MAJOR IN PHYSICS

Physics is the study of motion, matter, and energy. It is the most fundamental of sciences, and provides the essential underpinning of chemistry, biology, astronomy, and geology. Physicists probe the structure of atomic nuclei, study exotic states of matter that occur at ultra-low temperatures, and develop theories that predict the origin and destiny of the universe. Physics has practical applications to a wide variety of tasks such as fabricating very large scale integrated circuits, producing high efficiency solar cells, and developing nanomachines, high-power lasers, and scanners for imaging activity within the human brain. Fundamental research in physics has led to many important inventions, including the transistor, the computer, the internet, the flat panel display, and the cell phone.

The Physics major begins with an emphasis on fundamentals in the basic sciences and mathematics to provide students with a broad foundation. Subsequent course work is designed to develop analytical and experimental abilities that allow students to solve problems involving the technical applications of physics. The curriculum includes courses on classical mechanics, modern physics, quantum mechanics, electricity and magnetism, and thermal physics. A strong liberal arts program rounds out the major and provides educational breadth. Participation in undergraduate research is strongly encouraged since it enhances practical training and expands employment opportunities, as well as being expected of anyone applying to research-based graduate programs.

Two concentrations are offered: Physics and Applied Physics. The former is the standard concentration, and is recommended for students planning to apply to graduate programs in Physics or related disciplines. The latter requires the student to select a specific "field': there are a variety to choose from, and each has its own menu of associated electives. The Applied Physics concentration is ideal for students who are double-majoring in other technical disciplines, or who anticipate further education towards a career in health professions (including, notably, Medical Physics).

Learning Objectives

Successful graduates will:

1. Obtain a solid background in experimental and theoretical physics. This will include a conceptual understanding of mechanics, electromagnetism, thermal physics, and quantum mechanics as applied to important model systems and real systems.
2. Acquire the contemporary skills and knowledge necessary for positions in a variety of occupations or for admission to graduate or professional schools.
3. Carry out experiments on diverse physics phenomena using electrical and optical techniques; analyze data using statistical methods appropriately; identify systematic errors; and relate the results to core physics content at the advanced undergraduate level.
4. Appropriately apply physics theories to physical systems qualitatively and quantitatively, including identifying a proper theoretical approach, using relevant mathematical techniques, and applying justifiable approximations.
5. Communicate the results of experiments and theoretical analyses in writing and orally.

Potential Occupations

Physics majors who go into the workforce directly after graduation use their training in a variety of settings. The primary employers for our graduates have been large aerospace/defense and electronics companies, as well as software firms and other types of high-tech companies. In addition to the more obvious jobs in those settings, such as computer programming, quality control, and engineering, our students have also been hired in training and sales capacities. High school teaching is a possibility: there are several pathways for students with undergraduate Physics degrees to obtain teaching credentials. Physics graduates possess excellent mathematical and analytical skills that are useful in business and finance as well.

Our majors have gone on to research-based graduate programs in disciplines including Physics, Astrophysics, Applied Physics, Applied Mathematics, Atmospheric Science, and Quantitative Biology. Those earning graduate degrees can work in college teaching and at industrial, government, and academic research labs and reach the highest professional levels.

Health Physics and Medical Physics are two less-known career paths that offer great opportunities for students interested in the direct application of physics to human well-being. The former is concerned with protecting people from dangers associated with ionizing radiation, while the latter involves working with x-ray machines and radioisotopes in clinical settings. Both require Master's degrees in the discipline, and a Physics major is the preferred undergraduate preparation.

Concentrations

- Applied Physics Concentration (https://catalog.colostate.edu/general-catalog/colleges/natural-sciences/physics/physics-major-applied-concentration/)
- Physics Concentration (https://catalog.colostate.edu/general-catalog/colleges/natural-sciences/physics/physics-major-physics-concentration/)