

## 153<sup>rd</sup> meeting of The Lyncean Group of San Diego

**Date:** Wednesday, 8 April 2026

**Location:** Southwestern Yacht Club, 2702 Qualtrough Street, San Diego, CA 92106

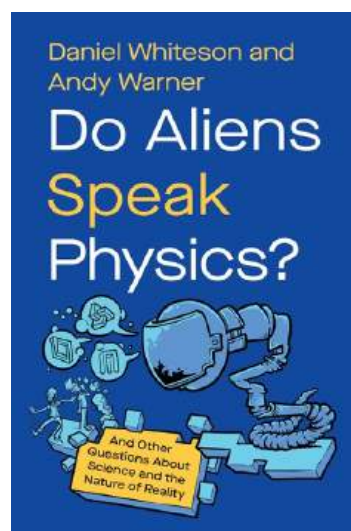
**Speaker:** Dr. Daniel O. Whiteson

Professor of Physics & Astronomy,  
University of California Irvine (UCI)



**Title:** **Do Aliens Speak Physics? And Other Questions about Science and the Nature of Reality.**

### **Abstract:**



This talk presents an overview of the book by the same title, written by Daniel Whiteson and Andy Warner and published in 2025 by W. W. Norton and Company.

An online abstract of this book reports, “A hilarious, mind-bending investigation into how much humans and aliens might have in common, scientifically speaking—from a best-selling cartoonist and acclaimed physicist.”

“Deploying cutting-edge physics, deep philosophical insight, and plenty of cartoons, Whiteson and Warner explode what we thought we knew about talking to our cosmic neighbors—and even science itself—by asking and answering questions both lighthearted and profound. Would aliens even need science to build the technology that brings

them to Earth? Is it possible that they could experience the Universe very differently from us—*tasting* electrons and *smelling* photons? Would the extraterrestrials have to perceive “electrons” and “photons” at all, or are these particles only convenient concepts for our human minds? At bottom, does physics reveal fundamental truths about the Universe, as we so often believe, or might it in fact tell us more about ourselves?

As ultimately mind-altering as it is hilarious, *Do Aliens Speak Physics?* will leave you with a view of the Universe—and humanity—that’s stranger and more marvelous than before.”

### **Speaker biography:**

Welcome back, Dr. Whiteson. Many of you may remember that Dr. Whiteson was the guest speaker at [Lyncean Group meeting #135](#) in March 2020, the last Lyncean Group

meeting before the start of the COVID pandemic. His topic was “We Have No Idea: Big, Unanswered Questions about the Universe and Its Particles.”

Professor Whiteson’s research is in the field of Experimental High Energy Physics. He is interested in probing the structure of matter and the nature of its interactions at the very smallest scales, to understand the fundamental nature of our universe. Whiteson is part of the ATLAS collaboration which built, maintains, and collects data from the ATLAS experiment at the Large Hadron Collider, where the Higgs boson was discovered. His research uses the LHC to investigate the basic building blocks of the Universe around us, hoping to find new kinds of particles or interactions and reveal a deeper and simpler layer underlying our reality.

In 2014, Whiteson set out on a mission to conceive the largest particle experiment ever constructed. Along with his team, he developed Cosmic Rays Found in Smartphones (CRAYFIS), a smartphone app which uses a cell phone’s camera to detect ultra high-energy cosmic rays (UHECRs). These particles are nearly a billion times as energetic as the particles in the Large Hadron Collider, and their origin is a mystery. The challenge is that UHECRs are very rare with about 1 particle per square kilometer over 100 years. Therefore, a very large detector is needed. CRAYFIS would turn the network of the roughly two billion existing phones into a planet-sized detector of cosmic rays. In 2015, CRAYFIS won a Webby Award, known as the Grammys of the internet, in the category Experimental & Innovation Sites.

Whiteson’s research has appeared widely in popular media outlets including *The New Yorker*, *Ars Technica*, *VICE* and many others. Along with his colleagues he created popular comics including “What’s in the data? The Higgs Boson Explained” and “True Tales of Dark Matters,” which were all featured on PBS. Upon receiving his Ph.D. in Physics from UC Berkeley in 2003, Dr. Whiteson was appointed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. He came to UCI in 2007 where he received the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research.



*Dr. Whiteson provided an engaging presentation that prompted many questions from the audience and many thoughtful responses.*



*(Above) After the main presentation, Bill Hagan gave an entertaining lead-up to his presentation of a commemorative Lyncean Coin to Dr. Whiteson.*



*(Left) After the meeting many members lined up to purchase a signed copy of Dr. Whiteson's book, "Do Aliens Speak Physics?"*

Bill Hagan's meeting slides are available [here](#) as a downloadable PowerPoint file. View as a slideshow, and when you reach the slide with the image of Dr. Whiteson's book, "Do Aliens Speak Physics?," manually click to advance, and then click two more times to start a short animation.

Dr. Whiteson's Lyncean presentation slides are [here](#).

You can watch several of Dr. Whiteson's presentations on YouTube. Here are two on the subjects that Dr. Whiteson presented to The Lyncean Group in March 2020 and April 2026:

- "Do Aliens Speak Physics? w Prof Daniel Whiteson," (1:05:48), posted by Bad Boy of Science, 7 November 2025:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1SzmDr\\_Nnk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1SzmDr_Nnk)
- "We have no idea about the universe | Daniel Whiteson," (18:09 min), posted by TEDx San Francisco, 25 November 2019:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7\\_bqZhy76SM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_bqZhy76SM)