

Physics, PhD

The Department of Physics offers a Doctor of Philosophy in Physics with specializations in different subfields that reflect the forefront research activities of the department, including biological physics, condensed matter physics, elementary particle physics, nanomedicine, and network science. The program for the PhD degree consists of the required course work, a qualifying examination, a preliminary research seminar, the completion of a dissertation based upon original research performed by the student, and a dissertation defense upon completion of the dissertation. Based on these measures, students are expected to obtain a graduate-level understanding of basic physics concepts and demonstrate the ability to formulate a research plan, communicate orally a research plan, and conduct and present independent research.

Coursework

The required courses are grouped into two sets, Part 1 and Part 2, having a total of 42 semester hours as a minimum. Part 1 courses (first-year courses) are typically taken prior to the qualifying exam. Students without a master's degree must complete all Part 1 courses in the first year to remain in good academic standing in the graduate program. Part 2 courses (second-year courses) may be taken before or after passing the qualifying exam.

Grade Requirements

The minimum grade required for the successful completion of the Part 1 courses is a B (3.000) average. Students will only be allowed to take the qualifying exam if they fulfill this requirement. The minimum grade required for the successful completion of Part 2 (excluding advanced research) is at least a B (3.000) average for the Part 2 courses. The Part 2 courses, including any makeup of grade-point-average deficiencies (see following), must be completed within two calendar years of passing the qualifying exam. The department expects students to complete the bulk of these courses in the first year after the qualifying exam. The cumulative average will be calculated each semester. No more than two courses or 8 semester hours of credit, whichever is greater, may be repeated in order to satisfy the requirement for the PhD degree. A student who does not maintain a 3.000 cumulative average for two consecutive semesters, or is otherwise not making satisfactory progress toward the PhD degree requirements, may be recommended for termination at the discretion of the graduate committee. Within the above limitations, a required course for which a grade of F is received must be repeated with a grade of C or better and may be repeated only once. In calculating the overall cumulative average, all graduate-level course work completed at the time of clearance for graduation will be counted.

Qualifying Exam Requirement

A student who fails to achieve the required B average for the Part 1 courses must petition the graduate committee in order to remain in the graduate program and be eligible to take the qualifying exam. A student who fails to achieve the required B average for the Part 2 courses must petition the graduate committee in order to remain in the graduate program. All students registered in the PhD program are required to pass a qualifying exam unless they are granted an exemption (see below). The qualifying exam may include both written and oral parts.

The qualifying exam consists of two parts:

- **Part 1:** Classical physics (based on classical mechanics and mathematical methods), electromagnetic theory, and statistical physics.
- **Part 2:** Quantum physics (based on quantum mechanics and its applications) and statistical physics. The content of the qualifying exam will be based on the content of the first-year courses, excluding Principles of Experimental Physics (PHYS 5318). A syllabus is available and on request will be distributed by the graduate coordinator to any student prior to the exam.

The qualifying exam is given twice yearly: once prior to the start of the fall semester and again within the first two weeks of the start of the spring semester. The exam will consist of one day each on Part 1 (classical physics/mathematical methods, electromagnetism, and statistical physics) and Part 2 (quantum physics and statistical physics).

All students enrolled in the PhD program must take the fall qualifying exam after completing their first-year course of study with the required grade-point average unless they are granted an exemption. Students taking the exam for the first time must take both Part 1 and Part 2. A student who does not pass the exam on his or her first attempt must pass the exam the next time it is given in order to continue in the PhD program. However, a student who passes one part of the first attempt is not required to repeat that part.

Any PhD student will be exempt from taking the quantum part of the qualifying exam if they receive both a grade of B+ or higher in Quantum Theory 1 (PHYS 7315), Quantum Theory 2 (PHYS 7316), and Statistical Physics (PHYS 7305) and have a GPA of 3.670 or higher in those three courses. To meet this standard, they must take all the above courses. Any PhD student will be exempt from taking the classical part of the qualifying exam if they receive both a grade of B+ or higher in Classical Mechanics/Math Methods (PHYS 7301), Electromagnetic Theory (PHYS 7302), and Statistical Physics (PHYS 7305) and have a GPA of 3.670 or higher in these three courses. To meet this standard, they must take all three of these courses.

A student who fails the written exam by less than 5 percent of the total possible score on the second attempt for that part will be automatically given an oral exam. A student who fails the written exam by more than 10 percent is excluded from taking an oral exam. These provisions apply separately to Parts 1 and 2 of the exam.

PhD Candidacy

Degree candidacy is established when the student has passed the qualifying examination and completed both the Part 1 and Part 2 course requirements. PhD candidacy may be achieved before completion of the advanced elective if the elective in the student's specialization is not offered

in a given year. The elective must be taken at the next opportunity. PhD degree candidacy is certified by the college. A maximum of five years after the establishment of doctoral degree candidacy is allowed for the completion of degree requirements.

PhD Dissertation Requirement

All PhD students are required to complete a dissertation based upon new and original research in one of the three following options:

- In one of the current theoretical or experimental research programs in the department, under direct supervision of an advisor from the Department of Physics. A dissertation committee will be formed consisting of the advisor, two full-time members of the department, and an additional member, either from within the department or from an outside department or institution.
- In a recognized interdisciplinary field involving another research area of the university, under the direct supervision of a faculty member in that field. In this case, an interdisciplinary committee is formed under the approval of the graduate committee, consisting of the direct supervisor, a departmental advisor, one other member of the department, and an additional member of either the department or the external department.
- In an area of applied research in one of the industrial or high-technology laboratories associated with the department's industrial PhD program. The direct supervisor is associated with the institution where the research is performed. In this case, a dissertation advisory committee is established by the graduate committee, consisting of the direct supervisor, the departmental advisor, and two other members of the department.

PhD students must select their departmental advisor no later than the end of the spring semester of their second year or their second semester after having passed the qualifying examination, whichever comes first. This process should start as soon as the student has identified a field of research or has passed the qualifying exam.

PhD Dissertation Committee, Preliminary Thesis Proposal, and Preliminary Research Seminar

By the end of the spring semester of the third year or the second semester in which the student is enrolled for PhD dissertation, whichever comes first, each PhD student must have an approved dissertation committee and thesis proposal.

The student (with the aid and approval of his or her thesis advisor) will submit a PhD thesis proposal to the graduate committee clearly outlining a plan to carry out new and original research in the context of previously published research in the scientific literature and also describe the methodologies to be employed. The thesis proposal is limited to 15 pages or less, including references. A proposed makeup of the dissertation committee will be submitted at the same time.

The graduate committee will evaluate the merit of the proposal and make recommendations for improvements when necessary, including any changes to the composition of the dissertation committee. No more than two submissions for a particular proposal may be made. In the case where a revised proposal does not meet a minimum academic standard that provides a basis for making such improvements, the graduate committee may instruct the student to select a different thesis topic or advisor.

After approval by the graduate committee, the proposal is circulated to the general faculty for comments. If the graduate coordinator receives any objections, the proposal will be referred back to the graduate committee for final resolution.

After the proposal and dissertation committee have been approved, the student will make a public presentation of the material in the preliminary research seminar before the dissertation committee in a format open to the full department and advertised one week in advance. The dissertation committee will then meet in closed session to evaluate the seminar. The preliminary research seminar must take place no later than the semester after the thesis proposal is approved and, normally, in the same semester.

In the event that the dissertation advisor is changed, a new committee must be formed, with the approval of the graduate committee, and a new preliminary research seminar given.

PhD Dissertation Defense

The dissertation defense consists of a public presentation, followed by a question period conducted by the dissertation committee and limited to them and the department faculty. The date of the dissertation presentation must be publicized and a copy of the thesis deposited with the graduate program coordinator at least one week prior to the defense. If during this posting period or in the two business days following the defense a written objection to the thesis is lodged with the department chair by a member of the faculty, the chair may appoint an ad hoc postdefense review committee to provide advice on the scientific issues raised by the objection. Students should note that they must be registered for Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation during the semester in which they defend their dissertation and that they should schedule their defenses well in advance of the end of the semester in order to accommodate the review/waiting period and the time required to deposit the thesis.

The final dissertation defense is held in accordance with the College of Science regulations.

PhD Specialization Options

Students choose a specialization in biological physics; particle physics; condensed matter physics; or, with preapproval of a faculty member, in the following areas: nanomedicine or network science.

Multiple specializations are allowed if the individual requirements for each specialization are met.

Note that the specialization will not appear on the degree diploma or on the official transcript but can be listed as the field of study on CVs and grant proposals.

Transfer Credit

Students must petition in writing through the graduate committee to the director of graduate student services for all transfer credit. A copy of an official transcript must be attached to the Request for Transfer Credit form. A maximum of 9 semester hours of credit obtained at another institution may be accepted toward the PhD degree provided that the credits transferred consist of a grade of B or better; are graduate-level courses; have been earned at an accredited institution; and have not been used toward any other degree. Grades are not transferred.

Course Waivers

Course waivers may be accepted toward the PhD degree course requirements, though they will not change the numbers of credits required for the program. The student must have received a B grade or better in equivalent graduate-level core courses that have been earned at an accredited institution. Students must petition in writing to the graduate committee for all course waivers and provide documentation in the form of official transcripts to support their petition.

Residence Requirement

The residence requirement is satisfied by at least one year of full-time graduate work (i.e., enrollment in PhD Dissertation, for two consecutive semesters). Students must be continually enrolled throughout the pursuit of the dissertation.

Internship Option

A PhD candidate may spend one year in a participating high-technology, industrial, or government laboratory immediately after passing the PhD qualifying examination. In this program, the student is expected to remain in touch with the university by taking one course per semester at the university and by frequent contact with a faculty advisor. After the one-year paid internship, the student returns to the university to do the dissertation. Eligibility for this program is contingent on acceptance both by the department and by the external laboratory.

Program Requirements

Bachelor's Degree Entrance

Complete all courses and requirements listed below unless otherwise indicated.

Milestones

Two qualifying examinations
 Annual review
 Candidacy
 Preliminary research seminar proposal with proposed dissertation committee
 Preliminary research seminar talk
 Dissertation defense

Core Requirements ¹

Code	Title	Hours
Principles		
PHYS 5318	Principles of Experimental Physics	4
Computational		
PHYS 7301	Classical Mechanics/Math Methods	4
PHYS 7305	Statistical Physics	4
PHYS 7321	Computational Physics	4
Theory		
PHYS 7302	Electromagnetic Theory	4
PHYS 7315	Quantum Theory 1	4
PHYS 7316	Quantum Theory 2	4
Research		
PHYS 7210	Introduction to Research in Physics (Take this repeatable course twice)	0
PHYS 9984	Advanced Research	1-8

Electives

Code	Title	Hours
Complete 8 semester hours from the following:		8
If preapproved to specialize in nanomedicine or network science, consult program director.		
PHYS 7322	Nonequilibrium Physics	
PHYS 7323	Elementary Particle Physics	
PHYS 7324	Condensed Matter Physics	
PHYS 7325	Quantum Field Theory 1	
PHYS 7731	Biological Physics 1	

Specialization Elective

Choose 4 semester hours from your specialization below:

4

PhD Specialization OptionsA specialization is required.²*Note:* Specialization in nanomedicine or network science requires prior approval.

Code	Title	Hours
Biological Physics ³		
PHYS 7731	Biological Physics 1	4
PHYS 7741	Biological Physics 2	4
Particle Physics ⁴		
PHYS 7323	Elementary Particle Physics	4
PHYS 7733	Topics: Elementary Particle Physics and Cosmology	4
Condensed Matter Physics		
PHYS 7324	Condensed Matter Physics	4
PHYS 7734	Topics: Condensed Matter Physics	4
Nanomedicine		
NNMD 5270	Introduction to Nanomedicine	3
NNMD 5370	Nanomedicine Research Techniques	4
Network Science		
PHYS 5116	Network Science 1	4
PHYS 7335	Dynamical Processes in Complex Networks	4

Dissertation

Code	Title	Hours
Taken third year and beyond.		
PHYS 9990	Dissertation Term 1	
PHYS 9991	Dissertation Term 2	
Complete the following (repeatable) course until graduation:		
PHYS 9996	Dissertation Continuation	

Program Credit/GPA Requirements

42 total semester hours required

Minimum 3.000 GPA required

1

Methods for Teaching in the Introductory Physics Laboratory 1 (PHYS 7220) and Methods for Teaching Introductory Physics Laboratory 2 (PHYS 7230) are required for students awarded a Teaching Assistantship.

2

Note that the specialization will not appear on the degree diploma or on the official transcript but can be listed as the field of study on CVs and grant proposals.

3

By approval of the graduate committee, biological physics students may substitute graduate courses in biology, physics, or chemistry from the following list instead of Biological Physics 2 (PHYS 7741):

Biochemistry (BIOL 6300), Molecular Cell Biology (BIOL 6301), Optical Methods of Analysis (CHEM 5613), Molecular Modeling (CHEM 5638), . Additional appropriate courses may also be substituted by approval of the physics graduate committee.

4

Elementary Particle Physics (PHYS 7323) is required for a specialization in particle physics. The advanced elective may be Topics: Elementary Particle Physics and Cosmology (PHYS 7733).

Plan of Study

Year 1				
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours	
PHYS 7210		0 PHYS 5318		4
PHYS 7301		4 PHYS 7210		0
PHYS 7302		4 PHYS 7305		4

PHYS 7315	4	PHYS 7316	4
	12		12
Year 2			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
PHYS 7321		4 PHYS 9984	2-8
Electives		8 Advanced elective	4
	12		6-12
Year 3			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
PHYS 9990		0 PHYS 9991	0
	0		0

Total Hours: 42-48

Advanced Entry Program Requirements

The Department of Physics offers a Doctor of Philosophy in Physics with specializations in different subfields that reflect the forefront of research activities of the department, including biological physics, condensed matter physics, elementary particle physics, nanomedicine, and network science. The program for the PhD degree consists of the required coursework, a qualifying examination, a preliminary research seminar, the completion of a dissertation based upon original research performed by the student, and a dissertation defense upon completion of the dissertation. Based on these measures, students are expected to obtain a graduate-level understanding of basic physics concepts and demonstrate the ability to formulate a research plan, communicate orally a research plan, and conduct and present independent research.

Coursework

Students entering with a master's degree from a U.S. institution in physics or a related area approved by the department will be required to take 10 semester hours of courses. The courses will be determined by the graduate director based on the student's transcripts. Students entering with a MS degree awarded by an institution outside the United States will need to consult the graduate director for a transcript evaluation to determine required coursework and course waivers.

Grade Requirements

The minimum grade required is a B (3.000) average. A student who does not maintain a 3.000 cumulative average for two consecutive semesters, or is otherwise not making satisfactory progress toward the PhD degree requirements, may be recommended for termination at the discretion of the graduate committee.

Qualifying Exam Requirement

All students registered in the PhD program are required to pass a qualifying exam unless they are granted an exemption. The qualifying exam may include both written and oral parts. Students who enter with a master's degree from a U.S. institution may take either the classical or the quantum exam, or both, at the first opportunity upon entering the program in the fall. In this case, the exam will count as a first attempt only if the student submits the exam to the examiner.

The qualifying exam consists of two parts:

- **Part 1:** Classical physics (based on classical mechanics and mathematical methods), electromagnetic theory, and statistical physics.
- **Part 2:** Quantum physics (based on quantum mechanics and its applications) and statistical physics. A syllabus is available and on request will be distributed by the graduate coordinator to any student prior to the exam.

The qualifying exam is given twice yearly: once prior to the start of the fall semester and again within the first two weeks of the start of the spring semester. The exam will consist of one day each on Part 1 (classical physics/mathematical methods, electromagnetism, and statistical physics) and Part 2 (quantum physics and statistical physics).

All students enrolled in the PhD program must take the fall qualifying exam after completing their first-year course of study with the required grade-point average. Students taking the exam for the first time must take both Part 1 and Part 2. A student who does not pass the exam on their first attempt must pass the exam the next time it is given in order to continue in the PhD program. However, a student who passes one part of the first attempt is not required to repeat that part.

A student who fails the written exam by less than 5% of the total possible score on the second attempt for that part will be automatically given an oral exam. A student who fails the written exam by more than 10% is excluded from taking an oral exam. These provisions apply separately to Parts 1 and 2 of the exam.

PhD Candidacy

Degree candidacy is established when the student has passed the qualifying examination and completed 10 semester hours of courses. PhD degree candidacy is certified by the college. A maximum of five years after the establishment of doctoral degree candidacy is allowed for the completion of degree requirements.

PhD Dissertation Requirement

All PhD students are required to complete a dissertation based upon new and original research in one of the three following options:

- In one of the current theoretical or experimental research programs in the department, under direct supervision of an advisor from the Department of Physics. A dissertation committee will be formed consisting of the advisor, two full-time members of the department, and an additional member, either from within the department or from an outside department or institution.
- In a recognized interdisciplinary field involving another research area of the university, under the direct supervision of a faculty member in that field. In this case, an interdisciplinary committee is formed under the approval of the graduate committee, consisting of the direct supervisor, a departmental advisor, one other member of the department, and an additional member of either the department or the external department.
- In an area of applied research in one of the industrial or high-technology laboratories associated with the department's industrial PhD program. The direct supervisor is associated with the institution where the research is performed. In this case, a dissertation advisory committee is established by the graduate committee, consisting of the direct supervisor, the departmental advisor, and two other members of the department.

PhD students must select their departmental advisor no later than the end of the spring semester of their second year or their second semester after having passed the qualifying examination, whichever comes first. This process should start as soon as the student has identified a field of research or has passed the qualifying exam.

PhD Dissertation Committee, Preliminary Thesis Proposal, and Preliminary Research Seminar

By the end of the spring semester of the third year or the second semester in which the student is enrolled for PhD dissertation, whichever comes first, each PhD student must have an approved dissertation committee and thesis proposal.

The student (with the aid and approval of their thesis advisor) will submit a PhD thesis proposal to the graduate committee clearly outlining a plan to carry out new and original research in the context of previously published research in the scientific literature and also describe the methodologies to be employed. The thesis proposal is limited to 15 pages or less, including references. A proposed makeup of the dissertation committee will be submitted at the same time.

The graduate committee will evaluate the merit of the proposal and make recommendations for improvements when necessary, including any changes to the composition of the dissertation committee. No more than two submissions for a particular proposal may be made. In the case where a revised proposal does not meet a minimum academic standard that provides a basis for making such improvements, the graduate committee may instruct the student to select a different thesis topic or advisor.

After approval by the graduate committee, the proposal is circulated to the general faculty for comments. If the graduate coordinator receives any objections, the proposal will be referred back to the graduate committee for final resolution.

After the proposal and dissertation committee have been approved, the student will make a public presentation of the material in the preliminary research seminar before the dissertation committee in a format open to the full department and advertised one week in advance. The dissertation committee will then meet in closed session to evaluate the seminar. The preliminary research seminar must take place no later than the semester after the thesis proposal is approved and, normally, in the same semester.

In the event that the dissertation advisor is changed, a new committee must be formed, with the approval of the graduate committee, and a new preliminary research seminar given.

PhD Dissertation Defense

The dissertation defense consists of a public presentation, followed by a question period conducted by the dissertation committee and limited to them and the department faculty. The date of the dissertation presentation must be publicized and a copy of the thesis deposited with the graduate program coordinator at least one week prior to the defense. If during this posting period or in the two business days following the defense a written objection to the thesis is lodged with the department chair by a member of the faculty, the chair may appoint an ad hoc postdefense review committee to provide advice on the scientific issues raised by the objection. Students should note that they must be registered for Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation during the semester in which they defend their dissertation and that they should schedule their defenses well in advance of the end of the semester in order to accommodate the review/waiting period and the time required to deposit the thesis.

The final dissertation defense is held in accordance with the College of Science regulations.

Residence Requirement

The residence requirement is satisfied by at least one year of full-time graduate work (i.e., enrollment in PhD Dissertation, for two consecutive semesters). Students must be continually enrolled throughout the pursuit of the dissertation.

Internship Option

A PhD candidate may spend one year in a participating high-technology, industrial, or government laboratory immediately after passing the PhD qualifying examination. In this program, the student is expected to remain in touch with the university by taking one course per semester at the university and by frequent contact with a faculty advisor. After the one-year paid internship, the student returns to the university to do the dissertation. Eligibility for this program is contingent on acceptance both by the department and by the external laboratory.

Complete all courses and requirements listed below unless otherwise indicated.

Milestones

Two qualifying examinations
 Annual review
 Candidacy
 Preliminary research seminar proposal with proposed dissertation committee
 Preliminary research seminar talk
 Dissertation defense

Core Requirements

Code	Title	Hours
	Complete 10 semester hours of coursework. The courses required will be determined by the graduate program director based on the student's transcripts. ¹	10

Dissertation

Code	Title	Hours
PHYS 9990	Dissertation Term 1	
PHYS 9991	Dissertation Term 2	
Complete the following (repeatable) course until graduation:		
PHYS 9996	Dissertation Continuation	

Program Credit/GPA Requirements

10 total semester hours required
 Minimum 3.000 GPA required

1

Methods for Teaching in the Introductory Physics Laboratory 1 (PHYS 7220) is required for students awarded a teaching assistantship.