

Incoming Graduate Student Guide to Purdue (Physics)

So, you've decided to apply to Purdue for a graduate degree in Physics, and you've been accepted. Now what? This guide outlines what we graduate students feel are important steps for adjusting properly to grad school life at Purdue, specifically in physics. The basic idea is to help make each phase of your arrival to Purdue a little smoother.

- **Summer Before Arriving at Purdue**

So you've been accepted into the program, and also enrolled into the graduate school. Welcome! There are essentially two things to examine before starting at Purdue:

Finding housing

Finding housing is always a little bit like hitting a moving target. The Physics Graduate Student Association (PGSA) has put together a housing survey by collecting responses from current graduate students. The Excel file for the survey can be accessed on the PGSA website under "Housing Survey" here [PGSA Housing Survey](#). The survey is still rather new, but it helps to narrow down to housing options to those with which students may be happy. We hope to improve it yearly. Many apartments are within walking distance to physics. Note that the on-campus graduate housing at Purdue is rather far from the physics building, although it is quite close to other parts of campus.

Qualifying exam

The qualifying exam is a 2-day test that is required for PhD candidacy or getting out with a Masters degree. The minimum passing points for both vary every semester and differ by ~25 points, with the cut-off for Masters being lower. During the orientation week, you'll be suggested to take it. If you pass it, great, if you don't, you'll get additional tries in the Spring semester and Fall/Spring semesters of the next year. Ideally, the department prefers that everyone pass the qualifier exam by the end of their second year. Past qualifier exams can be accessed on the department website here: [Previous Physics Dept. Qualifying Exams](#). It would be worthwhile to look at the most recent exams to get an understanding of the range of topics and types of questions to possibly show up on the test.

The last thing is to read over the Graduate Student Manual emailed to you by the department. This document outlines what is required of you in order to graduate from Purdue's Physics and Astronomy department.

- **Orientation Week**

An approximate schedule for your first week goes as follows (for the detailed schedule, refer the PHYSICS GRADUATE STUDENT ORIENTATION AGENDA emailed to you by Sandy):

1. Monday

Morning: Orientation at the Phys. Dept. (free breakfast!)

Afternoon: Qualifying exam day 1

2. Tuesday

Morning: English exam (if required)

Afternoon: Qualifying exam day 2

Evening (subject to change): Coffee, tea and snacks in the graduate lounge (PHYS 019) with current graduate students. Changes to this will be notified via email.

3. Wednesday

All day: Official Graduate TA orientation

4. Thursday

Morning: Individual meetings with temporary advisor and Dr. Lewicki

Afternoon: Pizza lunch with current grad students (get all the gossip!), Microteaching session

Evening: Dept. Scavenger Hunt for incoming students. Social night!

5. Friday

All-day: Graduate School orientation

Morning: Individual meetings with temporary advisor and Dr. Lewicki

Afternoon: Teaching in American classroom (International students)

We know that you're quite busy, especially during your first week of orientation and the first week of classes. But it is worth making time for the social events even if you're not a dedicated extrovert.

- **Week 1**

In your first week, you'll be very busy attending classes, (possibly) teaching for the first time, and fulfilling help center duties.

- **Adjusting to Life in Lafayette/West Lafayette**

There are several groceries and department stores across Lafayette & West Lafayette. Here is a short (and incomplete!) list of them.

Grocery Stores: Fresh Thyme, Payless, as well as several Asian and Indian international groceries

Department/Grocery Stores: Walmart, Meijer (Lafayette and West Lafayette locations), Target (Lafayette)

For transportation: The MyCityBus application has bus schedules and real-time bus tracking. The bus system is free for students with Purdue ID (except for the 21 Avenue and 35 Lindberg Express buses which are free only for their tenants). The Purdue University surplus store has affordable second-hand bicycles along with other items from the university.

- **The Physics Graduate Student Association @ Purdue (PGSA)**

The Physics Graduate Student Association (PGSA) is the formal interface between graduate students and the faculty. Do check out our website to know who's involved and for all the latest updates [PGSA Homepage](#).

As a physics graduate student you are already considered a member! The PGSA committee is a group of graduate students who are dedicated to ensuring a comfortable quality of life for all our graduate students. If you're interested to get involved in the department, want to make friends, or just want to see what we're all about, please reach out to any member on the committee, contact details can be found here: [PGSA Members Page](#).

What we do: while we have casual occasions like the weekly grad coffee (which is very useful for you to learn about the department) and a graduate seminar series, we also have a more serious role in the department. The committee is made up of people who have volunteered to take time to help you with concerns you may have during your academic life in the Physics department. Wondering how to transition to research? We've got a committee member for that (Jared Bland). Having a problem with your teaching assignment? Siddhant Pandey will take care of that for you. Foreign student unsure how to adjust to life in a new culture? We've got a committee member for you, too! (Ahmed Aly). If you're having issues in the program, please reach out to

our committee members. While some committee members may have a specified role, you're not limited to talk to person X about topic Y. We're all happy to help and point you to someone who may be helpful for your situation.

For any questions, contact PGSA members:

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