

Using Optics to Inspire Middle School Students

OSA Foundation sponsors youth science education activity in Washington

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13, 2014—In support of its mission to inspire future optics innovators, The OSA Foundation sponsored an “Optics Suitcase” demonstration for students in a Washington middle school this week. The event took place in conjunction with the annual OSA Winter Leadership meeting. Optics Suitcase activities were presented to 25 students at Center City Public Charter Schools Shaw Campus. The demonstrations included hands-on experiences that helped the 7th grade students understand optics concepts. Two of the OSA Members in attendance, Yasaman Soudagar and Arlene Smith, also spoke to the students about their science backgrounds and how their love of science first began.

“OSA provided an invaluable hands-on experience that my students would not have otherwise had,” said Nina Barcelli, teacher at Center City Public Charter Schools Shaw Campus. “The scientists were fun and engaging and I loved seeing my students so invested in the various activities. I would highly recommend this program to other educators.”

“Outreach to young students is one of the most significant ways we as optics and photonics professionals can impact and inspire future scientists,” said Michael Morris, OSA Foundation board chair. “Drawing upon the OSA volunteer leaders who were here in DC this week provided a unique opportunity for both the students and OSA Members alike. I am delighted that the OSA Foundation was able to sponsor this event. I encourage my fellow optics colleagues to bring the science of light alive for students in their local areas through this type of outreach.”

Of the event, some of the students in attendance said:

“It was so awesome! We learned cool science tricks!”

“The scientists were excellent. I want to learn more about lasers now.”

“I liked the demonstration with the balls that looked the same, but were really different. I wasn't expecting that!”

Developed by the OSA Rochester Section, the “Optics Suitcase” is an innovative, interactive presentation package designed to introduce middle school students to the dynamic and exciting range of concepts within the study of light. Each case includes a teaching guide and materials for demonstrations and experiments that teach about optics in a fun, hands-on atmosphere. Topics include: polarization, diffraction and selective reflection. The “theme packets,” which contain the individual experiments, are designed for students to take home and share with their friends and family as a reinforcement of the classroom lessons. A demonstration requires 40 - 60 minutes on average, and provides materials for up to 50 students. More information, including how to obtain an “Optics Suitcase,” is available on the OSA website.

About The OSA Foundation The OSA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation established by The Optical Society (OSA) in 2002 to carry out charitable activities that support OSA’s mission of promoting the generation, application, archiving and worldwide dissemination of knowledge in optics and photonics. The foundation helps cultivate the next generation of leaders and innovators in the optics and photonics community as they move through advanced degree programs and become active members of research and engineering communities around the globe. To date, The OSA Foundation has awarded more than 800 grants, scholarships, and prizes benefiting thousands of individuals in more than 55 countries. For more information, visit www.osa.org/foundation.

