General Policies of the Graduate School

The information in this section is a summary of the Graduate School web page, “Instructions, Policies, and Procedures for Graduate Students”, which contains a comprehensive listing of all Graduate School policies as well as additional information on the topics listed below. This summary reflects the requirements at the time of the latest update of this document. Be aware that this might change.

The Graduate School policy is that:

“A student must satisfy the requirements for the degree that are in force at the time the degree is to be awarded”.

Master's Degree Course Requirements

The Master's degree is the first step towards the doctoral degree. The course requirement for the Master's degree is 36 credits, 30 of which must be taken at the University of Washington. Course grades below 2.7 do not count towards the 36 credits total but are included by the Graduate School in the cumulative grade point average (GPA). At least 18 credits must be in courses numbered 500 and above. 18 credits must be numerically graded in 500 level courses or department approved 400-level courses. No more than 6 graduate level quarter credits can be transferred from other academic institutions to count towards the 36 credits total. A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required for a graduate degree at the University.

Doctoral Degree Course Requirements

The course requirement for the doctoral degree is 90 credits, 60 of which must be taken at the University of Washington. With the approval of the degree-granting unit, an appropriate Master's degree from an accredited institution may substitute for 30 credits. Numerical grades must be received in at least 18 quarter credits of course work taken at the UW prior to scheduling the General Examination. Only courses numbered 400, 500, 600, 700, and 800 can be applied to enrollment or course credit in the major field for advanced degrees. A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required for a graduate degree at the University.

Full-Time Enrollment

Full-time quarterly enrollment for graduate students starts at 10 credits. Students with a Teaching or Research Assistant position during the academic year (autumn, winter, and spring quarter) must enroll full-time.

Summer Quarter Enrollment

Students are not required to enroll for Summer Quarter to maintain continuous enrollment; however, students who accept a Teaching or Research Assistant position for Summer Quarter should enroll for at least 2 credits to maintain full-time student status for Summer Quarter. Enrolling for more than 2 credits as Research Assistant leads to higher tuition bills charged to the funding research grant.

Students who received financial aid before entering our graduate program should be aware that: “It is important to note that differing criteria and standards for full-time enrollment exist for eligibility in certain programs. Consult the Financial Aid Office for its
requirements on satisfactory student progress”. See the UW Registration Policies WEB site.

Graduate Courses

Graduate courses are intended for and ordinarily restricted to students enrolled in the Graduate School and are given numbers from 500 through 800. Some courses at the 300 and 400 levels are open both to graduates and to upper-division undergraduates. Courses at the 300 level are not included in the calculation of grade-point average (GPA) and will not apply towards the minimum Graduate School requirement of 18 graded credits for the Master's or doctoral degree.

Grading System for Graduate Students

Grades for graduate students are reported and entered as numbers, the possible values being 4.0, 3.9, 3.8, . . . and decreasing by one-tenth until 1.7 is reached. The Registrar records grades below 1.7 as 0.0 and no credit is earned. A minimum of 2.7 is required in each course that is counted towards a graduate degree. A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required for graduation. All course grades below 2.7 are also included in the cumulative GPA. Only core physics graduate courses are numerically graded. All other Physics graduate courses are CR/NC only. This means that it is quite difficult for your GPA to recover from a very low course grade.

Course Withdrawal

It is the students own responsibility to withdraw from a course. You may withdraw via MyUW, or in person, or by mail at the Registration Office, 225 Schmitz Hall, Box 355850, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98195-5850. The Office of the University Registrar offers more information on withdrawal policies.

Repeated Courses

Graduate students may repeat any course. Both the first and second grades will be included in the cumulative GPA. Subsequent grades will not be included, but will appear on the permanent record. The number of credits earned in the course will apply towards degree requirements only once.

On-Leave Status and Continuous Enrollment

Graduate students are required to maintain graduate status during their program of study. Students who need to take one quarter or several quarters off can by apply for On-Leave status. Failure to maintain either continuous enrollment or On-Leave status constitutes evidence for the Graduate School that the student has resigned from the Graduate Program. Returning from that status requires a formal petitioning for reinstatement to the University of Washington.

The Graduate School normally allows six years to complete a Master's degree and ten years for a doctoral degree. Periods spent On-Leave or out of status are included in this count.

Students requesting On-Leave status must submit an online Request for On-Leave Status via MyGrad. For a given quarter students can submit the request during the quarter and as early as two weeks prior to the first day of instruction. Pre-registered students must officially withdraw via MyUW or in person at the Registration office prior to the first day of the quarter. Students who are/were registered at any time during the quarter are not eligible for On-Leave status. On-Leave status is granted on a quarterly basis and requires the graduate student is in good standing. Refer to Graduate School Memorandum 9 for more details.

The Department needs to review/approve every On-Leave status request. On-Leave status is typically limited to a total of one year maximum.
Language Competency Requirements and Examinations

Students from English-speaking countries admitted to the Graduate School are presumed to be competent in the English language. Students from non-English-speaking countries must demonstrate a satisfactory command of English for admission to the program and also for appointment as teaching assistants. These are treated as two separate issues, and two separate sets of rules apply:

- An English language proficiency test score above 92 on the TOEFLiBT exempts a student from Academic English Program (AEP) requirements for admission to the Graduate Program. For details see Graduate School Memorandum No.8, "English Language Proficiency Requirements".

  International students with a TOEFL score below 92 are strongly advised to improve their score between admission and the start of classes in September. Otherwise, required AEP courses need to be taken immediately starting in the Autumn quarter. Tuition for those courses is charged separately, is not covered by TA and RA appointments, and is the responsibility of the student.

- A spoken English proficiency test score above 26 on the speaking portion of the TOEFLiBT, or a score above 230 on the SPEAK test (administered by the University of Washington) is required for Teaching Assistant duties. For details, see Graduate School Memorandum No. 15, "Conditions of TA Appointment who are not Native Speakers of English".

Low Scholarship/Unsatisfactory Progress

Admission to the Graduate School allows students to continue graduate study and research at the University of Washington only as long as they maintain satisfactory performance and progress towards completion of their graduate degree program.

Students whose cumulative or quarterly GPA falls below a 3.0 will be reviewed quarterly and be provided if needed with an explanation of performance expectations and a timetable for correction of deficiencies. Doctoral program students are to be reviewed by their doctoral supervisory committee after such a committee has been appointed, and before that by the graduate faculty members designated to oversee the individual student's progress.

For a complete PDF version of Physics Ph.D. Program Information, Policies, and Procedures.

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