

Summary of

**Physics Department
Texas A&M University**

GRADUATE STUDENT POLICIES

<http://graduateadvisor.physics.tamu.edu/>

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I. Introduction

In addition to the general University policies published in the Graduate Catalog and University Regulations and the graduate policies promulgated by the Office of Graduate Studies, there are special requirements and procedures established by the Physics Department which apply only to those students pursuing advanced degrees in Physics. This brochure summarizes these policies for the benefit of both graduate students and faculty. Since this brochure does not collect all of the information on graduate student policies necessary for the student or faculty member to be completely informed of the overall policies, one must consult the Graduate Catalog, the appropriate Office of Graduate Studies Regulations, and/or University Regulations. **It is the responsibility of each GRADUATE STUDENT to insure that they have met all Departmental, Graduate, and University requirements for their degree.**

II. Graduate Student Governance

The graduate students shall elect a committee to represent them. This committee is to provide a formal communication channel to the Department Head, through which they may voice their complaints, frustrations, suggestions, or recommendations regarding all aspects of the graduate program.

The committee consists of four elected student representatives, each serving a two-year term. Two members are to be elected each September.

The active interest of students in the quality of our graduate program and in the affairs of this committee in particular, is strongly encouraged. Students in the graduate program are also informed of significant departmental issues by their representatives to the committee. The elected representatives are invited to attend regular faculty meetings and to convey student views on matters under discussion.

III. Ph.D. Degree Plan

A. The **Ph.D.** Degree Plan will include the following nine basic courses totaling 32-credit hours.

1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
5. 624 Quantum Mechanics II (4-credit hours)
6. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only
7. 611 Electromagnetic Theory II (4-credit hours)
8. One graduate-level course in either Particle Physics or Nuclear Physics (3-credit hours)
9. One graduate-level course in either Atomic Physics/Quantum Optics or Solid State Physics (3-credit hours)

A grade of B or better on coursework 1 through 6, above, is required in order to be qualified as a Ph.D. candidate. See Section VII for details.

PHYS 633 (Advanced Quantum Mechanics), PHYS 634 (Relativistic Quantum Field Theory) and PHYS 616 (Methods of Theoretical Physics II) will not be required by the Department for all students, but will still be important and essential courses for many students. A student's advisory committee may require these courses on a student's Degree Plan.

In addition to these nine required courses, the student and/or his committee may add other specialty courses appropriate to his research area.

The Ph.D. Degree Plan for a student who has an M.S. degree normally includes all of the courses required for the Ph.D., except for any taken at Texas A&M University for the M.S. degree or any for which the student has taken and passed the Final Exam for the course at Texas A&M University, plus a sufficient number of credit hours in Physics 691 and other courses, to make a total of 64 credit hours.

The Ph.D. Degree Plan for a student who does not have an M.S. degree normally includes all courses recommended above for the Ph.D., plus a sufficient number of credit hours in Physics 691 and other courses, to make a total of 96 credit hours.

B. The **Ph.D. Applied Physics** Degree Plan will include the following ten basic courses totaling 33-credit hours.

1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
5. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only
6. One course in Classical or Quantum Physics. See <http://graduateadvisor.physics.tamu.edu/> for details.
7. Four elective courses chosen in consultation with the student's committee

A grade of B or better on coursework 1 through 5, above, is required in order to be qualified as a Ph.D. Applied Physics candidate.

IV. Thesis Master's Degree Plan

The Thesis M.S. Degree Plan normally includes the following graduate courses.

1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
5. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only

Note that advanced undergraduate courses or MATH 601 and 602, with a grade of B or better in each may be substituted for one of the graduate courses 601, 603, 606, 607, or 615. If this is done, the student must take one additional graduate level course in physics.

6. A sufficient number of credit hours in PHYS 685, 691, and other courses must be added to the Degree Plan to make a total of 32 credit hours

A B average on all coursework and a B average on all courses on the Degree Plan are required in order to be qualified as an M.S. Physics candidate.

Note that the Graduate Catalog puts specific limits on the number of 685, 691, etc. hours that may be included on a M.S. Degree Plan.

In making out their Ph.D. or M.S. Degree Plan, the students should consult with their Committee Chair. The student will then submit the copy of the Degree Plan (with the student's research advisor's signature) to Ms. Sandi Smith for approval by the Graduate Curriculum Committee. When notified by Ms. Smith that the Degree Plan has been approved, the student will submit an original copy with their Committee's signatures to Ms. Smith for processing. She will secure the Department Head's signature and Graduate Advisor Chair's approval before forwarding it to the Office of Graduate Studies.

For detailed requirements of the Office of Graduate Studies, the student should consult the Graduate Catalog. Assistance in preparing the Degree Plan may be obtained from Ms. Sandi Smith or your Departmental Graduate Student Advisor (see Section XIV A).

If a student makes a grade of C or lower in a basic course that is on his or her Degree Plan, the student should repeat that course and attain a grade of A or B.

V. Non-Thesis Master's Degree Plan

The faculty of the Physics Department has adopted the following guidelines to supplement the basic requirements as specified in the Graduate Catalog for the non-thesis Master's Degree Plan. The physics courses for the Degree Plan usually include the following.

- 18
hours
1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
 2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
 3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
 4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
 5. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only
 6. A minimum of six hours (8 hours maximum) advanced laboratory work or equivalent laboratory experience. The student normally satisfies this latter requirement by taking six hours of PHYS 685 and completing an experimental project supervised by an experimentalist on the faculty. The written project report is normally reviewed by the committee at the oral exam.
 7. A sufficient number of credit hours in other elective courses must be added to the Degree Plan to make a total of 36 credit hours

A B average on all coursework and a B average on all courses on the Degree Plan are required in order to be qualified as a non-thesis M.S. Physics candidate.

The final oral examination will be taken by the dates announced each semester by the Office of Graduate Studies. It may not be taken prior to the mid-point of the semester or summer term in which the student will complete all remaining courses on the degree program. This exam will be given by the student's committee and will cover the degree work, especially the laboratory work done to satisfy the requirement in #1, above, and the basic concepts of physics.

It should be noted that the Office of Graduate Studies will not accept Physics 691 in this program. A student with a non-thesis Master's Degree Plan on file, therefore, is not allowed to register for Physics 691.

VI. Student's Ph.D. or M.S. Advisory Committee

Each candidate for an advanced degree is required to have a committee to supervise his or her graduate program.

M.S. Degree This committee is composed of a chair, normally the student's research advisor, and at least two other graduate faculty members. One of the members must be from outside the Physics Department. The Graduate Catalog requires that this committee be selected and a Degree Plan approved **prior** to registration (or preregistration) for a third term, excluding summer terms, and no later than 90 days prior to the final oral examination or thesis defense. However, the Department encourages students to select an advisory committee as early in their studies as is possible.

Ph.D. Degree This committee is composed of a chair, again the research advisor, and at least three other members of the graduate faculty, one of which must be from outside the Physics Department. The Graduate Catalog requires that this committee be selected and a Degree Plan approved **prior** to registration (or preregistration) for a fifth term, excluding summer terms, and no later than 90 days prior to the preliminary examination. However, the Department encourages students to select an advisory committee as early in their studies as is possible.

The first step in selecting a committee is the choice of a research advisor and chair who may then assist in the selection of the other committee members. The committee should be closely involved in all aspects of the student's graduate education, classroom, and research. The functions of the committee include approval of the Degree Plan and research proposal, administration of the preliminary and final examinations, and approval of the thesis or dissertation. The timing and details regarding the preliminary examination can be found in the Graduate Catalog.

VII. Ph.D. Qualification

A. Students will achieve Ph.D. qualification by completing six core courses with a grade of B or better in each. These courses are:

1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
5. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only
6. 624 Quantum Mechanics II (4-credit hours)

If a student's previous academic experience warrants, they may satisfy the qualification requirement with respect to a particular course by taking the Final Exam for that course, together with the normally registered students the first time the course is offered after they arrive at Texas A&M University. An approval request signed by the student and the student's research advisor is submitted by memo to Ms. Sandi Smith for approval by the Graduate Curriculum Committee before making arrangements to take a Final Exam. If a sufficient grade isn't achieved, then the course must be taken. Students are strongly urged to take the course rather than attempting the Final Exam unless they determine in consultation with the faculty member teaching the course that their academic background is very strong in that area.

This policy applies to all students who enter our graduate program Fall 2002 or afterwards. Students who entered prior to Fall 2002 but who did not complete qualification through the Ph.D. Qualification Exam should consult with the Graduate Advisors and the Graduate Curriculum Committee about their Qualification status and requirements.

B. Students will achieve Ph.D. qualification in **Applied Physics** by completing five core courses with a grade of B or better in each. These courses are:

1. 601 Classical Mechanics (3-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 604, in Fall 2003 only
2. 603 Electromagnetic Theory I (3-credit hours)
3. 606 Quantum Mechanics I (4-credit hours)
4. 607 Statistical Mechanics (4-credit hours)
5. 615 Methods of Theoretical Physics I (4-credit hours); will appear as PHYS 689, section 605, in Fall 2003 only

If a student's previous academic experience warrants, they may satisfy the qualification requirement with respect to a particular course by taking the Final Exam for that course, together with the normally registered students the first time the course is offered after they arrive at Texas A&M University. An approval request signed by the student and the student's research advisor is submitted by memo to Ms. Sandi Smith for approval by the Graduate Curriculum Committee before making arrangements to take a Final Exam. If a sufficient grade isn't achieved, then the course must be taken. Students are strongly urged to take the course rather than attempting the Final Exam unless they determine in consultation with the faculty member teaching the course that their academic background is very strong in that area.

This policy applies to all students who enter our graduate program Fall 2002 or afterwards. Students who entered prior to Fall 2002 but who did not complete qualification through the Ph.D. Qualification Exam should consult with the Graduate Advisors and the Graduate Curriculum Committee about their Qualification status and requirements.

VIII. Teaching Requirement

As part of the training of the graduate student pursuing the M.S. or Ph.D. in Physics, the Physics Department recommends that all students serve as Teaching Assistants (TA) for at least two semesters. Previous equivalent teaching experience at locations other than Texas A&M University may make this unnecessary. A student may be as little as a 1/3 or 1/4 time TA, the rest of the support coming from a Research Assistantship (RA).

During those semesters that a student is satisfying this requirement while holding a TA, the tax status of the TA may be affected. Tax liability during this period is determined solely by the Internal Revenue Service.

IX. TA Appointments and Duties

Appointments

The Department of Physics selects its teaching assistants strictly on the basis of merit. The following criteria are used as a basis for evaluating incoming students: (1) grade point ratio, with consideration given to the university attended, (2) Graduate Record Examination scores, and (3) three letters of recommendation submitted by people who are familiar with the candidate's academic achievements and potentialities. The initial appointment is normally for a period of nine months. After the first academic year, the student is encouraged to choose a research project to begin a thesis or dissertation and to seek support as a research assistant.

When students accept a teaching assistantship, it is intended that they not only perform their teaching duties properly but that they also spend their remaining time in vigorously pursuing their graduate studies. The student must, therefore, show substantial progress in coursework and/or research, and may not undertake outside jobs. Also, students supported on teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or fellowships are expected to take **only coursework relevant to their physics degree**. Registration for any course outside of physics in any semester requires the written approval of the Graduate Advisor Chair. Approval will generally not be given until the student is qualified.

TA positions are a valuable resource. The following guidelines will be used by the Credentials Committee in establishing priorities among those students beyond their first year who are requesting TA support. In a given semester or summer term some or all of the lower priority applicants may not receive the TA support they have requested. The following three items are important to the support decision.

1. Academic Performance

All graduate students are expected to maintain a 3.0 GPR in the required courses. Students with GPR in required courses above 3.0 are given highest priority. A student who has six or more hours of C below a 3.0 GPR for more than one semester will not be supported.

2. Job Performance

All TAs must take their teaching responsibilities seriously. Lab and recitation TAs must always be on time and must be prepared for each class meeting. All TAs must cooperate fully with the faculty members teaching the lecture portion of the course. Each semester the Graduate Student Teaching Committee will poll all faculty who were assigned TAs, including lab and recitation assignments, to identify those students whose job performance was superior, as well as those whose job performance was deficient. Instances of deficient job performance are to be documented and forwarded to the Credentials Committee. Students so identified will be given a lower priority for TA allocation. When appropriate, the Credentials Committee will give a written warning to the student that their job performance must improve if support is to continue. The Department will provide help (mentoring, selection of TA assignment) to those students who need help in improving their teaching performance.

3. Research Progress

All students not taking a full load of core courses are expected to be vigorously involved in the research component of their degree. In those cases where the Credentials Committee feels it is appropriate, it may ask the student's research advisor for a written statement of research progress and anticipated timetable for completion. Some visible signs of progress are research proposal submission prelims, publications, and research presentations (seminars, talks at conferences). With input from the research advisor, the Credentials Committee may assign a lower priority to students who are not making adequate progress or may establish a date by which the student is expected to have finished and after which TA support will cease. Normally, a student seeking a M.S. degree will **not** be supported on a TA if they have been in our graduate program for more than three years; a student seeking a Ph.D. degree normally will not be supported if they have been in our graduate program for more than eight years.

The number of assistantships available for the summer session is usually much smaller than in the corresponding fall and spring semesters. Consequently, all of our graduate students are encouraged to seek other summer support in the form of full or part-time research assistantships, fellowships, or even part time jobs outside the Department.

The awarding of research assistantships is left solely to the principal investigator(s) of the research grant or contract.

Duties

Most teaching assistants serve as recitation and laboratory instructors; a few serve as graders or have only recitation or laboratory assignments. The standard load for a full TA is three lab/recitation sections. The job descriptions are as follows:

Recitation Instructor:

1. The recitation constitutes the first hour of the three-hour “lab” period in the introductory physics courses. This hour is devoted to helping the students develop their problem solving skills and to checking that progress on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Each weekly session normally covers the problems assigned in the course syllabus for the preceding week.
2. Prior to the start of the semester, each recitation instructor should contact the lecturer(s) for the sections of the course assigned to them. You need a copy of the course syllabus and the lecturer’s instructions on the conduct of each recitation. The lecturer may be assigning a fraction of the students’ course grade to their recitation performance. If this is the case, you will need his or her guidelines on how to determine this grade. You will also have to keep detailed records of these grades as you assign them during the semester and deliver a copy of the complete record (including a computed recitation grade for the semester) to the lecturer(s) no later than the first day of final exams.
3. The recitation instructors are to assist in proctoring exams when requested to do so by the professor who has the section(s) in lecture. They are also to assist, as requested, in the grading of the exams given in the lecture portion of the course.
4. There are security and safety problems related to the students proceeding to the lab at the end of the recitation hour. It is the recitation instructor’s responsibility to accompany the students and ensure that they remain outside the lab room until the lab TA is present if that is a different person from you. Note that the recitation, plus lab, is one continuous two hour and fifty minute block of time. Recitation should last a full 50 minutes. After a 10-minute break the lab should start promptly, 60 minutes after the recitation started.

Under no circumstances are the students to be left in the laboratory room without the lab TA or instructor being present.

5. If for some reason, you cannot meet one of your recitations you must arrange for a substitute. The most likely candidates are other recitations TAs in the same course. As a last resort, you might try the lecturer for the section involved.

Laboratory Instructor:

In order to achieve a high level of laboratory instruction, the Department of Physics has adopted the following rules and guidelines for laboratory instructors.

1. Attend all scheduled instructional meetings involving your laboratory course.
2. Study the experiment to be done and be prepared to answer students' questions pertaining to it.
3. Be present in the laboratory during the entire laboratory period.
4. Grade laboratory reports and return them to the students at their next laboratory meeting.
5. In case you have to miss a laboratory meeting due to illness or any other legitimate reason, notify the laboratory coordinator or some other responsible individual as soon as possible in order that other arrangements may be made.
6. Do not "trade" laboratories on a temporary basis with another instructor except in those cases where it is necessary. In those cases where a trade is in order, clear it in advance with the laboratory coordinator.
7. Turn in laboratory grades to the lecture professor before final exams start.
8. In general, conduct yourself in a manner that will command the respect of your students.

X. Affiliations with Research Groups

The Department encourages graduate students to seek an affiliation with a faculty member of a research group at an early stage of their graduate education, with the aim of sampling the style and content of research in a specific area. Such affiliations may take place either in the summer or during the term, and may consist of a specific research project or a general participation in group research activities. Any such affiliations must be regarded as tentative, without prejudice for the student's eventual choice of thesis project. While it may be hoped that such affiliations will stimulate a long-term interest, trial periods of work on research problems in widely differing areas, and with different professors, may constitute a useful and significant part of a student's general graduate education. Neither student nor professor involved in such a research affiliation should feel any obligation to continue the relationship beyond the summer or term initially agreed upon, whether or not the student received financial support for his research activities.

XI. Research Assistants

Graduate students who enter the Department of Physics on Research Assistantships normally accept this position for a period of time specified in their award letter. This appointment is considered half time based on a forty-hour workweek; hence, the student is expected to work an average of twenty hours per week. It is also assumed that the professor making the offer has encumbered the funds necessary to pay the student for the timeframe agreed upon. However, should the student wish to change major professors or switch to a teaching assistantship, assuming there is one available, before the original timeframe has expired, then the student has complete freedom to do so. At the end of the appointment, students may choose to remain with their original major professor, or they may change major professors subject to availability of support. It should be noted, however, that when a student changes major professors, the student could take longer to receive his/her degree. Also, should a student feel that he/she is being required to do things outside the realm of normal Physics Department duties, the student is strongly encouraged to report such inequities to the Department Head who will turn the matter over to a grievance committee which will then perform a thorough investigation.

XII. Minimum Course Load

All graduate students are required to carry a 9-hour course load per semester for the fall and spring semesters to be considered full-time students. The Department does, however, recommend that new students take two academic courses (6-8 hours) each of their first two semesters.

The standard full-time minimum course load for all graduate students during the summer will be three hours per 5 week session or six hours per 10 week session.

If a student is the recipient of a fellowship which requires a larger course load than that specified above, they must register for the number of hours specified to qualify for said fellowship (e.g., Regents and other Fellowships administered through the Office of Graduate Studies require registration for 12 hours for fall or spring to qualify).

All students supported on an assistantship, either teaching or research, must satisfy the above minimum registration requirements. The required minimum course load for students on a Welch fellowship or other fellowship administered within the Physics Department is the same as for students on an assistantship.

The Physics Department expects all students to preregister during the designated preregistration period each semester. Preregistration is important to both the students and Department since it allows the Department to finalize the list of course offerings and also to make the TA assignments in a timely way.

All students not taking a full load for formal courses are expected to register for Group Seminar, Physics 681, with the section number corresponding to their research group (1-hour). That is, if you would otherwise register for two or more hours of research, you must use one of these hours for PHYS 681 registration.

Students should be aware of the University's continuous registration requirement. Consult the Graduate Catalog for details (look up Registration in the index). In unusual circumstances, you may petition for a Leave of Absence.

XIII. Academic Standards

A graduate student must maintain a grade point ratio (GPR) of at least 3.0 to receive an advanced degree. A student with a GPR below 3.0 is on academic probation according to the Graduate Catalog. When the GPR drops below 3.0, a student will be given a one-semester probationary period to bring it back up to 3.0 or above. If this is not achieved, the student must meet with their Graduate Advisor to determine whether the student should remain in the Physics graduate program. If the GPR cannot be returned to 3.0 or above within two consecutive semesters (fall or spring), the student will be considered by the Credentials Committee for dismissal from the Physics graduate program. A course in which the final grade is a C or lower may be repeated for a higher grade. The original grade will remain on the student's permanent record, but only the most recent grade will be used in computing the cumulative and Degree Plan GPRs.

Failure to make reasonable progress in the other areas of graduate study, particularly research, is also grounds for a recommendation that a student be dropped from the graduate program. Such a recommendation is to be made by the Credentials Committee, with input from the students' research advisor.

XIV. International Students English Language Requirement

International students entering the Physics Department must achieve “Certified” status in English as soon as possible; the Department cannot use students as recitation or laboratory instructors until they have been “Certified”.

Incoming International Students take the English Language Proficiency Examination (ELPE) approximately two weeks before the start of classes. It covers six areas: Grammar, Composition, Reading, Listening, Vocabulary, and Oral Skills. To become “Certified” the student must complete all six areas by either scoring 80, or above, on the ELPE, or by getting an A or B in the upper-level (300, 400, 500) corresponding course at the English Language Institute (ELI). The Physics Department policy is that a student must take the ELPE every semester until “Certified.” Department requirements for taking English courses until “Certified” are as follows:

Beginning of first term (semester) – Students who pass two or more parts of the ELPE are not required to take ELI courses. Students who pass none or only one part are required to take two ELI courses.

Beginning of second term (semester or summer) – Students who have passed a total of four or more areas of English proficiency (either via the ELPE or via ELI courses) are not required to take ELI courses. Students who have passed three or fewer areas are required to take two ELI courses. **EXCEPTION:** Students who have not achieved English Proficiency “Verified” status are required by the University to take at least one course in any area of the ELPE that they have not yet passed. (See Graduate Catalog, p. 61).

Beginning of third term (semester or summer) – Students who have not yet achieved “certified” status are required to take ELI courses in all areas of deficiency.

If in any semester a student elects not to take the ELI courses as required above, that student will not be eligible to receive financial support from the Department as a TA (financial support via RA is at the discretion of the professor providing support). In addition, a student will not be eligible for a TA after their first year if they are not "Certified."

XV. Current Graduate Committee Memberships

A. Graduate Student Advisors

John Hardy	Office: Room 203 Cyclotron
Teruki Kamon (Chair)	Office: Room 430
Olga Kocharovskaya	Office: Room 301E Doherty
Christopher Pope	Office: Room 527
Wayne Saslow	Office: Room 521

B. Graduate Student Admissions and Appointments Committee

Chia-Ren Hu
Scharlotte Jones
George Kattawar (Chair)
Che-Ming Ko
Winfried Teizer
David Toback
M. Suhail Zubairy

C. Graduate Curriculum Committee

Chia-Ren Hu
Teruki Kamon
Michael Weimer (Chair)

D. Graduate Student Credentials and Records Committee

Lewis Ford (Chair)
Teruki Kamon
Robert Kenefick
Jerri McLemore
Sandi Smith