PHYSICS AMP

All students must meet the Requirements for the Accelerated Master's Degree Pathway

OVERVIEW

The Department of Physics offers research opportunities in Theoretical and Experimental Condensed Matter physics, Astronomy and Astrophysics, and Soft Condensed Matter Physics and Biophysics.

Research in theoretical condensed matter physics focuses on the dynamics of quantum systems with application to electronic, magnetic, optical, structural, and thermal properties of nanomaterials including fullerene-derived solids (buckyballs) and carbon nanotubes. Basic research also includes the investigation of low energy scattering of atoms and molecules from surfaces and systems with many internal degrees of freedom and the development of new methods for studying quantum many-body systems, such as new extensions of density functional theory to van der Waals systems. In addition, high performance computational techniques including quantum Monte Carlo and exact diagonalization are used to study strongly interacting quantum systems with a focus on the types of emergent phenomena that are ubiquitous in complex systems. This includes investigations of entanglement in quantum fluids and gases in the presence of confinement, disorder and dissipation.

The physics of recently discovered Graphene and its derivatives is another major direction of theoretical research. These materials exhibit unconventional electronic, magnetic, mechanical, and transport properties, and efforts are under way to understand the role of quantum many-body effects both from fundamental standpoint and in relation to nanodevice applications.

Additional theoretical studies include strongly-correlated electron systems, such as complex oxides and cuprates and high-temperature superconductors. Of particular interest are frustrated quantum magnets with novel ground states, as well as conducting cuprates which exhibit complex interplay of charge and spin phenomena. Such systems also tend to undergo quantum phase transitions, and the study of quantum critical phenomena is a major research direction.

Theoretical studies of the optical properties of materials include the electronic structure of defect complexes in ionic crystals, the application of subtracted dispersion relations to optical data analysis, and the separation of inter- and intra-band effects in the infrared spectra of metals. Related studies are concerned with theories of X-ray scattering, of X-ray optical properties, and of X-ray optical elements.

Research in materials physics includes studies of the kinetics of thin film growth and surface processing, applied to materials with interesting and useful physical properties such as organic semiconductors and magnetic materials. Many of the research projects involve real-time X-ray or electron diffraction structural studies of surface phenomena, combined with computer simulation of relevant surface processes. Available is an ultra-high vacuum thin-film deposition laboratory dedicated to these studies, and regular use is made of synchrotron X-ray facilities in the U.S.

Additional research in materials physics includes studies of fundamental magnetic and spin-dependent electronic properties of semiconductor nanostructures that employ high magnetic field optical spectroscopy imaging techniques. The physics department hosts 1 of the few laboratories in New England where time-resolved, spin-dependent spectroscopy imaging at magnetic fields as high as 5 Tesla may be carried out.

Astrophysical research centers on experimental radio astronomy, with particular emphasis on pulsars and the interstellar medium. Observations are carried out using major instruments of the U.S. National Observatories and generally involve computer analysis and interpretation.

Research in biophysical ultrasound is directed toward an understanding of the physical principles involved when ultrasound interacts with living systems. This often involves collaboration with the College of Medicine. Acoustical and optical tweezers permit manipulating single cells without touching them. New forms of ultrasonic transducers and biosensors are being developed in collaboration with Electrical Engineering, as part of the Materials Science Program. Biophysical research includes studies on the development and employment of novel uses of in situ atomic force microscopy for biological applications, specifically high-resolution structural studies of membrane proteins, investigation of the packing of genetic materials on bilayer membranes, and studies on how DNA-bilayer interactions affect the use of cationic lipids as gene-delivery means. Other research in biological physics and protein dynamics involves combining the detail of atomic-resolution X-ray crystallography with the sensitivity of optical and IR spectroscopy. The department has access to a state-of-the-art protein crystallography diffractometer and organizes regular trips to synchrotrons in the U.S. and Europe.

Opportunities for collaborative research with other university departments and groups include those with Chemistry, the Materials Science Program, Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, the Cellular, Molecular and Biomedical Sciences Program, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Medical Radiology, and Geology.

The department participates in a doctoral program in Materials Science.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for Admission to Graduate Studies for the Degree of Master of Science for Accelerated Students

Students must apply for the Accelerated Master's Entry Pathway (AMP) during Spring semester of their Junior year. Students interested in the AMP can request information in writing from the Physics Department. Recommendation for admission will be based upon the student's prior academic record with particular attention paid to performance in upper-division 3000- or 4000-level physics courses. Following formal Graduate College admission to the Accelerated Master's Program, up to 9 credits of approved graduate course work may be taken that may be counted toward both the undergraduate and graduate degree requirements. The graduate credits taken prior to completion of the bachelor's must be in graded coursework only; independent study, research credits, internships and practica will not count towards the master's degree. In addition, the courses taken must be approved by the student's graduate advisor.

Minimum Degree Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

A total of 30 credits including 15 credits of graded course work, at least 6 of which must be at the 6000-level, and:

Requirement Description	Credits
A minimum of 6 credits of thesis research	6
At least 9 credits of physics courses at the 5000-level or above	9

Comprehensive Examination

At the start of their second semester at UVM, students are expected to sit for the written part of the Comprehensive Exam which covers Classical mechanics, Quantum Mechanics, Electricity and Magnetism, as well as Thermal Physics and Mathematical Physics.

Students are given 2 opportunities to pass the comprehensive exam. In addition to the written portion, there is also an oral portion that consists of a Master's thesis proposal given after the start of a thesis research project.

Requirements for Advancement to Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Science

Successful completion of all required courses and the comprehensive exam.