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Don't Believe It?
Ask Lauren Bain.



Ask Lauren Bain what she finds so captivating about physics and she'll start her answer with "fireflies."

"Fire flies blinking in the night — one light blinks and then they all start to blink," Bain explained. "And you think about how beautiful this random pattern of fireflies is. But it's not random and there is an order and structure to it. If you study physics, you come to understand the laws that explain patterns in nature and the world."

While Bain, a junior physics major, has no problem making firefly-like connections between physics and everyday life, she likes going deeper too.

"Physics is about studying how to explain how the universe really is," Bain said. "For example, the study of oscillations — the movement of a traditional mass on a string. This is similar to the motion of atoms in a molecule. They form a lattice and oscillate with respect to each other. Almost everything in the universe can be represented by a simple harmonic oscillator."

Bain explains that physics is a path to everything else. Anything else isn't necessarily a path to everything else.

"If you go straight into engineering you are confining yourself to that," Bain said. "With physics you can go into anything — engineering, law, math, physics."

And Bain is a good example of how things can change as a result of being exposed to physics.

"I was pretty sure I wanted to study physics for the sake of physics and that has changed because it has become more about not just learning how to think but applying the problem solving to new situations," Bain said.

"Now I am thinking about mechanical or aerospace engineering — something different."

If you'd like to ask Lauren Bain about what it's like to pursue a physics major, you can contact her at lbain@unc.edu.

To see how others have made the connection between fireflies and physics, check it out at:

<http://tinkerlog.com/2008/07/27/synchronizing-fireflies-ng/>

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