



Department of Physics  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## CRITERIA FOR SATISFACTORY PROGRESS – Physics PhD

Adopted January 22, 2025 (updated August 1, 2025)

**From the Graduate School:** (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1218>)

*Continuation in the Graduate School is at the discretion of the Graduate School, the student's program, and the student's faculty advisor as defined in this policy. A student may be placed on academic probation or dismissed from the Graduate School for not maintaining satisfactory progress. In special cases, the Graduate School permits students who do not meet these minimum standards to continue on probation upon recommendation and support of their advisor.*

### **Satisfactory Progress**

*While the Graduate School sets minimum standards that all graduate students in the university must meet, many departments and programs have additional requirements that exceed the Graduate School's standards. The definition of satisfactory progress therefore varies by program.*

*Most programs require satisfactory progress to continue guaranteed funding support.*

*The [Graduate Guide](#) includes the Graduate School's minimum degree requirements and satisfactory progress chart, as well as each program's minimum degree requirements and satisfactory progress chart.*

*In determining satisfactory progress, the Graduate School monitors the following: cumulative grade point average, incomplete grades, English as a second language for some international students, the [Five Year Rule](#), the grades of students admitted on probationary status, enrollment in minimum required credits (underload), and unsatisfactory (U) grades.*

### **Low Cumulative GPA**

*The Graduate School requires students maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.00 or greater for all graduate courses (excluding research). Some probationary admission conditions may require a greater GPA. When a graduate student's cumulative GPA drops below 3.00, the student is placed on academic probation the following term and is notified via email (with a copy to the graduate coordinator). The student will not be allowed to enroll in classes beyond the probationary term until such time final grades for the probationary term are reported, and the student's cumulative GPA is 3.00 or greater.*

*Detailed information for Satisfactory Progress as defined by the Graduate School is [here](#).*

### **Department of Physics Requirements**

Satisfactory progress is important for staying on track and completing the PhD in a timely manner. Graduate students who do not achieve satisfactory progress are considered not in good standing and may not be allowed to continue in the PhD program. The Department expects graduate students to progress through a sequence of benchmarks within prescribed time periods. These benchmarks constitute a reasonable rate of accomplishment for full-time students holding teaching or research appointments. We recognize that individual circumstances vary, and not all students progressing toward their academic goals will hit the benchmarks exactly. A student not making satisfactory progress based on these benchmarks is not in good standing and will be placed on probation. Benchmarks and triggers for probationary status are shown in the following table. Note: Summer terms are automatically excluded in computing elapsed time. Fall and Spring semesters with no enrollment require an approved leave of absence to be excluded in computing elapsed time.

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<b>Steps to the PhD</b>	<b><u>Expected Progress</u></b>	<b><u>Not in good standing (probationary status*; enrollment hold placed)</u></b>	<b><u>Student may be dismissed</u></b>
Acquire a faculty research advisor	End of 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	End of 3 <sup>rd</sup> semester	End of 4 <sup>th</sup> semester
Pass Qualifying Exam	Start of 4 <sup>th</sup> semester	Start of 4 <sup>th</sup> semester	End of 4 <sup>th</sup> semester
Dissertator status**	Start of 7 <sup>th</sup> semester	Start of 8 <sup>th</sup> semester	End of 8 <sup>th</sup> semester
Satisfactory progress in research***	assessed every semester	assessed every semester	assessed every semester
Dissertation Deposit	4 years after Prelim	4 years after Prelim	5 years after Prelim

\*Probationary status and enrollment holds are ephemeral and do not appear on official transcripts once removed.

\*\*Dissertator status is defined by the Graduate School here: <https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1247>

\*\*\*Satisfactory progress in research is judged by the faculty advisor and demonstrated by earning a P (Progress) or S (Satisfactory) in 990 research each semester. The Graduate School monitors grades of U (Unsatisfactory), which are considered unsatisfactory, and reserves the right to place a graduate student on probation and prohibit registration in future terms until such time the matter is resolved.

A student's annual degree plan will provide information about any upcoming benchmarks. The graduate program manager will formally notify a student who misses a benchmark. The graduate program manager will formally notify a student who is not in good standing and, therefore, enters probationary status. The consequences of not being in good standing are as follows:

- a) The student is required to submit a plan for completion of the relevant benchmark(s) and remaining program requirements by the start of the following semester. This plan requires approval of the student's advisor and the Associate Chair for Grad Studies and should be submitted to the Graduate Program Manager. A hold will be placed on enrollment until the plan is approved.
- b) The student will be placed on probation until the benchmark is achieved.
- c) Unless a funding guarantee is active, the student will have a lower priority for departmental funding than students in good standing. That is, everything else being equal, a student in good standing will be appointed before a student on probation.
- d) A student may be dismissed from the program if the relevant benchmarks are not completed as indicated above.

Once the benchmark is met, timing of subsequent benchmarks may be reset. Timing expectations of remaining benchmarks shall be clearly communicated to the student by the Graduate Program Manager.

In the course of the PhD, students sometimes change advisors for a variety of reasons. For students early in the PhD program, change is normal and even expected, and connecting to a new advisor generally does not have a significant impact on the student's satisfactory progress. Later in the PhD program, a change of advisor – especially if it results in a change of project – can have a distinct impact on the student's progress. In this instance, the student may work with the new advisor, Associate Chair for Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Manager to develop a revised schedule of benchmarks. In the absence of a revised schedule, the student will be expected to meet the remaining benchmarks as described above.

Students may request exceptions for extenuating circumstances by contacting the Graduate Program Manager or the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. Students wishing to appeal a decision should request reconsideration by the full PhD Graduate Committee, and then the Department Chair (if necessary), and finally the Graduate School as a last resort.

*This policy will be in effect for all students entering the graduate program in or after Summer/Fall 2024. Students who began the Physics PhD program prior to Summer/Fall 2024 will be reviewed under this policy in Fall 2026.*

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### Department of Physics

2320 Chamberlin Hall  
Telephone: (608) 262-4526

1150 University Avenue  
<http://www.physics.wisc.edu/>

Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1390  
Fax: (608) 263-0800