Guidelines for Physics Graduate Students (Tulane University)

1. Each student is expected to become familiar with the requirements of the School of Science and Engineering and the Department of Physics and Engineering Physics, as set forth in the graduate catalog. These “Guidelines” supplement those requirements.

2. The students should see the graduate advisor before pre-registering for courses and when they have questions about the program. Students enrolled in Physics 7910-7940 will also have a research director.

3. Until he/she signs up for dissertation research, each graduate student is required to enroll in Research I-IV, Physics 7910-7940, for three credits. Each student should find a professor who will teach this course and serve as the student’s research director. The student may change professors between semesters.

4. Foreign students with any form of financial aid must master spoken English at a level which will qualify them to be teaching assistants. The Department may require these students to enroll in a course such as “English for Teaching Assistants” and/or “English Writing”.

5. Each full-time student is required to register for 12 semester hours of approved courses each semester, until he/she completes the course requirements. Exceptions may be granted by agreement between the student’s research director, the graduate advisor and the Chair. Grades of B or better are required by SSE. Students should be aware of academic and language requirements described in the catalog.

6. Students on teaching assistantships provided by the Physics Department are not allowed to complete the requirements for a master’s degree in another department. Exceptions require the approval of the research director, the graduate student advisor, and the Chair.

7. Some core courses (e.g., 7060, 7100, 7170, 7180, 7230, 7240) are typically offered once every two years. In order to prepare for the qualifying examination and graduate research, students are urged to take these courses as soon as possible.

8. Students are expected to attend all departmental colloquia.

9. When the colloquium series is offered for credit, registration is a requirement for those who are not yet degree candidates.

10. Each TA is required to do some teaching (e.g., lab or grading) and departmental service (e.g., helping to maintain teaching lab equipment, and departmental infrastructure, or proctoring exams).
11. Financial aid (including teaching and research assistantships, Fellowships, and tuition waivers) is awarded and renewed on the basis of merit to students who maintain good academic standing and make timely progress. Graduate students receiving financial aid from Tulane should not accept concurrent employment without the approval of their research director and the Chair of the Department.

12. A limited number of teaching assistantships are usually available over the summer. Preference will be given to students with a research advisor and a commitment to remain in our programs.

13. Candidates for the Ph.D. degree must pass a qualifying (or preliminary) examination, a prospectus defense, and a dissertation defense.

14. The qualifying examination for the Ph.D. degree is a written core examination in two parts (classical and modern physics). The student may attempt each part twice, if necessary. The qualifying exam is offered as needed, but normally no more than once per semester. Students taking the qualifying exam for the first time must take both parts. The student is given a month free from research to study for the qualifying exam. Each of the two parts will be passed or failed individually. (Sample qualifying exams are available from the Graduate Student Advisor). Failure to pass the written qualifying exam will eventually result in dismissal from the PhD program in physics.

15. In order to remain eligible for financial aid from the Graduate School beyond the sixth semester, a student must, before the end of his/her sixth semester of graduate study, (a) pass both parts of the written qualifying examination, (b) form a thesis or dissertation faculty committee, and (c) make a successful oral defense of a written prospectus for the dissertation. Students who have met conditions (a) and (b) become candidates for the Ph.D. degree. Failure to achieve conditions (a), (b) and (c) constitutes grounds for termination of financial aid. Exceptions require special departmental approval. The prospectus defense includes an examination over material in or related to the student’s area of specialization.

16. Any proposal for a special interdisciplinary degree with a physics component must be cleared through the departmental Graduate Committee before it is sent to the SSE curriculum committee.

17. The student writing a thesis or dissertation is expected to recruit a faculty research director, who should nominate the rest of the committee. The thesis or dissertation committee is officially formed via a letter of appointment from the Chair of the Department. In most cases, it is the committee already formed for the prospectus defense. Ordinarily, a student will not be encouraged to do research with someone outside the Physics Department.
18. The dissertation should represent original, publishable research. The dissertation may be based upon one or more papers accepted for publication in a refereed journal. The defense of the dissertation is an oral examination governed by the student’s committee but open to all Physics faculty (and other invited parties).

19. Most students should complete a Ph.D. in 4-6 years. Seven years is the maximum time normally allowed by SSE. SSE will not normally provide teaching assistantships to students who have received five or more years of financial aid (teaching assistant, grant-supported research assistant, ...).

20. A request by a graduate student to take a course outside the department will be reviewed carefully by the student’s research director, graduate student advisor, and the Chair.

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