

Boston University

Department of Astronomy

PhD Program Handbook

Boston University
Department of Astronomy
College of Arts & Sciences
725 Commonwealth Avenue, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02215
Tel: (617) 353-2625
<https://www.bu.edu/astronomy>

PhD Program Handbook

This document was produced by the Astronomy Department in accordance with instructions from the Provost's Office and the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences (GRS) in Fall 2024.

It addresses the aspects of academic requirements that were listed in those instructions, and is accurate as of April 2025.

Table of Contents

- **Specification of Maximum Time to Degree..... 3**
- **Procedures for Seeking Extension of Maximum Time to Degree..... 3**
- **Statements on Misconduct and Grievance Procedure..... 3**
- **Definition of Satisfactory Academic Progress..... 4**
- **Process for Obtaining an Advisor and Specific Time Frame Within Which a
Student Must Formalize a Relationship with an Advisor..... 5**
- **Conditions Under Which a Student May Change Advisors and
Consequences of Not Obtaining an Advisor..... 5**
- **Specification of Program Milestones and When They Must be Achieved..... 6**
- **Links to University-Wide and College-Specific Graduate Student Policies.....7**
- **Astronomy PhD Program Graduate Education Data Profile.....7**

Specification of Maximum Time to Degree

The Astronomy Department follows GRS policies on this topic.

“PhD degrees must be completed within seven years after the first registration for that degree (except for periods of authorized leave)”

- <https://www.bu.edu/cas/academics/phd-and-mfa-academics/academic-policies-and-conduct-code/>

Procedures for Seeking Extension of Maximum Time to Degree

The Astronomy Department follows GRS policies on this topic.

“Students wishing to take a leave of absence should submit a Leave of Absence Form to the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences ... The period of authorized leave of absence is not counted as a part of the time allowed for completion of PhD degree requirements.”

- <https://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/withdrawal-leave-of-absence-and-reinstatement/>

GRS also permits students to petition to extend the time approved for completion of PhD requirements. The relevant form is curated by GRS.

- <https://www.bu.edu/cas/files/2015/09/PhD-Petition-Extension.pdf>

Statements on Misconduct and Grievance Procedure

The Astronomy Department follows GRS policies on this topic.

- <https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>
- <https://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/grade-grievances/>

Definition of Satisfactory Academic Progress

The Astronomy Department follows GRS policies on this topic.

“Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is the term used when determining a student’s eligibility for federal financial aid (which includes federal loans and federal Work-Study)

The GRS minimum standard for Satisfactory Academic Progress for students is:

- Cumulative Grade Point Average: Maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher
- Minimum Completion Rate: A student must complete at least 75% of all cumulative attempted unit hours in order to be eligible for federal financial aid. The cumulative attempted unit hours include all transfer units accepted by the University and noted on the academic transcript.
- Degree Completion Maximum Time Limits: Master’s degrees must be completed within three years and PhD degrees must be completed within seven years after the first registration for that degree (except for periods of authorized leave). In addition, a full-time or certified full-time PhD student who is in good academic standing and who becomes the primary caregiver of an infant or adopted child will receive a one-year extension of their approved time to degree.
- Petitions for extensions of time to complete degree requirements must be submitted prior to the end of the above limits. Students exceeding these time limits without an approved petition for an extension of time will not be permitted to register.”

<https://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/failing-grades/>

“The Graduate School of Arts & Sciences requires graduate students to maintain Good Academic Standing in order to remain enrolled in their graduate program and/or to retain GRS scholarships, fellowship support, and federal loans. The GRS criteria for Good Academic Standing are as follows:

- Have no more than two grades lower than B– and/or two W grades.
- Meet all milestones of the degree, such as comprehensive exams, on the schedule specified by the program.
- Meet all milestones of the degree with sufficient quality of work as specified by the program.
- Minimum Completion Rate: A student must complete at least 75% of all cumulative attempted unit hours. The cumulative attempted unit hours include all transfer units accepted by the University and noted on the academic transcript.”

<https://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/good-academic-standing/>

Process for Obtaining an Advisor (and Specific Time Frame Within Which a Student Must Formalize a Relationship with an Advisor)

Students are encouraged to engage with faculty members to discuss potential research topics and assess the feasibility of establishing an advisee-advisor relationship. Once such a relationship is formally established, the student should notify the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) via email, with the relevant faculty member copied.

This notification should be completed by the end of the student's first year, which typically falls in August for those who begin the program in the fall.

Throughout the program, students receive continuous mentoring from the DGS, regardless of whether they have a designated research advisor.

Conditions Under Which a Student May Change Advisors and Consequences of Not Obtaining an Advisor

An advisee-advisor relationship may be dissolved at any time by either the student or the faculty member, after consultation with the DGS and the Chair. In the event of such dissolution, the student should notify the DGS via email, with the relevant faculty member copied.

If a student who has completed their first year remains without an advisor for six months or longer, they will be considered as failing to meet a program milestone within the specified timeframe.

Specification of Program Milestones and When They Must be Achieved

GRS does not define program-specific milestones. These milestones are defined by the department. They are also listed at <https://www.bu.edu/astronomy/academics/graduate/phd-in-astronomy#timeline>.

- Year 1 –** Completion of AS 701, AS 703, and AS 720. Completion of up to two (2) of the additional courses numbered AS 704-749 offered that year.
- Year 2 –** Completion of remaining courses numbered AS 705-749.
- Year 3 –** Completion of eight (8) credits for the astronomy seminar courses: AS 850, 851, 865, or 866.
- Year 4 –** Passing grade on the Oral Qualifying Examination (no later than the end of the first semester of the fourth year). Selection of the members of the student's PhD Dissertation Steering Committee, including the First and Second Readers of the dissertation. Submission of completed Astronomy Dissertation Steering Committee Membership Form. Begin meeting with PhD Dissertation Steering Committee at least twice per calendar year to monitor progress toward developing the Prospectus.
- Year 5 –** Continued meetings with PhD Dissertation Steering Committee at least twice per calendar year to monitor progress toward developing the Prospectus.
- Year 6 –** Continued meetings with PhD Dissertation Steering Committee at least twice per calendar year to monitor progress toward developing the Prospectus and completion of the dissertation. Dissertation Prospectus submitted to the DGS and GRS no later than 6 months before the Final Oral Exam. Review the Graduate School's PhD Graduation Checklists for year-specific deadlines.
- Year 7 –** Completion of all degree requirements, including dissertation and defense.

Links to University-Wide and College-Specific Graduate Student Policies

Such links include:

- <https://www.bu.edu/policies/>
- <https://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/academic-conduct/>
- <https://www.bu.edu/cas/academics/phd-and-mfa-academics/academic-policies-and-conduct-code/>

Astronomy PhD Program Graduate Education Data Profile

<https://www.bu.edu/grad/why-bu/phd-program-profiles/astronomy/>