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Learning from our neighbours about “Building a Thriving Undergraduate Physics Program”

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Many Physics Departments in Canada and around the world face similar challenges: low enrollment numbers for physics majors, long graduation times, retention problems, and the desire – or pressure – to improve the student experience.

In February 2015, a team from the Physics Department at SFU attended the “Building a Thriving Undergraduate Physics Program” workshop organized by the APS and AAPT in Seattle. We found these two days so useful and inspiring that we want to share some of what we learned with our Canadian colleagues. In this talk, we will show some highlights from the presentations about departments that reinvented themselves and now thrive, as well as features that strong programs appear to have in common. Next, we will summarize our approach towards building a strategy for our own department. This presentation will be guided by the thoughtful workshop design of Rob Hilborn and Renee Royal and will be shared with their permission. We will conclude by adding data and examples relevant to the situation in Canada.

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