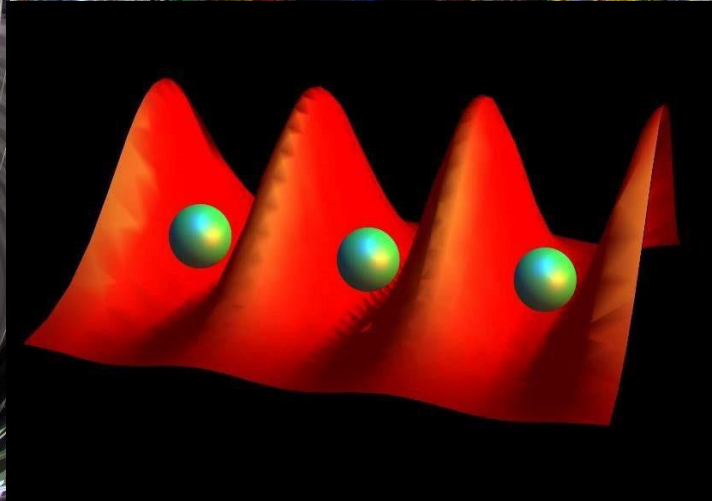
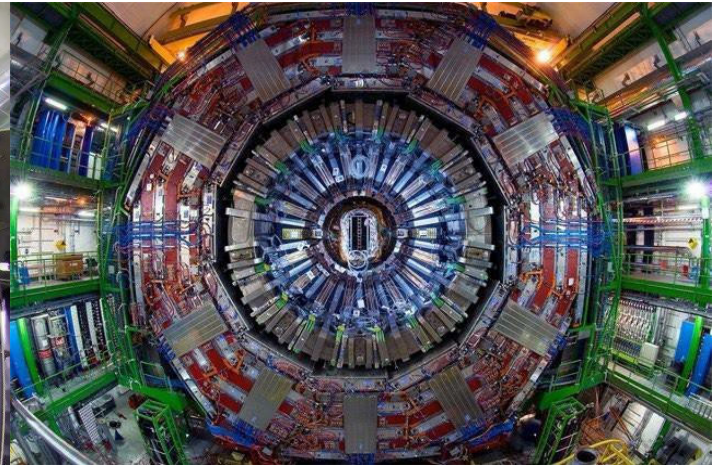


Master of Science in Physics



Northwestern University
Department of Physics & Astronomy
Master's Program Handbook
Academic Year 2024-2025



Welcome to the Department of Physics and Astronomy

We are delighted to have you join us here in the Department of Physics and Astronomy and are looking forward to helping you mature and grow as a scientist. We expect you to work hard, to master fundamental topics, to learn key research skills, and to help your colleagues improve in their own research. We hope that, along the way, you will have a fun and productive time and that your experience here will be a fulfilling one. We are ready to help you in any way possible.

We strive to maintain a positive, collaborative, and inclusive atmosphere in the Department of Physics and Astronomy that is welcoming to all. We expect that all members of our department will uphold these principles in their interactions with each other. The departmental website has additional information about our equity and inclusion initiatives, as well as resources for students seeking help or guidance. The department staff and faculty - including the Department Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, and your mentors - and student leaders are always available to address questions and concerns.

This document should provide answers to many of the questions that you will have throughout your time here. Feel free to let us know whether there is useful information that is either incorrect or missing!



Professor André de Gouvêa
Chair, Professor
Department of Physics and Astronomy
[Northwestern University](#)

The Physics Master’s Handbook supplements The Graduate School’s (TGS) policies and procedures. The following pages contain information about program-specific policies, procedures, and regulations. Students are subject to the regulations in effect at the time of matriculation. It is your responsibility as a student to be aware of these and The Graduate School’s regulations.

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Degree Paths

There are two paths to the Master's degree that students may follow: The Standard Path and the Elective Path. The Graduate School requires a minimum of nine (9) letter-graded (ABC) courses in each path.

The Standard/Thesis Path

The Standard Path requires that students take the five [core courses](#) and four [elective courses](#). This path also requires that students write a thesis and an oral defense is optional.

Year One	Typical Registration	Milestones to be Achieved	Forms to be Completed
Q1 - Fall	3-4 units of coursework	(before) Q1- Select an Advisor	On GSTS : Master's Completion Form
Q2 - Winter	3-4 units of coursework		
Q3 - Spring	3-4 units of coursework or Physics/Astro 499		
Q4 - Summer	TGS 512	Q4- Written Thesis Completion	

Some students have chosen to stay in the Fall of Year 2 in order to complete their thesis.

The Broad Path

The Broad Path requires that students take the five [core courses](#) and seven [elective courses](#).

Year One	Typical Registration	Milestones to be Achieved	Forms to be Completed
Q1 - Fall	3 units of coursework	Select an Advisor	
Q2 - Winter	3 units of coursework		
Q3 - Spring	3 units of coursework or Physics/Astro 499		
Q4 - Summer	TGS 512		
Year Two	Typical Registration	Milestones to be Achieved	Forms to be Completed
Q5 - Fall	3 units of coursework or Physics/Astro 499		On GSTS : Master's Completion Form

Courses

It is strongly recommended that students discuss course choices with their advisor or the Director of the Master's Program, Andrew Geraci (andrew.geraci@northwestern.edu).

Core Courses

- Physics 411-0: Classical Mechanics (fall)
- Physics 412-1: Quantum Mechanics I (fall)
- Physics 412-2: Quantum Mechanics II (winter)
- Physics 414-1: Electrodynamics I (winter)
- Physics 416-0: Introduction to Statistical Mechanics (winter)

Electives

This is a list of electives from Physics and Astronomy. It may be possible to take courses outside of the Department, but they must be approved by the Director of the Master's Program. Students have taken courses in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Materials Science, Neurobiology, Applied Mathematics and others.

- Physics 411-1: Methods of Theoretical Physics (fall)
- Physics 412-3: Quantum Mechanics III
- Physics 414-2: Electrodynamics II
- Physics 420-0: Statistical Physics
- Physics 422-1,2,3: Condensed Matter Physics
- Physics 423-0: Nuclear Physics
- Physics 424-1,2: Particle Physics
- Physics 426-0: Nonlinear Physics (EECS 406-0)
- Physics 430-0: Physics of Continuous Media
- Physics 432-1,2: Many-body Theory
- Physics 434-0: Quantum Fluids, Solids and Gases
- Physics 435-0: Soft Matter Physics
- Physics 436-0: Mesoscopic and Nanometer Scale Physics
- Physics 471-0: Molecular Biophysics
- Physics 478-0: Fundamentals of Macromolecular Crystallography
- Physics 479-0: Biophysical Methods for Macromolecular Analysis
- Astronomy 421-0: Observational Astrophysics
- Astronomy 425-0: Stellar Astrophysics
- Astronomy 429-0: Extragalactic Astrophysics and Cosmology
- Astronomy 443-0: Stellar Structure and Evolution
- Astronomy 445-1,2: General Relativity and Applications
- Astronomy 448-0: Interstellar Gas and Radiation Pressure
- Astronomy 449-0: Stellar Dynamics

Physics/Astro 499

This course allows students to work on a specific topic not covered by any lecture courses under the guidance of a faculty member of the Department of Physics and Astronomy. The student receives a letter grade (not P/NP) based on an evaluation conducted by the faculty member. This course carries the same credit as a lecture course. At most half of the courses taken by a first-year student can be 499. This course is only rarely used by students in this department.

TGS 512

This option allows students to maintain full-time status in the event that they lose funding. It can also be used by advanced student who need to temporarily step away from any research or teaching responsibilities. Students registered for this course can continue to use university facilities. When registered for TGS 512 students are able to purchase the Northwestern Student Health Insurance plan. Students taking this course cannot be registered for any other TGS course. This course carries a \$100 per quarter fee.

International students will register for this course in the Summer of their first year as part of their visa requirements.

Advising

Identifying an Advisor

Selecting a research advisor is the one of the most important choices a Master's student makes. Students should look for an advisor before their first quarter at the University. Please note that many professors may not have one-year projects for those following the Standard Path. Please consult with several different professors to ensure that they have a project available.

Thesis Committee

Students identify their thesis committees with the help of their advisor. The thesis committee consists of the advisor and, at minimum, one professor with a budgetary appointment in the Department.

Any change in committee members must be approved by the advisor.

Graduation

First, log on to [GSTS](#).

(Main Menu > TGS Forms > Navigate to Application for a Degree Form)

Then, fill out the Master's Completion Form, also in [GSTS](#).

(Main Menu > TGS Forms > TGS Master's Completion Form)

The Graduate Program Assistant prints out a copy of this once it is completed and attaches it to the folder that the Advisor picks up on the day of the Defense. This form must be signed by all Committee members. The Advisor then returns it to the PA who enters the information into the system.

Submitting the Thesis Draft

A complete copy of the thesis must be submitted to the committee no less than 7 days before the scheduled defense date (and therefore at least 14 days before TGS or other external deadlines). At the time the schedule is originally established, committee members can notify the candidate that they will require more than 7 days, for example in order to accommodate travel constraints or particularly intensive review styles. The submitted draft must be a polished and complete version that could credibly stand as a final thesis as submitted

Booking a Room

Please contact the Academic Office (F165) or Graduate Program Assistant to book a room if an oral defense is to be scheduled.

Thesis Edits

The student must finish all the edits requested by the committee. The advisor must approve the final version of the thesis before the Graduate Program Assistant enters in the completion of the degree. The student will receive an email from TGS stating that the degree form has been approved.

Submission of the Thesis to the Department

The student must complete all required editing before the final submission of the Final Exam Form takes place. It is advised that all editing is completed as quickly as possible.

Once the editing is complete and the Advisor has approved the thesis, the student submits his/her Dissertation to the Graduate Program Assistant via email.

Grade Changes

Any Y or K grades must be changed before a degree may be conferred.

Graduation

Commencement takes place once a year in mid-June. Students are invited to the ceremonies in June, without regard to the quarter of completion, as there are no other ceremonies throughout the year.

Admission to the PhD Program

Many students have been admitted to PhD programs here and to other physics and astronomy programs in America and Canada. However, there is no guarantee that you will be accepted into the Department's PhD program. Students are encouraged not only to apply to the Department's program but to other universities as well. The Director of the Master's Program and advisors may help to narrow down the best schools for students.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

GPA Requirement

The Department follows The Graduate School's minimum GPA requirement of a 3.0.

Academic Probation

Should a student's GPA fall below 3.0, he/she will be placed on Academic Probation and given two quarters to raise his/her GPA above the minimum. Students who are placed on probation by TGS

(<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academic-policies-procedures/policies/satisfactory-academic-progress.html>)

and who are unable to attain remediation during the probationary period will be dismissed from the program.

Extending Academic Probation

The TGS policy regarding petitions for extensions of Academic Probation is straightforward. The student must submit a [petition](#). The following criteria must be met:

- The specific length of the extension including the exact date by which the requirement will be met: the extension time frame should be realistic.
- A detailed rationale for the extension
- A detailed timeline for meeting the new deadline including what work remains to be completed and the specific timeline, with proposed deadlines by which that work will be completed within the extension period
- A detailed letter of support for the extension from the Director of Graduate Study
- A detailed letter of support for the extension from the student's academic/research advisor

Academic Progress Reports

Each student's academic progress must be reported annually by the student's program to the student and to TGS. Each quarter, grades will be checked for substandard performance. Students must ensure that they are maintaining their grades and finishing their work in a timely manner. If they are having trouble doing so, they must work with their advisor and the Director of the Master's Program to resolve issues preventing inadequate performance.

Students can find their Academic Progress Reports in [GSTS](#). This is also where students are expected to tell the Department about their progress. Advisors also report on progress in GSTS and students can find his/her thoughts there. It is vital that students report this, as this gives a good idea of where they are and how they will get to the next step.

Dismissal Process

The Director of the Master's Program and the Chair have the responsibility to decide whether a student is to be dismissed. Their decision is final.

Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence must be approved by your advisor, the DGS and TGS. Leaves of absence are permitted in the following circumstances.

- [Medical Leave of Absence](#): For students who must temporarily interrupt progress toward degree due to a physical or mental health condition.
- [Family Leave of Absence](#): For students who must temporarily interrupt progress toward degree to care for a child or other family member, or to extend absence following a parental accommodation. This is separate from and may be taken in addition to a [Parental Leave of Absence](#).
- [Parental Leave of Absence](#): For students who become new parents (whether by childbirth or adoption).
- [General Leave of Absence](#): For students who elect to temporarily interrupt their progress toward degree for a non- medical/non-family care reason.

Please see TGS' Leaves of Absence policy page for further details and requirements.

Submitting a Leave of Absence Request

Family, Parental and General leave of absence requests are submitted via [GSTS](#). GSTS > TGS Forms > Petition for Absence

The process for a student to request a medical leave of absence is outlined on the [Dean of Students, Medical Leave of Absence website](#).

Tuition and Other Fees

Tuition

Tuition information can be found here: <https://www.northwestern.edu/sfs/tuition/graduate/the-graduate-school.html>

Insurance

All Northwestern students are required to maintain health insurance coverage. Master's students are eligible to receive a discounted yearly premium through the Graduate School. [Information on the Health Insurance Plan](#).

Student Activity Fee

This fee covers special services, including discounted CTA rides, gym membership and programs for students, among other things. It is required for all full-time enrolled Graduate School students, except for those enrolled in TGS 512, 513, 514, 506, 507 or 508.

More information about the [Fee](#).

Funding Opportunities

More information about all types of fellowships and grants can be found [here](#).

Department Staff Members

Director of the Master's Program

Director- Professor Andy Geraci | Tech F135

Academic Office (Tech F165)

Department Chair

Director of Academic & Research Operations

Senior Program Coordinator

Graduate Program Assistant- your main point of contact

Undergraduate Program Assistant

Program Assistant

Business Office (Tech F155)

Business Administrator

Financial Coordinators

Program Assistant

The people filling the roles listed above may change. Please check the Department [website](#) for the most current staff members.

Any questions about the Department can be directed to the Graduate Program Assistant.

Calendars

The most up-to-date Northwestern academic calendar can be found [here](#).

The Graduate School has a calendar [here](#) as well.

The holiday schedule can be found [here](#) please make sure to select the correct year.

[Plan It Purple](#) is Northwestern's calendar for all things educational, social, and fun.

Department Activities

Students are expected to attend all colloquia and all seminars in their research area. These events serve to broaden students' knowledge in a range of fields, demonstrate effective scientific communication, and aid in networking within and outside the department.

Every week, a bulletin will be posted and sent to the graduate email list that says when and where each event takes place.

Colloquia

On Friday, an invited speaker of renown gives an hour-long colloquium. After the presentation and the question-and-answer session, snacks and refreshments are served in F160.

Seminars

Regular and special seminars are offered in various sub-fields of physics and astronomy. These are announced each week in the departmental email bulletin.

Heilborn Lectures

The department of Physics and Astronomy is grateful to George Heilborn (1935-2015), a graduate of Northwestern's physics program, and his family, for their generous support of the Heilborn Lectures at Northwestern University. We have benefited greatly from this program over the years. George Heilborn created the Heilborn endowment in memory of his parents, Walter and Christine Heilborn, in 2000 in order to strengthen the Physics and Astronomy program at Northwestern for the benefit of faculty, students, and other departments in the Chicago area.

There are several talks, lectures and chances to meet the speaker. Past speakers include Nobel Laureates, Professors, Physicists and Astronomers from the top laboratories in the world.

Link: [Past Heilborn Lectures](#)

Graduate Student Council

Mission

The goal of the Physics & Astronomy Graduate Student Council (PAGSC) is to address important issues pertaining to Physics & Astronomy graduate students at Northwestern University. The Council provides a structure to organize student efforts, to receive input from the student body, and to work with the Physics & Astronomy department.

Activities

The main activity organized by the Council is the weekly Grad Student Coffee Hour. Other activities include quarterly town-hall meetings, barbecues, game nights, pizza nights and other ad hoc get-togethers.

Please contact the President of the Council for more information: PAGSC_President@u.northwestern.edu

International Students

The Department has many students hailing from countries all over the world. The [International Office](#) is available by appointment for advising services and support programs. The Graduate Program Assistant is also available to provide support.

Visa Regulations

International students who are not permanent residents are given an F-1 or J-1 Student Visa. This visa gives the right to study here in the United States and only confers limited working rights. Please check with the International Office for up-to-date regulations.

The University helps apply for the visa and sends the Form I-20 papers. Bring the Form I-20 papers upon arrival in the United States. Students may arrive up to 30 days before the start date listed on the Form I-20.

English-language Skills

International students are expected to have taken the TOEFL test or a suitable alternative.

Students may also enroll in [English Language Programs](#). Please email elp@northwestern.edu for more information.

Course Registration

Foreign students on an F-1/J-1 visa must be registered for a minimum of three (3) credits or registered for TGS 512.

Foreign students who are not registered for other courses are required to register for TGS 512 in order to maintain their F-1/J-1 status, usually during the summer or during any leave taken. A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required to qualify for TGS 512.

Fellowships for International Students

Information on fellowships for International Students can be found [here](#).

International Office

[Office of International Student and Scholar Services](#)

Nondiscrimination Statement, Conflict Resolution, and Counseling

The Department and TGS are committed to maintaining an environment that fosters student education and training and have established the following guidelines for dealing with any type of conflict that might arise.

Nondiscrimination Statement

Northwestern University prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, caste, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, height, weight, or any other class of individuals protected from discrimination under federal, state, or local law, regulation, or ordinance or any other classification protected by law in the matters of admissions, employment, housing or services or in the educational programs or activities it operates, as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended in 2008; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; and any other federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation.

The University has designated the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance to coordinate the University's compliance with federal and state civil rights laws regarding protected characteristics, including Title IX and those other laws and regulations references above:

Emily Babb

Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance | Title IX Coordinator

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500

Evanston, IL 60201

(847) 467-6165

OCR@northwestern.edu

Tiffany Little

Senior Director, Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance | Deputy Title IX Coordinator

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500

Evanston, IL 60201

(847) 467-6165

OCR@northwestern.edu

The University complies with all federal and state laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability or perceived disability status. As such, reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are available to individuals with disabilities when such modifications and services are necessary to access the institution's programs and services. The University's ADA/504 Coordinator is:

Laura Conway

Director, ADA Compliance | ADA Coordinator

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500

Evanston, IL 60201

(847) 467-6165

Accommodations@northwestern.edu

Sam Milgrom

Deputy ADA Coordinator

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500

Evanston, IL 60201

(847) 467-6165

Accommodations@northwestern.edu

Inquiries about Title IX or the University's prohibitions against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation can be directed to the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, the ADA/504 Coordinator (for disability-related questions) or to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at the contact information listed below:

Complaints and inquiries regarding discrimination, harassment, and retaliation involving federal laws may be directed to:

U.S. Department of Education

Office for Civil Rights

John C. Kluczynski Federal Building

230 S. Dearborn St., 37th Floor

Chicago, IL 60604

(312) 730-1560

OCR.Chicago@ed.gov

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commissions

John C. Kluczynski Federal Building

230 S. Dearborn St., Suite 1866

Chicago, IL 60604

(312) 872-9777

Any person who believes that the University as a federal contractor has violated nondiscrimination or equal opportunity obligations may contact the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) at

OFCCP
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20210
www.dol.gov
(800) 397-6251

Conflicts Involving Discrimination and Harassment

Harassment, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that is based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship, or veteran status is a form of discrimination. Discrimination and harassment complaints should be referred to the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance](#) Information regarding Sexual Harassment is found below.

Sexual Harassment

It is the policy of Northwestern University that no member of the Northwestern community- students, faculty, administrators, staff, vendors, contractors, or third parties - may sexually harass any other member of the community. For information or assistance regarding a sexual harassment complaint, please visit the [Sexual Misconduct Response and Prevention website](#).

Conflicts Not Involving Discrimination, Harassment, or Sexual Harassment

When a conflict arises, whether with a student's advisor, a fellow student, or someone else in the University, TGS recommends that students first talk to their DGS. One function of the DGS is to address student concerns and grievances and to be available when students are experiencing academic difficulty. If a student is unsure who his or her DGS is, please contact the department office (847-491-3685) or TGS (847-491-5279).

If the DGS has a conflict of interest, the Chair of the student's department is the next resource. In the case that a student cannot or does not want to speak with anyone in the program or department, the next resource is TGS. In TGS, the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs, César Braga-Pinto (c-braga-pinto@northwestern.edu), handles student conflict issues and works directly with the academic school Associate Deans and faculty, as needed. DGSs, department chairs, TGS staff, and TGS Deans can treat students' concerns confidentially unless the concerns involve sexual harassment, discrimination, or a safety issue, in which case they are obligated to report the issue to the appropriate University office.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) CAPS serves as the primary mental health service at Northwestern University with offices on both the Evanston and Chicago campuses. CAPS provides a set of core services, including clinical services, educational workshops, and consultation with faculty, staff, and parents.

Evanston Campus – Searle Hall – 2nd Floor
633 Emerson St., Evanston, IL 60208
Phone: 847-491-2151
Hours: M/T/TH/F: 8:30am-5:00pm; W: 11:00am-5:00pm

More information on [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

