

Graduate Program Handbook

Department of Physics & Astronomy, UNLV

September 2025

Welcome

In the last decade, research programs at UNLV have been emphasized and strengthened. During this time, UNLV has moved up in rank substantially (two levels) on the Carnegie Institute Classification to “Research University-intensive”. In the last several years, UNLV has hired numerous new faculty members and vigorously expanded its research programs in the sciences by adding new state-of-the-art facilities and increasing the number of available degree programs. Since 2014, the Physics and Astronomy department has added 5 new faculty members in astrophysics, condensed matter physics and computational physics.

Our graduate program offers masters and doctoral degrees in both physics and astronomy; the physics and astronomy MS program requires a research thesis or course work (see sub plans in [Graduate College Catalog](#). MS students are expected to complete the program in two years while Ph.D. students typically take 5 years. Ph.D. students have two attempts to pass the Ph.D. qualifying exam (offered every Spring semester). Astronomy Ph.D. students have to pass an oral qualifying exam in addition to a written qualifying exam.

Purpose

The purpose of this handbook is to provide program specific information that is not found in the [UNLV Graduate Catalog](#). Students are responsible for understanding and following the policies and procedures delineated in this document and the [UNLV Graduate Catalog](#), as well as the [NSHE Code](#), [UNLV Bylaws](#), and the [UNLV Student Conduct Code](#). Questions about

policies should be directed to the Graduate College: valarie.burke@unlv.edu
or GradAssociateDean@unlv.edu.

Department Graduate Faculty

A current listing of the graduate faculty can be found in the [UNLV Graduate Catalog](#). Faculty must hold either associate or full graduate faculty status to be involved in graduate education at UNLV. For up to date information regarding graduate faculty status in your department, visit the [Graduate Faculty status web page](#).

Program Information

MS - Physics (Subplan 1: Thesis Track)

MS - Physics (Subplan 2: Non-Thesis Track)

MS - Astronomy (Subplan 1: Thesis Track)

MS - Astronomy (Subplan 2: Non-Thesis Track)

Ph.D. - Physics

Ph.D. - Astronomy

Contact Information UNLV Physics & Astronomy

Department Chair Tao Pang, BPB-215, tao.pang@unlv.edu

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Program Requirements

Program requirements regarding admission, coursework and culminating experience are found in the [graduate catalog](#).

Advisory Committee Guidelines

Physics and Astronomy follows the guideline of the Graduate College. The role of the Advisory committee is described in the [Progression and Completion Policies](#) section in the [graduate catalog](#).

Degree Program Benchmarks

This is described in the [Graduate Catalog](#) for the MS degree program and Ph.D. degree program.

Program Timeline

It is expected to take two years for MS degree program and three to five years for Ph.D. degree program. The general guideline is listed in the graduate catalog under the [Graduate Study Timeline](#) section.

Professional Code of Ethics/Discipline Guidelines

UNLV Graduate College policy regarding academic integrity can be found in the [Student Academic Integrity Policy](#) of the Office of Students Rights and Responsibilities.

Annual Review Procedures

Students are required to make adequate yearly progress towards degree completion. The Graduate Advisory Committee that oversees the development of MS thesis research/Ph.D. dissertation research will meet at least once a year

to review the progress of the student. This committee must be formed by the thesis/dissertation advisor during the first semester of the program. A written progress report will be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator/Graduate College for review.

Each winter break and early spring term, graduate students are **required** to complete the **Graduate Student Individual Development Plan (IDP) form**. The review covers the prior calendar year and assesses student progress, and it establishes reasonable goals for the year ahead. Reported student data is shared with students' graduate coordinators and advisors to foster opportunities for discussion about students' strengths and weaknesses, accomplishments and next requirements, and mentoring plans so that students know what they need to do in order to progress successfully through their programs in a timely manner. Students who are graduating are also required to complete the form in order to record their achievements since the data is also used to track metrics related to the annual productivity of all students.

Student conflicts and grievances

A student pursuing a graduate degree in Physics or Astronomy is in a professional position and should behave accordingly. Students are reminded that they must act professionally by treating everyone with respect. Occasionally interpersonal conflicts may arise between students, between the student and their mentor, or with other personnel at the university. Under these circumstances, the student should first attempt to resolve the issue directly and immediately with the other individual(s) involved. If this is not successful, or if the student becomes uncomfortable approaching the person, the student can ask the department Chair, the Department Graduate Coordinator, or the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator for advice or potential mediation. A student is reminded that the sooner they seek advice or mediation the more likely they are to achieve a positive outcome. If the student is unsatisfied with the informal mediation, they should present their case to the Graduate Coordinator in writing, as a formal complaint within Physics and Astronomy. At this point, the Coordinator will investigate the incident from the perspectives of all involved, in order to formally resolve the issue. In some cases, the resolution may include placing a student on academic probation. In cases where a student is placed on probation, the reason for that action is clear, and the remediation requirements are stated and within the student's

control. In the event that a student disagrees with the departmental recommendation to place the student on academic probation, the student may choose to file a formal appeal with the Graduate College. If the dean of the Graduate College accepts the appeal, then the dean will refer the case to the university-wide Appeals and Legal Issues Committee, for a final binding resolution.

Probation

If a student fails to successfully progress in their degree program, their department/school will recommend that the student be placed on probation by the Graduate College. Students on probation may be dismissed/separated from their program for failing to successfully meet the conditions of their probation by the deadline provided. Please see the [Probation and Separation](#) section of the [Graduate Catalog](#) for more information.

Additional Program Information

Colloquium, Seminar and talks are regularly scheduled in the department. They include Russell Frank Astronomy Lecture Series, Department Forum, Astronomy Journal Club and Astro Coffee. All graduate students are encouraged to attend. Graduate students are also expected to attend discipline meetings and workshops.

Discipline Resources

Students are encouraged to join professional organizations such as [American Physical Society \(APS\)](#), [Optical Society of America \(OPTICA\)](#), [American Astronomical Society \(AAS\)](#).

University Resources

The Graduate Academy: Innovative Leadership, Professional, and Career Development

The goal of the [Graduate Academy](#) is to serve as a virtual resource providing support and many professional opportunities to UNLV graduate students. The Academy offers information about events and services such as graduate certificate programs, workshops, training sessions and career services. You can follow Academy activities via social media or look for regular updates on the website.

Alumni Engagement

With an alumni base 150,000+ strong, [UNLV Alumni Engagement](#) offers a variety of services and opportunities in support of alumni and their families. UNLV alumni are encouraged to support the values of higher learning through advocacy, involvement, and giving.

Commencement Office

Located in the UNLV Office of the Registrar, [the commencement office](#) is the last step in the graduation process. Please check with the commencement office for information on the commencement ceremony and your diploma; for all other information about graduate student degree completion and graduation, including thesis/dissertation requirements and doctoral hooding, please contact the Graduate College. It is the students' responsibility to ensure they apply for [graduation on time](#) and submit all required forms to the Graduate College. Questions regarding thesis/dissertation should be directed to the Graduate College [Student Services Team](#) and questions regarding required forms should be directed to the [Graduate College RPC Team](#).

Division of Diversity Initiatives

The vision of the [Division of Diversity Initiatives](#) is to advocate, promote, and support the advancement of equity, inclusiveness, and empowerment of a continuously changing collegiate and global community. The mission of the Division of Diversity Initiatives is to provide leadership and support for

UNLV's diversity mission: *to nurture equity, diversity, and inclusiveness that promotes respect, support, and empowerment.* This Office also handles UNLV Title IX questions, inquiries, and reporting.

Disability Resource Center (DRC)

The **DRC** is committed to supporting students with disabilities at UNLV through the appropriate use of advocacy, accommodations, and supportive services to ensure access to campus courses, services, and activities. The DRC is the university-designated office that determines and facilitates reasonable accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Graduate students with disabilities must disclose to the DRC in order to receive appropriate accommodations.

Office of International Student and Scholars Services

International Students and Scholars (ISSS) ensures compliance with both SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and federal law, so that the university can continue to be authorized by the U.S. federal government to enroll international students; host and hire international scholars; assist and advise employment eligibility and authorization relating to international students and scholars, and visa, travel, and immigration issues; provide critical and specialized services to the international students and scholars of the UNLV community; and facilitate their transition to the campus and the U.S.

The Care Center

The Care Center is committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all genders through programming, services, and advocacy for the UNLV community. The Women's Center has informational resources, brochures, and fliers for a variety of on and off campus organizations to help empower and protect yourself, and learn about your options. They also provide free tampons, pads, and condoms.

The Intersection

The Intersection is a one-stop resource for UNLV's highly diverse student body — a comprehensive multicultural center grounded in the academic life of our students. As an intersecting campus resource, the Intersection helps ensure students, particularly first-generation and students of color, successfully navigate their academic careers. Here, all members of campus can discuss their differences, discover their similarities, and build a shared sense of belonging.

UNLV Libraries

UNLV Libraries has always been more than books; they are about encouraging students and creating quality programs that elevate growth and learning. Please visit their website for important information about the services they offer to graduate students.

Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA)

The Graduate & Professional Student Association serves all currently enrolled University of Nevada, Las Vegas graduate and professional students. The GPSA maintains the Graduate Student Commons located in the Lied Library room 2141 and Gateway Building PDAC Room. The facility a working office equipped with a copier, fax, flatbed scanners, color laser printer, office supplies, and computers with printers and a small kitchen area. The GPSA is the graduate student governance body at UNLV; the GPSA Council consists of one graduate student representative from each graduate department, and they meet monthly. The GPSA also provides volunteer opportunities, sponsors social events, and supports graduate student research through the graduate research and travel grants program.

Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities

The Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities is a student-centered, service-oriented office located within the Division of Student Affairs. The Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities collaborates with the UNLV community to provide an inclusive system through enforcement of the UNLV Student Code of Conduct by:

- Promoting awareness of student rights and responsibilities;
- Establishing accountability for student choices;
- Creating opportunities for involvement in the process; and
- Striving to uphold the values and ethics that advance the common good.

Military and Veteran Services Center

The **Military and Veteran Service Center** is staffed with veterans and veteran education benefits-experienced staff to assist more than 1,800 veterans, dependents, active duty service members, National Guard members, and reservists attending UNLV. Their mission is to develop a welcoming, veteran-friendly campus environment that fosters academic and personal success.

The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office

The **Financial Aid & Scholarships Office** supports higher-education access and persistence by providing financial aid to eligible students. The office partners with student organizations, the UNLV Foundation, the Graduate College, and other external constituents to provide financial aid learning opportunities and scholarship support for graduate students.

Writing Center

The **Writing Center** is a free service to UNLV students to help you with any writing project, from papers to creative writing, to resumes, and we can work with you at any stage of the writing process. The center can help you brainstorm, make an outline, work on your drafts, or just be a soundboard for your ideas. The center staff can assist you in person, or via the **Online Writing Lab (OWL)** page.

University Policies and Procedures

Graduate students are responsible for knowing and acting in accordance with UNLV Policies and Procedures. To view the most commonly referenced cam-

pus policies and procedures, you can refer to the [Graduate Student Catalog](#), and following websites:

- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [Activation for Military Service](#)
- [Change of Address](#)
- [FERPA/Privacy Rights](#)
- [Mandatory Health Insurance](#)
- [Jean Clery Campus Safety and Security Report](#)
- [Proof of Immunization](#)
- [Policies and Procedures on the Protection of Research Subjects](#)
- [Rebelmail Policy](#)
- [Student Conduct Code](#)
- [Student Computer Use Policy](#)
- [Title IX](#)

UNLV does not discriminate in its employment practices or in its educational programs or activities, including admissions, on the basis of sex/gender pursuant to Title IX, or on the basis of any other legally protected category as is set forth in NSHE Handbook Title 4, Chapter 8, Section 13. Reports of discriminatory misconduct, questions regarding Title IX, and/or concerns about noncompliance with Title IX or any other anti-discrimination laws or policies should be directed to UNLV's Title IX Coordinator Michelle Spósito. The Title IX Coordinator can be reached through the online reporting form at [Title IX Reporting Form](#), by email at titleixcoordinator@unlv.edu, by phone at (702) 895-4055, by mail at 4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Box 451062, Las Vegas, NV, 89154-1062, or in person at Frank and Estella Beam Hall (BEH), Room 555.

To ensure compliance with Graduate College policies and procedures, please review the relevant sections of the Graduate Catalog:

- [Academic Calendar](#)
- [Academic Policies](#)
- [Admission and Registration Information](#)
- [Degree Progression Policies & Procedures](#)

In addition, the [Graduate College website](#) contains additional information regarding policies and procedures.

Nothing in this handbook supersedes any NSHE, UNLV, or Graduate College policy.

Handbook Revision Information

Last revised	Revised by	Changes summary
	Victor H. Kwong	First edition
September 2025	Timothy L. Porter	Addition of “Conflict Resolution”
September 2025	Jay Nietling	Typesetting and hyperlink cleanup