Bachelor of Science in Physics

Why study physics and astronomy?

Our goal is to understand the physical universe. The questions addressed by our department's research and education missions range from the applied, such as an improved understanding of the materials that can be used for solar cell energy production, to foundational questions about the nature of mass and space and how the Universe was formed and subsequently evolved, and how astrophysical phenomena affected the Earth and its evolution. We study the properties of systems ranging in size from smaller than an atom to larger than a galaxy on timescales ranging from billionths of a second to the age of the universe. Our courses and laboratory/research experiences help students hone their problem solving and analytical skills and thereby become broadly trained critical thinkers. While about half of our majors move on to graduate studies in STEM, many find employment in the private sector in diverse situations ranging from financial analysts to physicians. Graduates of all our degree programs can be found in key positions regionally, nationally, and internationally. In this way, our department is at the forefront of telling the academic story of the University of Kansas to people around the state and around the world.

Undergraduate program in physics and astronomy

We welcome all students curious about the universe around them. This includes not only students planning on graduate study in STEM, but also students from other disciplines where a background in foundational physical science and critical thinking can be useful – teaching, medicine, e.g. – and anyone seeking to include astronomy and physics as part of their general education. The department offers BA degrees in astronomy and physics and BS degrees in astronomy, physics, and engineering physics; degrees in astronomy and physics are granted through the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences whereas engineering physics degrees are granted through the School of Engineering. The BS physics degree includes an interdisciplinary track that allows students to take elective courses in other STEM disciplines and a pre-medicine emphasis for students interested in health professions. We also offer minors in astronomy and physics and a certificate in astrophysics of origins. We involve our undergraduate majors in cutting-edge research practically from the day they join the department; research is a requirement of both the BS Astronomy and BS Physics degrees. The breadth of our research program affords our students exposure to a number of different fields and we are justifiably proud of our undergraduate researchers who routinely publish papers, attend conferences, and/or conduct research abroad (in Antarctica, Chile, CERN, e.g.).

Undergraduate Admission

Admission to KU

All students applying for admission must send high school and college transcripts to the Office of Admissions. Unless they are college transfer students with at least 24 hours of credit, prospective students must send ACT or SAT scores to the Office of Admissions. Prospective first-year students should be aware that KU has qualified admission requirements that all new first-year students must meet to be admitted. Consult the Office of Admissions (http://admissions.ku.edu) for application deadlines and specific admission requirements.

Visit the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (http://www.iss.ku.edu) for information about international admissions.

Students considering transferring to KU may see how their college-level course work will transfer on the Office of Admissions (http://credittransfer.ku.edu) website.

Admission to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Admission to the College is a different process from admission to a major field. Some CLAS departments have admission requirements. See individual department/program sections for departmental admission requirements.

Requirements for the B.S. Degree in Physics

Physics Bachelor of Science (B.S.) General Education Requirements

All students pursuing the Bachelor of Science in Physics must complete the KU Core requirements in addition to the degree and major requirements. For details regarding the KU Core requirements, please see the KU Core section of the catalog.

Foundational Physics and Mathematics (8.5)

Majors must complete courses as specified in each of the following areas. Majors are advised to take honors courses when eligible. All honors equivalents are also acceptable to fulfill PHSX major requirements. These hours do not contribute to the minimum number of hours required for the major.

Calculus I. Satisfied by:

MATH 125 Calculus I 4
or MATH 145 Calculus I, Honors

Calculus II. Satisfied by:

MATH 126 Calculus II 4
or MATH 146 Calculus II, Honors

Seminar in Physics, Astronomy, & Engineering Physics. Satisfied by:

PHSX 150 Seminar in Physics, Astronomy and Engineering Physics 0.5

General Physics I. Satisfied by one of the following:

PHSX 211 General Physics I
& PHSX 216 General Physics I Laboratory
PHSX 213 General Physics I Honors

General Physics II. Satisfied by one of the following:

PHSX 212 General Physics II
& PHSX 236 General Physics II Laboratory
PHSX 214 General Physics II Honors

General Science Requirements (8)

Foundations of Chemistry I. Satisfied by:

CHEM 130 General Chemistry I 5
or CHEM 150 Chemistry for Engineers
or CHEM 170 Chemistry for the Chemical Sciences I
or CHEM 190 Foundations of Chemistry I, Honors

Computing and Programming. Satisfied by:
**EECS 138**  
Introduction to Computing: _____ excluding Fortran or C++  

3

**or EECS 168**  
Programming I

Advanced Mathematics (9)

Vector Calculus. Satisfied by:

- MATH 127  
Calculus III  

4

- or MATH 147  
Calculus III, Honors

Elementary Linear Algebra. Satisfied by:

- MATH 290  
Elementary Linear Algebra  

2

- or MATH 291  
Elementary Linear Algebra, Honors

Applied Differential Equations. Satisfied by:

- MATH 320  
Elementary Differential Equations  

3

Math Elective. Satisfied by one of the following: (3-4)

3-4

- PHSX 518  
Mathematical Physics  

- PHSX 718  
Mathematical Methods in Physical Sciences

- MATH 526  
Applied Mathematical Statistics I

- MATH 530  
Mathematical Models

- MATH 558  
Introductory Modern Algebra

- MATH 581  
Numerical Methods

- MATH 590  
Linear Algebra

- MATH 628  
Mathematical Theory of Statistics

- MATH 646  
Complex Variable and Applications

- MATH 647  
Applied Partial Differential Equations

- MATH 648  
Calculus of Variations and Integral Equations

- MATH 660  
Geometry I

- MATH 661  
Geometry II

- any 700-level MATH lecture course except MATH 701 and MATH 715

Advanced Physics (69-78)

Majors must complete a course in each of the following areas:

General Physics III. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 313  
General Physics III  

3

Intermediate Physics Lab. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 316  
Intermediate Physics Laboratory I  

1

Introductory Quantum Mechanics. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 511  
Introductory Quantum Mechanics  

3

Mechanics I. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 521  
Mechanics I  

3

Electricity and Magnetism. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 531  
Electricity and Magnetism  

3

Thermal Physics. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 671  
Thermal Physics  

3

Undergraduate Research or Honors Research. Satisfied by:

- PHSX 503  
Undergraduate Research  

1-4

- or PHSX 501  
Honors Research

Physics Elective. Satisfied by any PHSX lecture or laboratory course numbered 500 or higher and not part of the other specific requirements for the major.

Physics Required Electives (Majors must complete one of the following options, Preprofessional or Interdisciplinary)

16-19

Preprofessional Option  

Majors choosing this option must complete 17 credit hours in advanced physics as follows:

- Mechanics II. Satisfied by:
  - PHSX 621  
  Mechanics II

- Electromagnetic Theory. Satisfied by:
  - PHSX 631  
  Electromagnetic Theory

- Quantum Mechanics. Satisfied by:
  - PHSX 711  
  Quantum Mechanics I

Advanced Physics Labs. Satisfied by both of the following:

- PHSX 516  
  Physical Measurements

- PHSX 536  
  Electronic Circuit Measurement and Design

Interdisciplinary Option  

16-19

Majors choosing this option must satisfy Advanced Physics Labs, Advanced Physics, and Allied Science Fields categories as follows:

Advanced Physics Labs. Satisfied by one of the following:

- PHSX 516  
  Physical Measurements

- PHSX 536  
  Electronic Circuit Measurement and Design

Advanced Physics. Satisfied by two of the following:

- PHSX 621  
  Mechanics II

- PHSX 631  
  Electromagnetic Theory

- PHSX 711  
  Quantum Mechanics I

- PHSX 516  
  Physical Measurements

- PHSX 536  
  Electronic Circuit Measurement and Design

Allied Science Fields. Satisfied by the completion of 2 advanced courses in 1 allied science field chosen from the following:

- Biology. Satisfied by two of the following:
  - BIOL 350  
    Principles of Genetics

- BIOL 400  
  Fundamentals of Microbiology

- BIOL 412  
  Evolutionary Biology

- BIOL 416  
  Cell Structure and Function

- BIOL 600  
  Introductory Biochemistry, Lectures

- BIOL 636  
  Biochemistry I

- BIOL 638  
  Biochemistry II

- Chemistry. Satisfied by two of the following:
  - CHEM 598  
    Research Methods (UKanTeach students only)

- CHEM 310  
  Fundamentals of Organic Chemistry

- CHEM 530  
  Physical Chemistry I

- Geology. Satisfied by two of the following:
  - GEOL 360  
    Field Investigation

- GEOL 562  
  Structural Geology

- GEOL 572  
  Geophysics

- GEOL 575  
  Seismic Exploration

- GEOL 576  
  Potential Fields Exploration

- GEOL 577  
  Environmental Geophysics

1 Course not used to satisfy Core Knowledge and Skills requirement above.

2 This course will not count as one of the two Advanced Physics Courses if it has already counted toward the one required Advanced Physics Lab.
Physics Major Hours & Major GPA
While completing all required courses, majors must also meet each of the following hour and grade-point average minimum standards:

**Major Hours**
Satisfied by 30 hours of major courses.

**Major Hours in Residence**
Satisfied by a minimum of 15 hours of KU resident credit in the major.

**Major Junior/Senior (300+) Hours**
Satisfied by a minimum of 12 hours from junior/senior courses (300+) in the major.

**Major Junior/Senior (300+) Graduation GPA**
Satisfied by a minimum of a 2.0 KU GPA in junior/senior courses (300+) in the major. GPA calculations include all junior/senior courses in the field of study including F's and repeated courses. See the Semester/Cumulative GPA Calculator (http://clas.ku.edu/undergrad/tools/gpa).

Departmental Honors in Physics and Astronomy
Qualified students earning either a B.A. or a B.S. degree in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with a major in astronomy or physics may graduate with Honors in Physics & Astronomy by fulfilling the following requirements: (1) By the end of the candidate’s final semester, achieve a minimum GPA of 3.25 overall and 3.5 in the major, in all courses taken in residence and elsewhere; and (2) Complete at least 24 semester hours of astronomy and physics courses numbered 500 or above, including undergraduate research represented by two hours of credit in ASTR 597, ASTR 503, PHSX 501 or PHSX 503. A grade of B or better must be earned in one of the following: ASTR 597, ASTR 503, PHSX 501 or PHSX 503. In addition, all of our department’s honors requirements include student research, for which results shall be presented in at least one of the following forms: (1) a written research summary, read by 3 faculty members in physics and astronomy or related fields or authorship on a peer-reviewed manuscript; (2) a research-based oral presentation at an appropriate venue (e.g., Undergraduate Research symposium, a presentation in an advanced department seminar class, a discipline specific meeting); or (3) presentation of a poster at an appropriate venue. A student who plans to graduate with honors in physics and astronomy must file a Declaration of Intent Form with the Departmental Honors Coordinator, preferably during his/her junior year but in any case no later than enrollment for the final undergraduate semester.