

PHYSICS, PHD

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Field of Study: Physics

Program Overview

The graduate student in physics has two primary responsibilities: to broaden and deepen their own understanding of physics, and to contribute in a significant way to the progress of physics as a research discipline. Neither of these efforts can be completely separated from the other. Your understanding of physics is necessarily reflected in your research, and your research will help to deepen your understanding of physics. However, the relative emphasis gradually shifts during graduate study from early concentration on formal course work to the original research necessary for a PhD dissertation.

Requirements for Graduation

Requirements for the PhD degree include course work, the PhD qualifying examination, a topical oral examination, and submission and defense of a written thesis.

Additional Courses for Cultural Purposes

The university permits graduate students to enroll in up to eight "fellowship" courses that are not counted toward the degree requirements for no additional charge. These may include courses in foreign language, history, philosophy, business and management, music, engineering, etc. These courses will be graded, and a grade will appear on the student's transcript.

PhD Qualifying Examination

The PhD qualifying examination is based on advanced undergraduate material and on material covered in the introductory courses: Quantum Mechanics I & II; Classical Electromagnetism; and Classical and Statistical Mechanics I & II.

A normally prepared student will be expected to take the qualifying examination in May at the end of the first year of graduate study. For students who do not pass on the first attempt, a second exam is offered in late August.

Admission to PhD Candidacy

A student will be admitted to PhD candidacy upon passing the qualifying exam *and* upon a vote of the faculty to determine whether the student is making satisfactory academic progress.

Topical Oral Exam

Within one year of formal association with a research advisor, but no later than the end of the fifth semester after a student matriculates, each student will have an oral examination of her/his research progress with the dissertation committee. The examination will consist of a presentation by the student relating to literature in her/his thesis topic, a proposed direction for work, and a progress report. Passing this examination is a requirement for the PhD degree.

Advising

Upon entry to graduate school, the PhD student's academic advisor will be the department's Director of Graduate Studies. Eventually, each successful student will acquire a research advisor and dissertation committee. At that time, the responsibility of the Director of Graduate Studies will greatly diminish, but not vanish entirely. It will remain the Director's responsibility to assist the research advisor in academic matters. The Director of Graduate Studies, as well as the research advisor, will countersign the student's course program. It is the responsibility of the Director of Graduate Studies to follow the career of the student and see that all requirements for the degree are fulfilled.

PhD Research and Dissertation

A PhD degree implies, in addition to the course and qualifying exam requirements, the performance of a piece of original research and its presentation as a doctoral dissertation. The research requirement for the PhD is at the heart of the doctoral program. The final requirement for the PhD degree is the written doctoral dissertation and oral defense.

Entering students should interest themselves in the available research possibilities in the physics department at an early state of their careers. They should be thinking about the area of interest, the kind of problem they would like to tackle, and the faculty member under whose direction they would like to work. As soon as they have passed the qualifying exam, they should devote themselves increasingly to research.

By January or February of the first year, the student should begin to speak with faculty members about their research, and ultimately find a faculty member who will sponsor and supervise the student's work. The relationship between a student and research advisor is a very close one. It is in the course of this relationship that students develop their skills in the actual doing of physics. Students should give much thought to their choice of research area and research advisor. Once a student has made this commitment, it takes the highest priority. Students must understand that they are unlikely to bring their thesis research to a successful conclusion without a total commitment on their part. Our policy on financial support of graduate students reflects the importance of such a commitment. Renewal of a student's support will be contingent upon evidence of progress toward a degree.

Colloquia and Seminars

In addition to course work and individualized direction in research, the physics department provides a third medium of teaching, colloquia and seminars, which are shared by students and faculty alike.

Colloquia are talks of a general nature, given at a level that all graduate students in all areas of physics should be able to follow. They are usually held on Thursdays. Notices (and, whenever possible, brief introductions to the subject) will be distributed well in advance of each colloquium. Graduate students are urged and expected to attend all of these colloquia. (All graduate students are required to register each semester for the zero-credit-hour course PHYS 666 Frontiers in Physics, which consists of attendance at colloquia.)

Seminars tend to deal with more specific topics and often require some expertise in the field. Some groups hold weekly luncheon seminars; others meet whenever a speaker is available. Advanced students are expected not only to attend, but also to participate in the seminars in their fields. Students who have not yet chosen a field of research may

find the seminars a valuable means of sampling the types of research available.

Policy on Working Outside the Department

The teaching and research assistantships represent a rich and exciting experience and a total time commitment on the part of both the graduate student and his or her advisor. It is generally not advisable for a student to accept other employment or non-family responsibilities, inside or outside of the department or university. If a student nevertheless desires an additional position, written approval must first be obtained from the student's advisor, and a petition then made to the Graduate Committee. Prior approval of the committee is required in order to avoid a possible reduction or termination in assistantship financial support.

PhD Policies

For PhD policies and procedures, please review the School of Graduate Studies section of the General Bulletin.

Program Requirements

With the help of a faculty advisor, students choose a curriculum of course work from among a large array of offerings in physics and related science and engineering departments. The university requires a total of 36 hours of course work for students entering with a bachelor's degree, or 18 hours of course work for those students entering with a master's degree. This requirement may be met by supervised research, by lecture courses, by reading courses, or a combination.

Twelve of the course hours involve required courses, but any of these requirements may be waived for students who have had the equivalent material elsewhere or, in the case of Graduate Laboratory, equivalent experience elsewhere. The required courses are:

Two from the following five:

- PHYS 427 Laser Physics
- PHYS 431 Physics of Imaging
- PHYS 441 Physics of Condensed Matter I
- PHYS 451 Empirical Foundations of the Standard Model
- PHYS 465 General Relativity *or* PHYS 436 Modern Cosmology

Additionally, students are required to take PHYS 472 plus one additional 400- or 500-level lecture course from the following list*:

- PHYS 442 Physics of Condensed Matter II
- PHYS 451 Empirical Foundations of the Standard Model
- PHYS 460 Advanced Topics in NMR Imaging
- PHYS 539 Special Topics Seminar
- PHYS 591 Gauge Field Theory I

*Other courses, either in physics or in other departments, may be substituted by petition. Note that courses that have dual listings with 300-level courses generally do not satisfy this requirement.

Although not required, most students take the following introductory courses during the first year, as much of the PhD qualifying exam is based on material in these courses:

- PHYS 481 Quantum Mechanics I and PHYS 482 Quantum Mechanics II

- PHYS 423 Classical Electromagnetism
- PHYS 413 Classical and Statistical Mechanics I and PHYS 414 Classical and Statistical Mechanics II

The classroom lecture courses will be augmented by official reading courses, which will have specified syllabi (published in the catalogue and monitored by the Graduate Committee), graded homework, and final examinations. Courses in special topics, as well as individualized study, can be arranged by mutual consent when the demand is sufficient.