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A New Kind of Outreach: What's in it for you?

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There are abundant reasons for students to be involved in service and outreach projects. Not only is it a good recruitment tool for recruiting and retaining majors, but students gain confidence in their knowledge, and have opportunities to cement new knowledge by teaching others. Outreach teaches students how to talk with the public about science, an increasingly important skill for today's scientists. Let's not forget that it's also inspiring, and a lot of fun! There are also abundant reasons for faculty to develop a solid outreach program. It can be an unusual, but welcome, source of funding. It can tie together the various E/PO efforts that granting agencies are now requiring. A solid outreach program can also revitalize your teaching and research programs, and help you find non-traditional sources of funding for your research projects. Outreach is also vastly more satisfying than serving on boring University committees! In the Physics Department at Weber State University, we have developed an extensive suite of outreach programs that involve students in the life of the Department from the very moment that they start to think they might be interested in physics. This demonstrably improves our recruitment and retention numbers, as well as improving student performance. In addition, these outreach efforts have resulted in unprecedented funding levels for Departmental projects of all kinds, and have created a new, ongoing, Department-controlled funding source. From those funds, we've been able to pilot a number of different projects, some of which have gone on to be funded more traditionally. More than 2 million dollars has come into the Department in the last few years as a result of these efforts. I'll tell you how we did it, and how our Department has changed as a result.