UCI’s Women in Physics Club Becomes "UNITY"

The club decided to change their name and mission statement to be inclusive of people of all minoritized genders in physics and astronomy.

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Anne-Katherine Burns
UCI Physical Sciences Communications



The name change is the latest effort at Physical Sciences to create a place that's welcoming to all.

Picture Credit:
Tiffany Kuo

In the Spring of 2021, the Women in Physics and Astronomy club at UC Irvine rebranded and became Underrepresented Genders in Physics and Astronomy (UNITY). The club decided on the name change in order to become a more inclusive space. UNITY is a representative body for all whose gender identities and experiences of gender have been historically marginalized in physics and astronomy at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This includes those who are non-binary, which refers to gender identities that do not fit soley within the binary labels of man or woman.

In a 2019 study, the Institute of Physics, Royal Astronomical Society and Royal Society of Chemistry reported that almost a third of non-binary, and transgender physical scientists experienced targeted exclusionary, intimidating, offensive or harassing behaviour because of their gender or sexual identity in the 12 months preceeding the study.

The members of UNITY hope the rebranding will make a positive impact on the community by explicitly including non-binary people in the club. In addition to the name change, UNITY is introducing initiatives to create a more diverse community and supportive environment for non-binary people — a continually underserved community in physics. Initiatives include advocating for the creation of gender inclusive bathrooms in UCI's physics buildings, organizing a colloquium for the department on the importance of honoring people's pronouns and expanding UNITY's mentorship program.

"As a club representing women and non-binary physicists of the next generation, we implore other women in physics clubs to undertake a similar rebranding and re-evaluatuation of their missions," a statement from UNITY leaders read. "By encouraging others to follow in our footsteps, we hope to aid in the creation of a supportive environment and access to resources for non-binary physicists across the country."

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