

Girls' Day : April 25, 2013

The Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy in Bonn called upon female students to discover the Universe. With the motto "Girls, reach for the stars", the students were given a view into the world of astronomy and physics and were motivated to choose a career in these fields.

The Girls' Day attracted forty-five students interested in astronomy to the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy in Bonn and Argelander Institute of the University of Bonn. Every year on the April 25th, various businesses and institutes offer a Girls Day in the hopes of encouraging more women to choose careers in technical or scientific fields. "Girls' Day is open to female students between the ages of twelve and sixteen, and the available spots for Girls' Day fill up within a few days", says Ute Teuber, Girls' Day organizer at the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy.



The program began with an official welcome from Michael Kramer, a director at the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy. From the beginning he made it clear how important it is to have women in technical careers and that they are as capable as men. As an example he described the British radio astronomer Jocelyn Bell Burnell, who discovered the first known radio pulsars in 1968 as a graduate student.



The physicist Nadya Ben Bekhti described a typical work day as an astronomer. Her presentation illustrated to the students how adventurous astronomy can be. As soon as Nadya Ben Bekhti asked the students a few questions, it was clear that many of the girls already knew a lot about astronomy. This knowledge also came into play during a conference call to the control room of the Effelsberg radio telescope. The girls toured five different technical labs, and afterward had homemade ice cream cooled with liquid nitrogen.



The girls then chose one of six different hands-on workshops. For example the students worked in the machine shop and made hose clamps from sheet metal. Three girls got to solder their own electronic circuit. Another workshop took the girls on "a trip through the Galaxy", where they learned about various kinds of stars and how they are born. Students also learned how to find planets outside of our solar system using the transit detection method.



After they finished with their workshops, the girls took an astronomical quiz, which tested their knowledge of astronomy with questions like "which planets have rings?" or "how do the planets orbit the Sun?". The top-scorer won a guided tour of the Effelsberg radio telescope. At the end the students were asked if they could see themselves choosing a career in a science or engineering, and most of the girls raised their hand. Volunteers from all departments within the Max Planck Institute participated in Girls' Days, and everyone had fun.