Department of Physics & Astronomy,
College of Arts and Sciences, Texas A&M University

GRADUATE STUDENT POLICIES (08/16/26)

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I. Introduction

In addition to the University policies published in the Graduate and Professional Catalog and the graduate policies enforced by the Graduate and Professional School (GPS), this document summarizes the departmental policies of the Department of Physics and Astronomy for students pursuing graduate degrees. It is the responsibility of each graduate student to ensure they have met all Departmental, Graduate School and University requirements for their degree.

Important Note: For a current directory of graduate advisors, detailed degree plans, course requirements, and official graduation timelines, please visit the Current Graduate Students webpage.

II. Academic Standards

A graduate student must maintain a grade point ratio (GPR) of at least 3.0 to receive an advanced degree.

- **Academic Probation:** A student with a GPR below 3.0 is on academic probation according to the Graduate and Professional Catalog. When the GPR drops below 3.0, a student will be given a one-semester probationary period to bring it back to 3.0 or above.
- **Dismissal:** If this is not achieved, the student must meet with their graduate advisor to determine whether the student should remain in the Physics and Astronomy graduate program. If the GPR cannot be returned to 3.0 or above within two consecutive semesters (fall or spring), the student will be considered by the Graduate Records Committee for dismissal from the Physics and Astronomy graduate program. Failure to make reasonable progress in the other areas of graduate study, particularly research, is also grounds for a recommendation that a student be dropped from the graduate program. Such a recommendation is to be made by the Graduate Records Committee to the Department Head, with input from the student's research advisor.
- **Grade Replacement:** A course in which the final grade is a C or lower may be repeated ONCE in order to replace the lower grade. If the second grade is higher, the original grade will remain on the permanent record, but it will not be used to compute the cumulative and Degree Plan GPRs. In accordance with University rules, any further repeat would be treated as an additional grade that will be included along with the previous grade for GPR computations.

III. Minimum Course Load & Registration

To be considered full-time, graduate students must carry a 9-hour course load each fall and spring semester. First year students should consult with their research adviser and/or the graduate advisors to select an appropriate set of fall or spring courses.

- **Summer Registration:** The summer full-time minimum load for graduate students is three hours per 5-week session or six hours per 10-week session. In most cases, these will be research hours.
- **Continuous Registration:** Full-time registration is a University requirement for students while receiving support on a teaching or research assistantship, or a Department or University fellowship. If a student does not plan to register in the fall or spring due to unusual circumstances, a Leave of Absence petition may be required.
- **Preregistration:** The Physics and Astronomy Department expects all students to preregister during the designated preregistration period each semester. Failure to register in a timely manner can result in a delay of tuition and stipend payment.

V. Graduate Assistantships (GAT, GANT, and GAR)

Required Training

All incoming students are required to attend departmental and university teaching assistant (TA) training. The departmental TA training will be scheduled for one week, in one of the two weeks before the beginning of classes. More information about the University training can be found at the Center for Teaching Excellence website.

Teaching Assistantships (GAT/GANT)

The initial appointment is normally for a period of nine months. After the first academic year, the student is expected to progress toward choosing a research advisor and beginning the thesis or dissertation work, and to seek support as a research assistant (RA). It is expected that students holding a TA not only perform their teaching duties diligently but also spend their remaining time vigorously pursuing their graduate-research studies. The student must therefore show substantial progress in coursework and/or research, and may not undertake outside jobs.

TA positions are a limited resource, and for students beyond the first year the Department employs a priority system for assigning these positions. The following guidelines will be used by the Credentials Committee in establishing these priorities:

1. **Academic Performance:** All graduate students are expected to maintain a 3.0 GPR in the required courses. Students with a GPR above 3.0 in required courses are given the highest priority. A student who has six or more hours of C or below a 3.0 GPR for more than one regular semester is unlikely to be supported.
2. **Job Performance:** All TAs must take their teaching responsibilities seriously. Lab and recitation TAs must be on time and prepared for each class meeting and must fully cooperate with the instructor for the lecture portion of the course. Each semester the faculty who were assigned TAs will be polled to identify students whose job performance was superior, as well as

those whose performance was deficient. Students identified as showing poor performance will have a lower priority for future TA allocations.

3. **Research Progress:** After the first academic year, students making good progress should demonstrate steps toward finding a research group. After the second academic year the student is expected to have found a research adviser to work with. With input from the research adviser, the Credentials Committee may assign a lower priority to students not making adequate progress.
4. **Funding Duration / Semesters Supported:** Priority for GAT/GANT assignments will be given to students who have been supported on teaching assistantships for fewer semesters. Students are expected to transition to graduate assistant research (GAR or RA) support as they advance in their degree programs.

Graduate Assistant Research (GAR)

Graduate students who enter the Department of Physics on research assistantships are normally allocated this position for a period of time specified in their award letter. This appointment is considered half time based on a forty-hour work-week. The awarding of research assistantships is left solely to the principal investigator(s) of the research grant or contract.

- **Grievances:** Should a student feel that he/she is being required to do things outside the realm of normal Physics and Astronomy Department duties, the student is strongly encouraged to report such inequities to the Department Head who will appoint an ad-hoc Grievance Committee, which will then perform a thorough investigation.

V. Annual Evaluations

Each academic year, all graduate students will have an evaluation completed by their research adviser. For students without research advisers, a member of the Graduate Records Committee will be assigned to complete the evaluation. The evaluation process generally occurs in May/June for the preceding year and includes plans for the following year.

- The evaluation process is designed for the purpose of starting a one-on-one discussion between a supervisor and each of their students.
- From this discussion a student needs to get a clear idea on their progress towards their degree, the quality and appropriateness of their research and teaching, as well as the goals for the future.
- Each evaluation needs to be signed by the supervisor and by the student.
- Evaluations are mandatory and may influence a student's eligibility for teaching support.

If a student receives an unsatisfactory evaluation in any of the evaluation categories, the following steps shall be taken:

- The student meets with the adviser to develop a mitigation plan with milestones and informs the GRC of the plan.
- The GRC will monitor progress on the plan/milestones in the following year.
- If the problem is not resolved by the time of the next evaluation and the milestones are not met, the Graduate Records Committee may recommend dismissal to the Department Head,

who will make the final decision after meeting with the student and consulting with the student's research supervisor.

VI. International Student English Language Requirements

To serve as a GAT, an international student must demonstrate a higher level of English Proficiency - English Proficiency Certification. International students entering the Physics and Astronomy Department must achieve "Certified" status in English as soon as possible; the Department cannot assign students to any GAT position, including grading, recitation, or laboratory assignments, until they have been "Certified".

Students who are conditionally certified are allowed to hold teaching assistantships for one semester only but must simultaneously participate in Center for Teaching Excellence English Language Proficiency (CTE-ELP) instruction and achieve a certifying score on the oral section of the Texas A&M ELPE by the end of the semester.

- **Official Test Scores.** The university will accept the TOEFL-Essentials Speaking, TOEFL-iBT Speaking, IELTS Academic Speaking, or Texas A&M English Language Proficiency Examination (ELPE) scores to meet the ELP Certification Requirement.

Eligibility Level	TOEFL Essentials Speaking Section	TOEFL-iBT [Old] Speaking Section	TOEFL-iBT [New] Speaking Section	IELTS Academic Speaking Section	Texas A&M ELPE Oral Section
1 – Eligible	11 or higher	26 or higher	5.5 or higher	8.0 or higher	80 or higher
2 – Conditionally Eligible	9 – 10	23 – 25	4.5 – 5.0	7.0 – 7.5	75 or higher
3 – Ineligible	8 or lower	22 or lower	4.0	6.0 or lower	70 or lower

- **Alternative Certification:**
    - **Citizenship.** English Proficiency Certification testing may be waived for students from the following English-speaking countries:

American Samoa	Bermuda	Ghana	New Zealand
Anguilla	The British Virgin Islands	Gibraltar	Nigeria
Antigua and Barbuda	Canada (except Quebec)	Grenada	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Australia	Cayman Islands	Guyana	Saint Lucia
Bahamas	Dominica	Ireland	Trinidad/Tobago
Barbados	Federated States of Micronesia	Jamaica	Turks and Caicos Islands
Belize	Gambia	Liberia	United Kingdom

- **Bachelor's Degree.** English Proficiency Certification testing may be waived for students holding a bachelor's degree with all coursework completed at an accredited academic institution within the United States.

Head of GCC: Dr. Artem Abanov
Head of GRC: Dr. Ralf Rapp
Head of GAC: Dr. Jeremy Holt