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Building an undergraduate physics program with Learning Assistants¹

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In 2007, the CSUSM Physics Department began offering a B.S. in Applied Physics, its first physics bachelors degree program. The program has grown from 11 majors in 2008 to over 80 in 2012, due in part to recruiting students from local high schools and community colleges. More broadly, because most CSUSM students come from the local region, the longer-term health of the Department is coupled with the vitality and strength of local high school physics education. In addition, establishing a new physics degree required curriculum development and offered the opportunity to incorporate recent innovations in physics education when developing courses. A Learning Assistants (LA) Program, established by the Department in 2008, has been a critical component in these efforts to recruit students, build local educational networks, and implement innovative curricula. In an LA Program, undergraduate Learning Assistants assist faculty in class, meet regularly with the course instructor, and participate in a weekly seminar on teaching and learning, which provides guidance on effective instruction and an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the classroom. The LA program promotes course transformation, improved student learning, and teacher recruitment. This talk will describe the CSUSM LA Program and its role in support of our growing applied physics degree program.

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