PHYSICS, PH.D.

The department offers the master of arts and master of science degrees in physics, and the doctor of philosophy degree with a major in physics.

The master of arts degree is a purely academic degree, requiring 30 credits of graduate work and passage of the qualifying examination at the master’s level. It is designed to strengthen the student’s physics background and enhance the opportunities for employment as a physicist or in physics education.

The master of science degree is a professional program that requires the completion of a directed master’s project and thesis in the student’s area of interest, 30 credits of graduate work, and passage of the qualifying examination at the master’s level. It is designed to strengthen the student’s background and experience in physics, and enhance the opportunities for employment as a physicist or in physics education.

The Ph.D. degree requires successful completion of advanced course work in physics, completion of a minor, and passage of the qualifying and preliminary examinations. However, the Ph.D. is primarily a research degree, awarded only upon completion of substantial original research in some subfield of physics. The program provides the background, experience, and credentials needed for employment as a professional physicist in research or education.

The research program in physics is unusually broad in scope with active experimental and theoretical research programs in astrophysics; atomic, molecular, and optical physics; biophysics; condensed matter physics; elementary particle physics; nuclear physics; particle physics theory; phenomenology; and plasma physics. This broad range of research opportunities makes the department especially attractive to beginning students who have not yet chosen a field of specialization.

Research specialties include:

THEORETICAL PHYSICS

Astrophysics; atomic, molecular, and optical physics; condensed matter physics; cosmology; elementary particle physics; nuclear physics; phenomenology; plasmas and fusion; quantum computing; statistical and thermal physics; string theory.

EXPERIMENTAL PHYSICS

Astrophysics; atomic, molecular, and optical physics; biophysics; condensed matter physics; cosmology; elementary particle physics; neutrino physics; experimental studies of superconductors; medical physics; nuclear physics; plasma physics; quantum computing; spectroscopy.

The Department of Physics has a diverse group of graduate students who come from many countries around the world. There are typically 150–200 graduate students in the department. Virtually all students admitted receive financial support in the form of teaching or research assistantships and fellowships.

The information on courses and examinations provided in this catalog is only a brief summary of the procedures for graduate work in the department. Entering graduate candidates are supplied with additional details when they arrive. More complete information on the graduate program, the faculty, and research groups is available at the department website (http://www.physics.wisc.edu).

FUNDING

Prospective students should see the program website for funding information.

REQUIREMENTS

MINIMUM DEGREE REQUIREMENTS AND SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

To make progress toward a graduate degree, students must meet the Graduate School Minimum Degree Requirements and Satisfactory Progress (http://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiesandrequirementstext) in addition to the requirements of the program.

DOCTORAL DEGREES

Ph.D.

MINIMUM GRADUATE DEGREE CREDIT REQUIREMENT

51 credits

MINIMUM GRADUATE RESIDENCE CREDIT REQUIREMENT

51 credits

MINIMUM GRADUATE COURSEWORK (50%) REQUIREMENT

Half of degree coursework (15 of total 30 credits) must be in graduate-level coursework; courses with the Graduate Level Coursework attribute are identified and searchable in the university’s Course Guide (http://my.wisc.edu/CourseGuideRedirect/BrowseByTitle). No 300-level courses will be counted toward the 51 credit minimum.

PRIOR COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS: GRADUATE WORK FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS

No coursework from other institution may count toward any graduate degree in physics.

PRIOR COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS: UW–MADISON UNDERGRADUATE

Up to 7 credits in courses numbered 500 or above may be used to satisfy minimum degree requirements.

PRIOR COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS: UW–MADISON UNIVERSITY SPECIAL

With program approval and payment of difference in tuition (between Special and graduate tuition), students are allowed to count no more than 15 credits of coursework numbered 500 or above taken as a UW-Madison University Special student. Coursework earned five or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credits
PROGRAM-SPECIFIC COURSES REQUIRED
Contact the program for information on any additional required courses.

DOCTORAL MINOR/BREADTH REQUIREMENTS
Doctoral students must complete a doctoral minor.

OVERALL GRADUATE GPA REQUIREMENT
3.00

OTHER GRADE REQUIREMENTS
The Graduate School requires an average grade of B or better in all coursework (300 or above, not including research credits) taken as a graduate student unless conditions for probationary status require higher grades. Grades of Incomplete are considered to be unsatisfactory if they are not removed during the next enrolled semester.

PROBATION POLICY
The Graduate School regularly reviews the record of any student who earned grades of BC, C, D, F, or Incomplete in a graduate course (300 or above), or grade of U in research credits. This review could result in academic probation with a hold on future enrollment or in being suspended from the Graduate School.

ADVISOR
Every graduate student is required to have an advisor. An advisor is a faculty member, or sometimes a committee, from the major department responsible for providing advice regarding graduate studies. An advisor generally serves as the thesis advisor. In many cases, an advisor is assigned to incoming students. Students can be suspended from the Graduate School if they do not have an advisor.

To ensure that students are making satisfactory progress toward a degree, the Graduate School expects them to meet with their advisor on a regular basis.

A committee often accomplishes advising for the students in the early stages of their studies.

ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS
Doctoral students are required to take a comprehensive preliminary/oral examination after they have cleared their record of all Incomplete and Progress grades (other than research and thesis). Deposit of the doctoral dissertation in the Graduate School is required.

TIME CONSTRAINTS
Doctoral degree students who have been absent for ten or more consecutive years lose all credits that they have earned before their absence. Individual programs may count the coursework students completed prior to their absence for meeting program requirements; that coursework may not count toward Graduate School credit requirements.

A candidate for a doctoral degree who fails to take the final oral examination and deposit the dissertation within five years after passing the preliminary examination may be required to take another preliminary examination and to be admitted to candidacy a second time.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS
Contact the program for information on any language requirements.

ADMISSIONS
Admission is competitive. All applicants are reviewed and evaluated on the basis of previous academic record, three letters of recommendation, statement of purpose for graduate studies, resume, and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) general and subject scores. The physics subject GRE exam is required. For applicants whose native language is not English, the department requires a minimum score of 580 (paper-based), 237 (computer-based) or 92 (internet-based) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam, or 7 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. All eligible applicants with complete files are considered for teaching or research assistantships and fellowships. To be considered for admission, students must submit all application materials (including test scores) via the Graduate School electronic application site (https://www.gradsch.wisc.edu/eapp/eapp.pl) by December 15.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
• Formulates and plans original research.
• Formulates ideas, concepts, designs, and/or techniques beyond the current boundaries of knowledge within the field of physics.
• Creates research, scholarship, or performance that makes a substantive contribution to the field of physics.
• Gains a broad awareness of the status of contemporary research beyond the student’s area of specialization.
• Gains a deep awareness of the status of research in the student’s area of specialization.
• Advances contributions in the field of physics to society.
• Learns to engage and communicate with other research professionals.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
• Fosters ethical and professional conduct.

PEOPLE

Faculty: Professors Karle (chair), D. Anderson, Balantekin, Barger, Boldyrev, Carlsmith, Chung, Coppersmith, Dasu, Eom, Eriksen, Everett, Forest, Gilbert, Halzen, Hanson, Hashimoto, Hegna, Heinz, Herndon, Joynt, Lagally, Lawler, Lazarian, Lin, McCammon, McDermott, Onellion, Rzchowski, Saffman, Sarff, Shiu, W. Smith, Sovinec, Terry, Timbie, Vavilov, Walker, Westerhoff, Winokur, Wu, Yavuz, Zweibel; Associate Professors Egedal, Pan; Assistant Professors Arnold, Bai, Levchenko, Palladino, Vandenbroucke