



Education Guidelines for Faculty and Teaching Staff  
Department of Physics  
August 2013

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Department of Physics  
Academic Programs, Room 4-315  
77 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139-4307  
617-253-4841

# Education Guidelines for Faculty and Teaching Staff

## Department of Physics

August 2013

The following guidelines summarize some of the departmental policies on education issues and the services and support that faculty and teaching staff can expect to receive from the Department and the Academic Programs Office. The *Education Guidelines* of the Department of Physics are intended to be used together with three other important resources: on the Department's website, information on the Undergraduate Program (<http://web.mit.edu/physics/current/undergrad/index.html>) and the *Guidelines for Physics Doctoral Candidates* (<http://web.mit.edu/physics/current/graduate/doctoral.html>); and the *Academic Guide for Undergraduates and Their Advisors* (<http://web.mit.edu/academic-guide/>), from the MIT Office of Faculty Support. If you have questions that none of these resources address sufficiently, please contact staff members in the Academic Programs Office at 3-4841 (for undergraduate issues) or 3-4851 (for graduate issues).

The policies in this document are determined by the Department of Physics Education Committee, with oversight from Physics Council and the Department's faculty as a whole. The 2013-2014 Education Committee members are:

Professor Krishna Rajagopal, Associate Department Head for Education, Chair

Professor John Belcher

Dr. Peter Dourmashkin, Training and Support Coordinator

Professor Joseph Formaggio, Graduate Admissions Officer

Professor Mehran Kardar, General Examination and Requirements Coordinator

Professor J. David Litster, Junior Lab Faculty Head, Career Counselor

Professor Nergis Mavalvala, Undergraduate Coordinator

Professor Christoph Paus, Graduate Appointments Coordinator

Dr. Sean Robinson, Flexible Major Program Coordinator

Professor Gunther Roland, Junior Lab Faculty Head

Professor Iain Stewart, Graduate Student Coordinator

Professor Boleslaw Wyslouch, Subject Coordinator

Professor Thomas Greytak, Interim Department Head, Ex Officio

Mr. Matthew Cubstead, Administrative Officer

Ms. Catherine Modica, Academic Administrator

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## Teaching

### *Teaching Assignments and TA Assignments*

#### *Faculty Teaching Assignments*

The Subject Coordinator (a member of the Education Committee) and Associate Department Head for Education will make decisions on the staffing of subjects each semester based on staffing levels and other teaching requirements. The following priorities (listed from highest priority to lowest) are used to make assignments:

- freshman lecturers, administrators for 8.01 and 8.02, lecturers for required undergraduate subjects, Junior Lab staff, and lecturers for the general graduate courses (8.311, 8.321, 8.322, 8.333 and 8.334);
- lecturers for specialty-required graduate subjects and undergraduate electives;
- lecturers for small specialized graduate subjects, freshmen recitations, and recitations in required undergraduate subjects;
- recitations in graduate subjects.

Please note, under normal conditions recitation sections in small undergraduate subjects will be the responsibility of the lecturer.

#### *TA Assignments*

TA Assignments are made by the Graduate Appointments Coordinator of the Education Committee. The following priorities (listed from highest priority to lowest) are used in the appointment process:

- freshman recitation sections, sections in required undergraduate subjects including Junior Lab, and general graduate subjects;
- tutoring and non-grading utility work;
- grading.

Assignments are made using these guidelines based on past precedence, requests from lecturers, and availability of Teaching Assistants.

#### *Statement on uniform compensation for postdoctoral fellows who teach*

All postdoctoral fellows who teach will be compensated by the Department. We will increase their take-home salary and we will assume a fraction of the normal salary that is paid by a research group. The exact financial arrangements will be determined by the Department Head each year. The cost to the Department for a fellow teaching two recitation sections for a term will be roughly equivalent to supporting a TA for a term; the cost will be split about evenly between compensation to the fellow and to the research contract.

## ***Teaching Commitment***

Faculty will earn teaching credit for the following:

- lecturing any Physics subject with adequate enrollment (see below);
- for junior faculty, teaching two recitation sections;
- for senior faculty, teaching three recitation sections;

### ***Policy on low-enrollment subjects***

If the enrollment in an undergraduate elective or a small specialized graduate elective falls below a certain cutoff, serving as lecturer for that subject will not completely satisfy a faculty member's teaching responsibility for the term. In addition, subjects already listed in the Bulletin will generally not be considered as counting toward a faculty member's teaching commitment if:

- the subject was offered in the previous year and awarded fewer than 9 grades, or
- the subject was not offered in the previous year, but fails to have at least 12 students officially registered for credit by the end of the first week of classes.

### ***Policy on double teaching loads***

In general, the Department believes that the focus that comes from teaching a single subject in a given semester is in the best interest of both faculty and students. Thus, double teaching loads will be allowed only under special circumstances.

Double teaching assignments should only be made in the context of a schedule of normally-offered subjects and traditional staffing levels; that is, double teaching should not be used to increase the standard numbers of subjects or recitations offered.

Only junior faculty will be permitted to double teach, and then only once.

To be eligible for double teaching a faculty member must:

- be working on an experiment at a distant location, where a substantial portion of time must be spent on site;
- have an established record of teaching scores at or above the average for the sort of subjects taught;
- if the double teaching is done in a single subject, be responsible for finding a graduate student who will contribute to the grading, proctoring, and other administrative tasks that would otherwise place an undue burden on the other faculty in the subject. The Department will provide the funds for a half-time TA for that student;
- be willing to accept teaching assignments outside of earlier determined teaching trajectories.

Please note: a faculty member on a leave earned by double teaching will not be exempted from other Institute or Departmental responsibilities.

## ***Teaching Relief***

Faculty can obtain relief from teaching for the following:

- fulfilling an assignment which is considered larger than normal as determined by the Education Committee. Examples include serving as Graduate Admissions Coordinator or developing a major teaching initiative such as TEAL;
- requesting a leave of absence, research leave, or sabbatical from the Department Head;
- fulfilling an administrative assignment such as Department Head, Institute Office, or major Laboratory Head;
- other arrangements as negotiated with the Department Head and Associate Department Head for Education.

## ***Scheduling***

Initial scheduling of subject times and locations is completed in the first week of March for the subsequent fall term and in the first week of October for the spring term. If changes to the schedule are needed after these times, teaching staff can contact the Academic Administrator for assistance. The Course Manager can also assist in making scheduling changes and/or making additional reservations for events such as review sessions, grading sessions, exams, etc.

## ***Textbook Ordering***

The assigned lecturer for each course in an upcoming term will be contacted during the term prior to the teaching assignment about textbook orders. Lecturers will be asked to provide such required information as the names of texts, authors, publishers, and ISBN numbers to the Reading Room Assistant, who orders all textbooks.

## ***Course Materials***

In general, course materials are maintained each term for each subject on the subject's individual website through the Stellar Course Management system or, in some cases, individually designed websites. Syllabi, problem sets, exams, solutions, and grade sheets are examples of material which can be stored. Materials from previous term courses are not to be released or distributed without the permission of the course lecturer or the Associate Department Head for Education. The only exception to this is providing materials to the subsequent lecturer of a course.

## ***Class Lists and Student Pictures***

Lecturers can access class lists and student pictures via WebSIS (<http://student.mit.edu/>). Recitation instructors can contact the course lecturer or Course Manager to obtain recitation lists and/or student pictures.

### ***Term Rules and Regulations***

Faculty and teaching staff are responsible for compliance with the Term Regulations as published at <http://web.mit.edu/faculty/termregs/>. These term regulations and examination policies derive from the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty and apply to academic exercises during the fall and spring terms. Exceptions to the term regulations and examinations policies must be approved by the Faculty Chair. Asking students to vote on some deviation from the rules is not permissible. Instructors should contact [exam-termregs@mit.edu](mailto:exam-termregs@mit.edu) with questions of interpretation or requests for exceptions to the regulations.

### ***Photocopying of course materials***

Academic Programs can arrange for CopyTech, the Institute's copying partner, to reproduce the following documents for Physics courses. Standard distribution for each category of material is noted in parentheses.

- course information, syllabus and calendar (on the web, optional paper distribution);
- current exams and quizzes (paper);
- solutions to homework and exams (on the web; not distributed on paper);
- sample problems and solutions (on the web; not distributed on paper);
- problem sets (preferably on the web and not distributed on paper. If the problem set write-ups are short and it is important that students have a paper copy in front of them, then we can determine week to week how many paper copies are produced and adjust printing accordingly);
- lecture notes (on the web, or paper copies paid for by the students. If your notes are already complete, they can be printed ahead of time by MIT's copy service, CopyTech. Students pick up the packet and pay for it at CopyTech);
- chapters from books (paper copies paid for by the students through CopyTech);
- large blocks of subsidiary material, including instructions for experiments (on the web or paid for by the students through CopyTech).

Teaching staff are asked to adhere to the copy deadlines except in rare cases. CopyTech visits Academic Programs at three pick-up and delivery times each day:

- 9:30 am
- noon
- 4:30 pm

Our agreement with CopyTech stipulates that a job will be returned to Academic Programs within 24 hours from the time it was picked up. Most requests can be accommodated by the next pick-up time, although large documents may take longer. It is very difficult to deviate from this schedule because of CopyTech's daily demands. We are one of many clients, and they plan their work based on the volumes collected at each pick-up time. In most cases, they are able to accommodate rush jobs, but only if requests are made infrequently. Please consult with the Course Manager on any questions regarding copying of materials.

### ***Homework***

Lecturers are encouraged to collect homework during class sessions whenever possible. Academic Programs maintains a limited number of lockable homework bins on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of building 8 where it intersects the 4<sup>th</sup>-floor lobby of building 16. Before the beginning of the term, the Course Manager will solicit homework bin requests from each lecturer, and the staff will then determine how to meet the maximum number of requests. Because in most terms not all specific requests can be accommodated, lecturers are asked to be willing to accept compromise solutions when needed.

Please be sure to ask your students to identify homework with their name, the name of the course, and the recitation section to reduce the amount of unidentified homework left behind.

### ***Grades and Graded Work Distribution***

All teaching faculty and staff should be aware of the privacy guidelines that are listed in the [Term Rules and Regulations](#). Posting grades or leaving graded work in a public space such as a hallway is not permitted under the [Student Information Policy](#). Lecturers should make arrangements to distribute graded exams or homework problems either in class or during office hours.

Graded final exams may be stored in the Academic Programs Office for up to one year, after which they will be shredded. During the year when the exams are on file, students may access their exams by coming to the APO with the lecturer or a recitation instructor; students are not permitted to review final exams without an instructor present.

### ***Exam and Tutor Space***

Academic Programs maintains a number of rooms for tutoring and for administering exams to students requiring accommodations. The Course Manager will schedule these rooms for their most efficient use, and teaching staff should work with the Course Manager on any needs they have for these spaces.

If a lecturer approves a conflict exam for a student, it becomes his or her responsibility to arrange for space and/or proctoring. The Course Manager may be able to assist with finding space, depending on workload at the time, but is unable to proctor individual exams. This is particularly true for evening exams.

### ***Final Exams***

Final Exam policies can be found in the [Term Rules and Regulations](#). The Course Manager will contact lecturers scheduled to teach in the next term when the on-line final exam scheduling system opens, and will work with teaching faculty to ensure that the Registrar's Office receives all requests for Final Exam scheduling.

### ***Course Records***

All instructors are expected to be responsible for record keeping throughout the semester, including grades for problem sets, other homework, and quiz grades, as well as final exam and subject grades. End-of-term grades are to be recorded by the instructor using the Institute's on-line grading system, available at <https://ogs.mit.edu/ogs/>.

### ***Course Evaluations***

All course evaluations are conducted on line. Lecturers will be notified of procedures by Academic Programs at the appropriate time during the semester. A searchable listing of evaluation results under both the current electronic and the former paper system is available at <http://web.mit.edu/subjectevaluation/results.html>.

At the end of each term, each faculty member teaching that term participates in Institute-wide on-line evaluation of each subject. Lecturers will be notified by Academic Programs when the evaluation website is ready for use. Statistics based on these evaluations will be recorded by the Department and posted by the Institute [here](#).

Faculty and teaching staff may review evaluation results after the deadline for the submission of grade sheets. This policy is meant to maintain the integrity of the evaluation process.

The Department Head, Associate Department Head, Subject Coordinator and the Division Heads will have complete access to the course evaluation material. These results are used by the Department in promotion, tenure and other evaluation processes.

Lecturers will have access to all evaluations relevant to the subject they have lectured. Recitation instructors (faculty and TA's) will have access to their own evaluations only. In general, TAs are evaluated only if they have classroom duties, and at the request of the faculty member in charge of the course. The Training and Support Coordinator and the Graduate Appointments Coordinator will have access to evaluations of graduate student teaching assistants. Academic Programs staff will have access to the course evaluation material for the purpose of gathering statistical information for the Associate Department Head.

### ***New Subjects***

Any proposal for a new subject must be submitted to the Physics Education Committee for consideration and potential approval prior to submission to the Institute's Committee on Curricula. Subjects should be submitted in the fall term prior to the academic year of desired first offering. Proposals to the Education Committee should include a subject description and syllabus, and information on units and level as well as on texts to be used. Submissions made after the fall term may not be reviewed by the Institute's Committee on Curricula, depending on the volume of requests at the Institute level.

## Undergraduate Program

### *Academic Advisor Assignments*

The Undergraduate Coordinator on the Education Committee, in conjunction with the Associate Department Head for Education, identifies faculty members to advise the incoming sophomore majors each year. These academic advisors keep this group of students for three years, or until the last advisee graduates.

Registration packets are prepared in the week before Registration Day each term. Advisors will be notified when the packets are available, and are asked to make arrangements to pick up their packets in the Academic Programs Office. Instructions on registration are included in the packets, but new advisors are welcome to talk with the Associate Department Head for Education, the Undergraduate Coordinator, or the Academic Administrator about their questions on advising undergraduates.

Advisors who are unavailable for part or all of Registration Day, and who cannot arrange another mutually agreed-upon time before the Friday after Registration Day, must arrange for a substitute and should email their advisees to notify them of the change. Because the Department places a high value on faculty-student interaction, another faculty member should be asked to assist when a substitution is necessary.

### *Advising Resources and WebSIS*

Comprehensive advising resources are available on the Registrar's website at <http://mit.edu/registrar/general/advisors/index.html> and on the Faculty Resources website at <http://web.mit.edu/faculty/teaching/>, where you will find the [\*Academic Guide for Undergraduates and Their Advisors\*](#).

WebSIS, at <http://student.mit.edu/cgi-docs/advisor.html>, provides advisors with individual advisee information such as grade reports, degree audits, pictures and other information.

### *S.B. Degrees*

There are two tracks to the degree of S.B. in Physics: the focused option and the flexible option. Specific information can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/physics/current/undergrad/major.html>.

Students interested in the flexible option should be directed to the [Flexible Major Coordinator](#) to discuss focus-group subjects, lab requirement, etc.

### *Committee on Academic Performance*

The Committee on Academic Performance (CAP) is charged with reviewing the performance of undergraduate students who are not making sufficient academic progress. At the conclusion of each term, the Undergraduate Coordinator and the Academic Administrator will communicate with all academic advisors with students who have been flagged by CAP. Depending on the action recommended by CAP, the advisor may be asked to attend a CAP meeting to address the deficiencies in a student's performance.

## Graduate Program

### *Admissions Process for the Graduate Program*

The Graduate Admissions Officer, a member of the Education Committee, must approve any offer of admission into the Ph.D. or master's program (please note that admission to the master's program is available only to officers of the US military). With the assistance of faculty readers from each Division, each application is reviewed and graded at least twice, once by the Graduate Admissions Officer and a second time by the division reader(s). The Graduate Admissions Officer will solicit nominations for fellowships from the readers and call a meeting to discuss the nominees. Final fellowship decisions are made by the Associate Department Head for Education in consultation with the Department Head. Teaching Assistantship and Research Assistantship decisions must be approved by the Graduate Admissions Officer in consultation with the Associate Department Head for Education.

If a faculty member wishes to admit and offer a Research Assistantship to a student about whom the Admissions Officer has doubts, the case will be reviewed by three other members of the graduate section of the Education Committee. If the faculty member is unsatisfied with their decision, he or she may, as a last recourse, appeal to the Associate Department Head for Education.

A student admitted with an RA offer will be given the option of a TA for one year if a) the student is rated an A candidate or better by the readers, and b) there is a reasonable expectation that he or she is fluent in English.

### *Graduate Academic Advisor Assignments*

The Division Heads, in consultation with the Education Committee's Graduate Coordinator, identify faculty members to serve as academic advisors and assign graduate students to them. If a student subsequently chooses that advisor as a research supervisor, another faculty member will be selected to assume the role of academic advisor.

Registration packets are prepared in the week before Registration Day each term. Advisors will be notified when the packets are available, and are asked to make arrangements to pick up their packets in the Academic Programs Office. Instructions on registration are included in the packets, but new advisors are welcome to talk with the Associate Department Head for Education, the Undergraduate Coordinator, or the Academic Administrator about their questions on advising graduate students.

Advisors who are unavailable for part or all of Registration Day, and who cannot arrange another mutually agreed-upon time before the Friday after Registration Day, must arrange for a substitute and should email their advisees to notify them of the change. Because the Department places a high value on faculty-student interaction, another faculty member should be asked to assist when a substitution is necessary.

## ***Advising Resources and WebSIS***

Comprehensive advising resources are available on the Registrar's website at <http://mit.edu/registrar/general/advisors/index.html> and on the Faculty Resources website at <http://web.mit.edu/faculty/teaching/>.

WebSIS, at <http://student.mit.edu/cgi-docs/advisor.html>, provides advisors with individual advisee information such as grade reports, degree audits, pictures and other information.

## ***Doctoral Guidelines***

The [Guidelines for Physics Doctoral Candidates](#) contains the Department's policies and procedures for graduate students. Graduate advisors are encouraged to become familiar with its contents, as most questions regarding graduate students' academic progress can be answered in the *Guidelines*.

## ***General Exams***

The general examination consists of three parts. Part I and Part II are five-hour written examinations. Part III is an oral exam, approximately two hours long. Complete details about the general exams are available in the [Guidelines for Physics Doctoral Candidates](#).

### ***Parts I and II: Written Examinations***

Part I is designed to measure a student's general level of understanding, physical insight, ability to get to the essence of a question, intuitive grasp of orders of magnitude and proper approximations, and knowledge of basic facts. Up to three attempts to pass Part I are allowed: three if a student takes the exam in the week before the beginning of his or her first term; two if he or she chooses to wait until the second term of the first year for the first attempt. If a student takes Part I in the week before his or her first term and does not pass, the exam may be seen only by the student and the student's academic advisor; in other words, a failed first attempt at the beginning of the student's first term is kept confidential, and the student is considered not to have yet attempted the exam.

Part II comprises a set of eight questions, from which students choose four, one in each of four general areas: Classical Mechanics, Quantum Mechanics, Electromagnetic Theory, and Thermodynamics/Statistical Mechanics. Two attempts of Part II are permitted.

Academic advisors and research supervisors can obtain Part I or Part II results for their students from the Academic Administrator (with the exception of any Part I exam failed in the week before the student's first term, as described above). Students who wish to review their graded Part I or II exams may do so in the Academic Programs Office, and should plan to do so with a faculty advisor.

### ***Special Oral Exams for Parts I and II***

If a student fails Part I or Part II at the final attempt, the exam committee for the applicable exam gives the student a special oral exam on the material normally covered on that exam (please note, non-faculty teaching staff such as Research Scientists, and non-Departmental faculty are not

eligible for these committees). The student's research supervisor may attend as an observer. This special oral is given during the same semester, generally within a few weeks after notification of failure.

It is the committee's primary responsibility to determine whether the student's performance on the written exam was an accurate indication of his or her mastery of the material. In evaluating exam performance, it is inappropriate to take into consideration performance in graduate subjects, other parts of the graduate exam, or special research problems. If the committee thinks that extenuating circumstances may have influenced the student's performance, they should bring those concerns to the attention of the Associate Department Head for Education, who will bring them to the Education Committee for consideration.

A student who fails to pass the general exam requirements may be offered an opportunity to complete a Master's thesis. Upon approval, such a student is allowed to reapply to the Ph.D. program.

### ***Part III: Oral Exams***

The purpose of the oral portion of the general exam is to test the student's broad general knowledge within their specialty. Each research field will appoint one committee each year to examine all students within that field. The scope of the material covered is most easily defined by the specialties for which exam committees are formed:

- Astrophysics
- Atomic and Optical Physics
- Biophysics
- Condensed Matter Experiment
- Condensed Matter Theory
- Nuclear and Particle Experiment
- Nuclear and Particle Theory
- Quantum Information
- Plasma Physics

An oral exam committee consists of a chairperson and two other faculty members. If the research supervisor of a student taking a Part III exam is a member of the standing committee, he or she will be replaced by an alternate faculty member for that exam only. The research supervisor may observe the exam, and may provide input if requested to do so by committee members. The supervisor and student will be asked to leave when the final decision is discussed.

The exam should test a student's overall knowledge in his or her specialty, rather than focus on the student's specific research area. For example, a student working on neutron stars could be asked basic questions about our solar system, galactic dynamics, or the early universe; a student working on high temperature superconductivity should know the fundamental concepts in semiconductors and quantum fluids as well. The practice of having the same committee examine all the students in a given specialty in any term is meant to insure that the Part III students have a firm grasp of concepts across their specialty.

The Department encourages the common practice of giving the student a question to be prepared beforehand: this helps put the student at ease as the exam begins, and starts the discussion on a topic with which the student should be quite familiar. However, the prepared material is meant to be only a fraction of the entire exam -- typically about one-third, certainly never more than a half. The committee may choose to ask questions which gradually lead away from the prepared topic into new ground, or, if it is satisfied with the prepared response, it may jump to a new topic entirely. Typically an exam lasts one and a half to two hours.

## ***Research Supervision***

### ***Prior to Thesis***

Graduate research prior to thesis research (8.391 in the fall term, or 8.392, in the spring and summer terms) may be officially supervised only by current or retired physics faculty or by senior research scientists who have or have had appointments in the Physics Department. Pre-thesis research completed under the supervision of a faculty member in another department must have a current Physics faculty member as a co-supervisor.

### ***Thesis Supervision***

Ph.D. and S.M. theses may be supervised and signed only by current or retired Physics faculty or by senior research scientists who have or have had appointments in the Physics Department. In cases where a student chooses a thesis supervisor who is a faculty member in another department or university, the student is required to find a current physics faculty member to serve as a co-supervisor. The responsibility of the co-supervisor is to assure that the student's research is founded in physics. He or she is expected to be an active member of the thesis committee and ultimately to sign the thesis with the primary supervisor. Additional details can be found in the [\*Guidelines for Physics Doctoral Candidates.\*](#)

### ***RA Termination Policies***

Research supervisors should consult the [\*Guidelines for Physics Doctoral Candidates\*](#) for the policy on terminating a Research Assistantship. Supervisors should be aware that a long, detailed, and writing-intensive process of communication with the student is required before an RA is terminated. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to consult the *Guidelines* and to confer with the Academic Administrator early if unsatisfactory performance issues emerge.

***Statement Regarding Under-Represented Minority Graduate Students***

The MIT Department of Physics is dedicated to providing equal opportunity to its graduate student population and is dedicated to helping its students succeed and thrive. The Department of Physics ranks among the best in the nation for its rate of graduating under-represented minority students. The Department achieves this goal in many ways.

First, the Department strongly recruits under-represented minority students to its program. During the application process, the applications of identified under-represented minority students are given careful consideration, including review by the Department Head and/or Associate Head. Applications are scrutinized both for traditional measures of achievement as well as for strengths that may appear outside of the traditional indicators.

While at MIT, under-represented minority students are given tools to succeed. Under-represented minorities who are accepted and remain in good standing are eligible for a generous package of financial assistance throughout their graduate studies. Details regarding funding may be obtained by contacting the Academic Administrator.

Additionally, the Department provides a faculty member to serve as an advisor to under-represented minority students. This advisor plays a proactive role in monitoring the academic progress and personal well-being of under-represented minority students throughout their MIT experience. Advisees are encouraged to bring problems or concerns to the advisor at any time.

Under-represented minority applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Academic Programs at [physics-grad@mit.edu](mailto:physics-grad@mit.edu) with any questions they may have about the graduate program.