ASTRONOMY, PHD

The goal of the graduate program is to prepare capable and creative astronomers for careers in research and education. The granting of the PhD degree indicates that the recipient has a mastery of the knowledge and techniques of modern astrophysics. A PhD candidate is expected to be both knowledgeable of problems at the frontiers of astrophysical research and able to carry out independent forefront research in a specialized area. Candidates are required to gain experience as teaching assistants and are encouraged to work with a variety of faculty and research staff members during the first two years of study.

The Department of Astronomy offers the doctor of philosophy in astronomy. Although a master's degree is offered, students generally are not admitted for a terminal master's degree.

The department has a long-standing reputation as one of the finest graduate astronomy and astrophysics programs in the United States. The program provides each student with a broad knowledge of modern observational and theoretical astrophysics, while emphasizing the development of independent research skills. Beginning with the first year in the program, graduate students play an active role in the department's research programs and have access to all research facilities. As teaching assistants, they also acquire experience as astronomy educators.

The faculty are engaged in a broad range of observational and theoretical research. Topics of study include dynamical phenomena of massive stars; binary star evolution; dynamics of star clusters and star forming regions; compact objects; extrasolar planets; the interstellar and intergalactic medium; star formation; plasma astrophysics; computational fluid mechanics; magnetic fields; turbulence; the structure, kinematics, and stellar populations of nearby galaxies; active galactic nuclei; galactic winds and chemical evolution; galaxy clusters; galaxy formation and evolution; the star formation and black hole accretion history of the universe; and the development of innovative astronomical instrumentation. More information is available on the department website.

RESEARCH FACILITIES

Astronomical observations at UW–Madison trace their origin to the 15-inch refractor of Washburn Observatory, founded on the campus in 1878, and still open for public viewing. Wisconsin subsequently pioneered a multi-wavelength approach to astronomical observation. Faculty, research staff, and students are frequent observers on X-ray, ultraviolet, optical, infrared, radio, and submillimeter telescopes around the globe and in space. The department currently participates in the operation of a number of research-class observing facilities and is actively engaged in the development of cutting-edge instrumentation.

The university is a major partner in the WIYN telescope, an advanced technology 3.5m telescope at Kitt Peak, Arizona, optimized for wide-field imaging and spectroscopy, and in the 11m Southern African Large Telescope (SALT), the largest single aperture optical telescope in the Southern Hemisphere. The university is also a partner in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey IV, a massive spectroscopic survey of the distant Universe, nearby galaxies, and stars in the Milky Way. NOEMA, our newest telescope partner, is the most powerful millimeter radio telescope of the Northern Hemisphere and one of the most advanced facilities existing today for radio astronomy. The department is also actively involved in ASKAP and MEERKAT, precursor experiments for an array of radio telescopes one square kilometer in size.

The department has a long history of developing astronomical instrumentation for both ground and space-based facilities. Current efforts center on the development of a near-infrared spectrograph on SALT. UW–Madison scientists are also continuing to develop and operate an innovative and highly successful Star Tracker for sounding rocket and balloon-borne experiments. Technical support is provided by in-house electronics and machine shops.

The theory group uses a variety of facilities to support numerical modeling. The main workhorse comprises 24 dedicated nodes of the campus High Performance Computing (HPC) cluster, each containing 20 CPU cores and 128 GB of RAM, optimized for tightly coupled problems such as magnetohydrodynamical and N-body simulations. A number of smaller clusters within the Astronomy Department are used for development, analysis and three-dimensional visualization.

ADMISSIONS

ADMISSIONS

Please consult the table below for key information about this degree program's admissions requirements. The program may have more detailed admissions requirements, which can be found below the table or on the program's website.

Graduate admissions is a two-step process between academic programs and the Graduate School. ***Applicants must meet* the minimum requirements *(https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/) of the Graduate School as well as the program(s).*** Once you have researched the graduate program(s) you are interested in, apply online (https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/).

Requirements	Detail
Fall Deadline	December 3
Spring Deadline	The program does not admit in the spring.
Summer Deadline	The program does not admit in the summer.
GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)	Not required.
English Proficiency Test	Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Requirements for Admission policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/).
Other Test(s) (e.g., GMAT, MCAT)	n/a
Letters of Recommendation Required	3

To enter as a graduate student, an applicant must have undergraduate preparation that includes at least three years of college physics and mathematics through differential equations. Applicants are judged on the basis of previous academic record, letters of recommendation, personal statement, and research experience. Admission is competitive and is for the fall only.

Applicants for admission must submit the following via the Graduate School online application:

- Unofficial transcripts of all undergraduate work
- Statement on reasons for graduate study in astronomy

- Three letters of recommendation from people well acquainted with past academic work
- International students must prove English proficiency. Refer to the Graduate School Requirements (https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/) page for more information.

Financial support is provided through university fellowships (incoming graduate students only) or department assistantships. To compete for fellowships awarded by the university, applicants must submit all application materials via the online Graduate School Application by the fall application deadline.

FUNDING

FUNDING

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

The Bursar's Office provides information about tuition and fees associated with being a graduate student. Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial aid. Further funding information is available from the Graduate School. Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Financial support for PhD students in Astronomy

University fellowships or departmental assistantships are offered, contingent on satisfactory progress. The length of guaranteed student support is four continuous years for those with no prior graduate work. Three continuous years of funding are guaranteed for those with one year or more of prior graduate work. It is almost always the case that students remain fully funded through their thesis defense.

Teaching Assistants (TA) assist faculty members in the introductory Astronomy courses, generally by teaching discussion and laboratory sections. A graduate student is required to TA at least one semester. Research Assistants (RA) work with a major professor on a mutually agreed research program.

Tuition is remitted for TA and RA appointments. However, all students must still pay university segregated fees and any additional university fees.

REQUIREMENTS

MINIMUM GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Review the Graduate School minimum degree requirements (https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#requirementstext) and policies (https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiestext), in addition to the program requirements listed below.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Face to Face	Evening/ Weekend	Online	Hybrid	Accelerated
Yes	No	No	No	No

Mode of Instruction Definitions

Accelerated: Accelerated programs are offered at a fast pace that condenses the time to completion. Students typically take enough credits aimed at completing the program in a year or two.

Evening/Weekend: Courses meet on the UW–Madison campus only in evenings and/or on weekends to accommodate typical business schedules. Students have the advantages of face-to-face courses with the flexibility to keep work and other life commitments.

Face-to-Face: Courses typically meet during weekdays on the UW-Madison Campus.

Hybrid: These programs combine face-to-face and online learning formats. Contact the program for more specific information.

Online: These programs are offered 100% online. Some programs may require an on-campus orientation or residency experience, but the courses will be facilitated in an online format.

CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

Requirement	Detail
Minimum Credit Requirement	51 credits
Minimum Residence Credit Requirement	32 credits
Minimum Graduate Coursework Requirement	26 credits must be graduate-level coursework. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Graduate Coursework (50%) Requirement policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/).
Overall Graduate GPA Requirement	3.00 GPA required. Refer to the Graduate School: Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirement policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/).
Other Grade Requirements	A GPA of at least 3.0 is required in the core (required) courses and a student may have no more than 3 credits of a C or below. A grade of S must be received in ASTRON 990 Research and Thesis before the preliminary examination can be taken.
Assessments and Examinations	Students take one oral preliminary examination and one written preliminary examination after completing their second academic year. Students who pass are eligible to continue toward their PhD. If students do not wish to retake a failed exam, they may complete the requirements for a terminal master's. Doctoral candidates must submit a written dissertation proposal and make an oral presentation to the faculty by the end of their third academic year. A written dissertation must be submitted and successfully defended before a faculty committee.
Language Requirements	No language requirements.

Graduate School Breadth Requirement	All doctoral students are required to complete a doctoral minor or graduate/professional certificate. Refer to the Graduate School: Breadth Requirement in Doctoral Training policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1200 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1200/). They may either meet the minor requirement set by an external department (typically physics), or they may choose a distributed minor. In the latter case, 9 credits must be taken from two or more relevant departments outside of astronomy. The coursework will normally be courses numbered 400 and above although special exceptions may be made in the case where courses numbered 300 are needed to satisfy prerequisites. At least two courses must be completed in courses with the Graduate Coursework (Grad 50%) Attribute, and one should be completed in physics. Courses for the distributed minor or for minors outside of physics should be approved by the student's mentoring committee (or the graduate advisor if the mentoring committee has not yet been formed).

REQUIRED COURSES

Code	Title	Credits
Core		
ASTRON 500	Techniques of Modern Observational Astrophysics	3
ASTRON 700	Basic Astrophysics I	2
ASTRON 702	Basic Astrophysics II	2
ASTRON 715	Stellar Interiors and Evolution	2
ASTRON 720	The Interstellar Medium I: Basic Processes	2
ASTRON 730	Galaxies	2
ASTRON 735	Observational Cosmology	2
ASTRON/ PHYSICS 910	Seminar in Astrophysics [1]	0-1
ASTRON 990	Research and Thesis [2]	1-12
Breadth		**9**
See PhD policy above on Breadth Requirement for details.		
Total Credits		**51**

1. Barring course conflicts, students are expected to take this course every semester during their first two years for 1 credit each semester. Once students reach dissertator status, they no longer register for this course.
2. Beyond the other required courses listed, students typically take ASTRON 990 Research and Thesis credits to reach the total minimum credit requirement.

POLICIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/) serve as the official document of record for Graduate School academic and administrative policies and procedures and are updated continuously. Note some policies redirect to entries in the official UW-Madison Policy Library (https://policy.wisc.edu/). Programs may set more stringent policies than the Graduate School. Policies set by the academic degree program can be found below.

MAJOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES

PRIOR COURSEWORK

Graduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/) policy.

Undergraduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions or UW-Madison

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/) policy.

Credits Earned as a Professional Student at UW-Madison (Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary careers)

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/) policy.

Credits Earned as a University Special Student at UW–Madison

With program approval, students are allowed to transfer no more than 15 credits of coursework numbered 400 or above taken as a UW–Madison University Special student. However, these credits are not allowed to count toward the 50% graduate coursework minimum unless numbered 700 or above or are taken to meet the requirements of a capstone certificate and has the "Grad 50%" attribute. Coursework earned ten years or more prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

PROBATION

A grade of C or lower in a core course will result in the student being placed on academic probation. This is removed after the next grade of B or better in a core course. Grades of C or lower in two or more core courses will result in dismissal.

Refer to the Graduate School: Probation (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1217/) policy.

ADVISOR / COMMITTEE

All students will be assigned a mentoring committee consisting of the student's advisor and two other faculty members. Students are strongly encouraged (but not required) to meet with their mentoring committees twice a year in the first two years and annually thereafter.

CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credit maximum. Refer to the Graduate School: Maximum Credit Loads and Overload Requests (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1228/) policy.

TIME LIMITS

Refer to the Graduate School: Time Limits (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/) policy.

GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

These resources may be helpful in addressing your concerns:

- Bias or Hate Reporting (https://doso.students.wisc.edu/bias-or-hate-reporting/)
- Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/#grievance-procedure)

- Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policies and Procedures (https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/)
  - Office of the Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs (https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/)
- Employee Assistance (http://www.eao.wisc.edu/) (for personal counseling and workplace consultation around communication and conflict involving graduate assistants and other employees, post-doctoral students, faculty and staff)
- Employee Disability Resource Office (https://employeedisabilities.wisc.edu/) (for qualified employees or applicants with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities)
- Graduate School (https://grad.wisc.edu/) (for informal advice at any level of review and for official appeals of program/departmental or school/college grievance decisions)
- Office of Compliance (https://compliance.wisc.edu/) (for class harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence)
- Office Student Assistance and Support (OSAS) (https://osas.wisc.edu/) (for all students to seek grievance assistance and support)
- Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/) (for conflicts involving students)
- Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff (http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/) (for employed graduate students and post-docs, as well as faculty and staff)
- Title IX (https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/) (for concerns about discrimination)

L&S POLICY FOR GRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC APPEALS

Graduate students have the right to appeal an academic decision related to an L&S graduate program if the student believes that the decision is inconsistent with published policy.

Academic decisions that may be appealed include:

- Dismissal from the graduate program
- Failure to pass a qualifying or preliminary examination
- Failure to achieve satisfactory academic progress
- Academic disciplinary action related to failure to meet professional conduct standards

Issues such as the following cannot be appealed using this process:

- A faculty member declining to serve as a graduate student's advisor.
- Decisions regarding the student's disciplinary knowledge, evaluation of the quality of work, or similar judgements. These are the domain of the department faculty.
- Course grades. These can be appealed instead using the L&S Policy for Grade Appeal (https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/22258/).
- Incidents of bias or hate, hostile and intimidating behavior (https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/), or discrimination (Title IX (https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/), Office of Compliance (https://compliance.wisc.edu/eo-complaint/formal-investigations/)). Direct these to the linked campus offices appropriate for the incident(s).

Appeal Process for Graduate Students

A graduate student wishing to appeal an academic decision must follow the process in the order listed below. Note time limits within each step.

1. The student should first seek informal resolution, if possible, by discussing the concern with their academic advisor, the department's Director of Graduate Studies, and/or the department chair.
2. If the program has an appeal policy listed in their graduate program handbook, the student should follow the policy as written, including adhering to any indicated deadlines. In the absence of a specific departmental process, the chair or designee will be the reviewer and decision maker, and the student should submit a written appeal to the chair within 15 business days of the academic decision. The chair or designee will notify the student in writing of their decision.
3. If the departmental process upholds the original decision, the graduate student may next initiate an appeal to L&S. To do so, the student must submit a written appeal to the L&S Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Academic Affairs within 15 business days of notification of the department's decision.
   a. To the fullest extent possible, the written appeal should include, in a single document: a clear and concise statement of the academic decision being appealed, any relevant background on what led to the decision, the specific policies involved, the relief sought, any relevant documentation related to the departmental appeal, and the names and titles of any individuals contributing to or involved in the decision.
   b. The Assistant Dean will work with the Academic Associate Dean of the appropriate division to consider the appeal. They may seek additional information and/or meetings related to the case.
   c. The Assistant Dean and Academic Associate Dean will provide a written decision within 20 business days.
4. If L&S upholds the original decision, the graduate student may appeal to the Graduate School. More information can be found on their website: Grievances and Appeals (https://grad.wisc.edu/documents/grievances-and-appeals/) (see: Graduate School Appeal Process).

OTHER

University fellowships or departmental assistantships are offered, contingent on satisfactory progress. The length of guaranteed student support is four continuous years for those with no prior graduate work. Three continuous years of funding are guaranteed for those with one year or more of prior graduate work. It is almost always the case that students remain fully funded through their thesis defense.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

Take advantage of the Graduate School's professional development resources (https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/) to build skills, thrive academically, and launch your career.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

The goal of the graduate program is to prepare capable and creative astronomers for careers in research and education. Each student will have both a graduate student mentor and a set of three faculty mentors, called a "Committee of Three" (or Co3 for short). The Co3's are expected to evolve into a Thesis Committee as the student progress towards their degree. The Committee of Three fosters more departmental collaborations and provides students with a broader advising perspective and regular feedback on their progress.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Demonstrate mastery of basic observational techniques and the core astrophysical processes that govern the structures and evolution of major cosmic systems
2. Formulate scientific hypotheses and design original research that pushes beyond current boundaries of knowledge
3. Create research and scholarship that substantively advances a specific field of study within astronomy
4. Communicate complex ideas in a clear and understandable manner to students, research professionals, and lay audiences
5. Foster ethical and professional conduct
6. Demonstrate breadth within their learning experiences and awareness of the status of contemporary research beyond the student's area of specialization