Paths to Graduation

UW Students take many paths to their physics degree. While a plurality of recent graduates finished 3.75 years after their first UW quarter, only 27% did so; about 15% of recent graduates took Physics 121 in their first quarter at UW; fewer than 5% did both. Sample Graduation Plans (linked below) contains several options to help you build a path to your degree depending on your preparation, desired degree option (or track) and post-graduation goals. Note these paths only include courses directly related to your physics degree – you still need to fit in your college distribution requirements.

If you plan on a physics major, the first few quarters are the same, independent of degree option; you don't need to decide on your option (comprehensive, applied, biological, teaching) until you declare your major. You must complete one year of introductory physics and one year of calculus before you can declare a physics major. Both these sequences are available at community college and are offered every quarter at UW. A strong performance in AP, IB or A-level physics course (or Phys 114), is often suitable as a substitute for Phys 121, occasionally suitable for Phys 122, and rarely suitable for Phys 123. The honors introductory sequence is offered once each year, starting in the autumn, and assumes students are ready to learn rapidly and appreciate excursions into material not in the text. Honors is often a good option for students who completed a high school physics program with AP, IB or A-level credit, but who want to reinforce that knowledge at UW.

Students who arrive on campus placing into MATH 120 should join the Freshman Interest Group that pairs MATH 120 with PHYS 101, which gives a conceptual introduction to physics. This would then be followed by Math 124 in winter, and PHYS 121 paired with MATH 125 in the spring. They would then follow one of the paths below for starting with PHYS 122 or PHYS 123 in the Autumn. The PHYS 121 sequences that start in autumn and spring are roughly the same number of students.

For simplicity, most of the sample graduation plans below assume students take Math 124 and Phys 121 at the same time. If you start with a higher level math class concurrent with Phys 121, simply substitute whatever math class you are ready for whenever there is a math option on the plan.

The most options are shown for the comprehensive track, but most can easily be modified for the teaching and applied tracks; the biophysics track is distinct, requiring 7 quarters of chemistry and biology as well as two required physics courses that offered only once per year.

- Sample Graduation Plans
- Typical Offerings by Quarter
- 2019-2020 Quarterly Course Offerings
- 2020-2021 Quarterly Course Offerings
- Selected Syllabi