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Harvard physicist speaks to students at Watsonville High

By [Scott Rappaport](#)

Renowned Harvard physicist Lisa Randall spoke to more than 100 Watsonville High School students enrolled in physics classes last Wednesday as part of an outreach event to help celebrate the investiture of UCSC chancellor Denice D. Denton.

After a brief presentation of her background and work, Randall fielded questions from the 15- to 18-year-old students, ranging from her goals and influences to more detailed queries about black holes and string theory.



Harvard physicist Lisa Randall (left), Watsonville High student Andrea Aguilar, and her physics teacher Joe Manildi after Randall's November 2 talk at the high school

Photo: Scott Rappaport

When asked, "what is the greatest goal you wish to achieve with your career?" Randall received applause when she quickly responded: "to change the world."

"I'd like to see more people interested in science and I want people to know that all kinds of people can become scientists," she added.

Randall ran through the qualities that make a good scientist--including curiosity about how things work and fit together, perseverance, and the ability to admit when you are wrong and try something else.

"Math is also really important," Randall told the students. "You want to learn as much math as you can—it's really useful in anything that you do. Reading is essential too," she added, "it's a great way to engage your imagination."

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The event was cosponsored by UCSC Arts & Lectures and the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County. The students prepared for Randall's visit by spending the past two weeks learning about principles of modern physics.

"It was really interesting and I think it cleared up a lot of things about string theory that we're learning now in our physics class," observed 16-year old junior Andrea Leone.

"She kind of broke it down and made it much easier to understand," chimed in fellow student Andrea Aguilar, "particularly certain things that other people couldn't really explain to us."

Watsonville High physics teacher Joe Manildi helped coordinate the event and noted that he was extremely pleased with the outcome. "I can't say enough about Lisa Randall—she really brought out the best in my students," Manildi said.

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