from Dr. Pierre-Richard Cornely, Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics at Valdosta State University, followed by a speech from Jordan Hewins, President of the SPS Chapter at VSU and a senior in the physics and astronomy programs. Their remarks set the tone for a weekend dedicated to exploration, learning, and connection.

Following the opening statements, attendees were treated to an inspiring keynote presentation by Dr. Renee Horton. Dr. Horton's talk was inspiring to say the least; she talked about her beginnings as a physical scientist, the difficulties she overcame in her career, and her work in NASA and different outreach organizations such as Unapologetically Being Inc. It was truly a pleasure to have a voice like Dr. Horton's to speak at our university and zone meeting.

After the keynote, participants had time to mingle and share in informal discussion before making their way across campus to the VSU Planetarium in the Nevins Building for an immersive show titled *The Dawn of the Space Age*. The show chronicled the early days of space exploration and the intense technological race of the Cold War era, highlighting the pivotal moments that launched humanity beyond Earth's atmosphere.

The evening concluded with telescope viewing on the roof of the Nevins Building, hosted by VSU astronomy volunteers. Attendees observed celestial sights including the Winter Hexagon and deep sky objects such as the Orion Nebula, bringing a beautiful close to the first day of the

conference. The night wrapped up around 10:00 PM–10:30 PM, leaving attendees inspired and eager for what the rest of the weekend would bring.

Saturday, March 29th, 2025:

The second day of the 2025 SPS Zone 6 Meeting at Valdosta State University began around 7:00 AM for the volunteers. They gathered in their physics and astronomy study room to quickly inventory supplies before loading them onto a hand-pulled cart owned by the physics program. With help from a VSU police officer, they entered the Student Union and made their way to the third-floor ballroom. Once there, they began setting up poster stands, chairs, food, and cleaning supplies. Some volunteers organized the venue while others returned to the study room for additional items. The chapter treasurer had been up early to ensure the Publix catering order was ready and picked up on time. Meanwhile, the executive board realized they still needed boards for the research posters and ice for the coolers, eager to have everything in place before guests arrived.

Guests did not arrive immediately at the designated 9:00 AM sign-in time; this gave the Society members extra time to prepare. Preparations were complete and all the necessary supplies were laid out in the ballroom for guests. We had many volunteers who worked on the second day of the meeting including physicists and astronomers, non-scientific Society members, and loved ones of members. All were proud to contribute to the success of the SPS Zone 6 Meeting. At around 10:00 PM, President Jordan Hewins left to pick up Dr. Renee Horton from her hotel room, stopping along the way to grab her mobile Starbucks order. Both Jordan and Dr. Horton arrived to see that a majority of the previous day's attendees were congregating in the ballroom and discussing amongst themselves. There were still some delegations from other universities that were just arriving as well. Digital poster presentations were starting soon and people gathered around the stage to listen to the presenters. After the digital presentations, the physical poster presentations started with two VSU students and one from FSU who described their research. Everyone walked away impressed and inspired by the caliber of undergraduate scientific research from the Society's 6th Zone. The poster session ended with judging, in which James Egdford of FSU won 1st place for his impressive astrophysical work *Toward Estimating Properties of Stellar Populations using the Synthetic Isochrone Method*.

After the lunch break—featuring Publix sandwiches provided by the hosting SPS chapter and some attendees opting for a local pho restaurant—the penultimate moment of the conference began: the panel discussion. The panel featured Zone Councilor Dr. Srinivasan, guest speaker Dr. Renee Horton, VSU alumni Ian McClean and Christopher Robinson, and SPS and AIP Director Dr. Alejandro de la Puente. Over the next hour and a half, the panelists engaged in a compelling discussion on their decisions to pursue careers in physics, the value of undergraduate research,

and the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sciences. Attendees left with a wealth of insight and inspiration from the conversation.

Saturday, March 29th, 2025 [2]:

The panel discussion turned out to be the final scheduled event for the day, but an unexpected change of plans shifted the remainder of the meeting. Volunteers had learned that severe rain was expected on the final day, which would disrupt many of the planned outdoor activities. To avoid this, they decided to move those events up to the second day. President Jordan Hewins announced the updated schedule to attendees, and soon after, students gathered on the VSU front lawn for the fox hunt. A fox hunt is a radio enthusiast activity where participants use Yagi antennas connected to radios to locate a small orange transmitter—called the fox—by tracking its signal. Attendees searched across campus until one group eventually found the fox near the dorms.

Overall, the Society of Physics Students Zone 6 Meeting at VSU was a collective effort, showcasing the dedication of the chapter's volunteers to bring colleagues together in celebration of the physical sciences. The VSU chapter was proud to welcome so many to their campus to engage in meaningful discussions about the field and its impact on students. They were also deeply grateful to the Zone and national SPS leadership for bringing this opportunity to VSU—where many attendees could hear the story of the university's deactivation of its physics and astronomy programs. We will never forget your support.

Pictures From Meeting:



Pictures From Meeting [2]:



Pictures From Meeting [3]:



Pictures From Meeting [4]:

