Approved by Vote of Physics Department Faculty (10/20/14) and by GSAS (11/10/14)

Department of Physics, Washington University
Policy on Probation and Dismissal of Graduate Students for Academic Reasons

This policy represents the implementation by the Department of Physics of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) Policy on Probation and Dismissal for Academic Reasons, approved by the Graduate Council on April 24, 2014. For issues where the departmental policy is silent, the GSAS policy will be followed verbatim. Cases of violations of academic integrity are handled separately, under the procedures of the GSAS Academic Integrity Policy.

I. Good Standing

All students in the Ph.D. program are expected to satisfy the academic performance requirements of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, which can be found in the General Requirements section of the Graduate School Bulletin.

Further, the following specific criteria are necessary for a student to remain in "good standing" in the physics Ph.D. program:

a. Maintaining an overall grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better.

b. Maintaining a GPA in graduate physics core courses of 3.0 or better.

c. Finishing the core requirements by the end of the fourth semester in the program.

d. Having no more than 6 credits of incomplete (I), final examination missed (X) and/or not yet submitted (N) on the transcript at any one time.

e. Submitting a dissertation proposal, in the form of a completed Title, Scope, and Procedure Form, before beginning the 9th semester (5th year) of continuous enrollment.

f. Scheduling a Qualifying Oral Exam by the end of the student's 3rd semester, and taking and passing the exam by the end of the 4th semester.

g. Finding a research advisor in a timely fashion (generally by the end of the 4th semester in the program).

h. Good performance in the research group to which the student has been admitted, and timely progress toward the Ph.D. "Good performance" includes: (1) maintaining high standards of professional behavior, (2) completing well-defined

research tasks in a timely fashion, (3) working productively on open-ended projects, (4) communicating regularly with the research advisor, (5) showing initiative in thinking about and working on problems and questions that arise out of the research in progress, (6) staying abreast of relevant literature, and (7) fostering communication within the research group and helping bring less experienced students up to speed.

i. Good performance of assigned TA duties. "Good performance" includes: (1) maintaining high standards of professional behavior, (2) accomplishing duties, including meeting classes, holding office hours, and grading assignments or exams, in a timely fashion, (3) grading papers carefully and accurately, (4) making a good-faith effort to explain concepts to students clearly, (5) treating students respectfully. (NOTE: A full-time TA position should require 15 hours of work per week on average. Teaching Assistants who feel that they are being asked by the professor in charge of the class to work significantly more than that should bring the situation to the attention of the Teaching Assistant Coordinator and/or the Director of Graduate Studies.)

II. Notice to Students about Performance Issues with RA and TA Duties

Most performance issues are minor problems that can easily be resolved after informal discussion between the research advisor or teaching supervisor and the student. The following guidelines refer only to major performance issues that could result in probation or even dismissal if not corrected.

a. If a research advisor believes the student's work in the research group is falling significantly below the level of "good performance" (point I.h. above), the advisor should convene the student's mentoring committee to discuss the situation. If the mentoring committee agrees with the advisor's assessment, the committee should give the student written notice detailing the problems and what needs to be done to remedy them. The notice should also specify a reasonable time period over which these improvements need to be made. A copy of the notice should be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). If problems remain at the end of the time period, the mentoring committee has the option of repeating the process with a new notice detailing the problems that still remain. Alternatively, when the remaining problems are severe, the research advisor, after considering the advice of the mentoring committee, may dismiss the student from the research group. In either case the notice needs to be written, and a copy sent to the DGS.

b. The "teaching supervisor" is the faculty member in charge of the course for which the student is a teaching assistant. If a teaching supervisor believes the student's work as a TA is falling significantly below the level of "good performance" (point I.i. above), the supervisor should discuss the situation with the department Teaching Assistant Coordinator. If the TA Coordinator agrees with the advisor's assessment, they should send written notice to the student that details the problems and what needs to be done to remedy them. The notice should also specify a reasonable time period over which these improvements need to be made. A copy of the notice should be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). If problems remain at the end of the time period, the teaching supervisor and TA coordinator have the option either of repeating the process with a new notice detailing the problems that still remain, or of forwarding the case to the Graduate Studies Committee to consider whether the student should be put on probation. In either case the notice needs to be written, and a copy sent to the DGS.

c. In II.a and II.b. above, "written notice" may be by email.

III. Probation

Except in those cases so severe as to result in immediate dismissal (see V below), students who fail to stay in good standing in the program will be placed on probation for one semester and given a chance to return to good standing.

In general, consideration by the full faculty membership of the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), chaired by the DGS, is necessary to place a student on probation. However, when the criteria are objectively determined (*e.g.*, the criteria listed above in I.a. – I.e.) and the remedy is straightforward (*e.g.*, the student must bring a GPA below 3.0 up to 3.0 during the probationary semester) the DGS may act alone.

In considering whether to place a student on probation, and what conditions to impose on the student to return to good standing, the DGS and GSC will take into account the following:

- Scheduling and taking the Qualifying Oral Exam (I.f.).
  A student may be granted additional time if, for example, he/she switches his/her prospective research field or advisor. If the Qualifying Oral Exam is failed on the first attempt, the student will always be given the opportunity to take the exam again during the probationary period, and passing it the second time will result in a return to good standing.

- Problems with low overall GPA or core-course GPA (I.a. or I.b.).
  In cases where the GPA is low enough that it is seems unlikely that the student can bring it to the required level in a single semester, the GSC may consider requiring some intermediate goal for the GPA of the first probationary semester, and envision a second probationary semester if the intermediate goal is met. Students will not be allowed more than two semesters to bring a low overall GPA or core-course GPA to required levels. Note that extremely low GPAs may be grounds for immediate dismissal; see V below.
- Problems reported by the research mentoring committee (II.a.).
  A first notice of problems in performance in a research group will not in general result in probation unless the problems are egregious. In other cases, the GSC will consider placing a student on academic probation if problems persist after the time period(s) specified in one or more notice(s) from the mentoring committee. Outright dismissal from a research group will in general result in probation. In the probationary period, the student will be given a chance to find another research advisor, and will be returned to good standing if there are no serious problems reported by the new advisor.
- Problems reported by a teaching supervisor (II.b.).
  A first notice of problems in performing TA duties will not in general result in probation unless the problems are egregious or there is evidence of a pattern of problems: for example, a student who fails to improve his or her performance after being given due notice by the teaching supervisor and TA Coordinator, or a second serious problem reported by a teaching supervisor in a subsequent semester.
- The GSC may take into account special exculpatory circumstances (for example, serious illness or death in the student's family) in considering whether to place a student on probation.

When it has decided to place a student on probation, the DGS will write a letter to the student (with copies to Dean of GSAS, the student's advisor, and the student's departmental file) detailing the reasons for probation, and the improvements necessary over the probationary period in order to return to good standing. The DGS should attach to the letter copies of the Physics Department policy and the GSAS policy, so that the student will understand the rules and procedures involved. The letter and attachments will be both emailed to the student and sent by regular or campus mail to the student's home or office address.

Stipend support will continue during a probationary period unless the student fails

to meet the basic expectations of his/her position (*e.g.*, a student who holds a TA position repeatedly misses the class or section to which the TA is assigned, or a student who holds an RA position is repeatedly absent from the lab and fails to carry out lab duties). Students must be given a minimum of two weeks' notice prior to withholding such support. Any withholding of support for a TA position must be approved by the GSC. In the case of an RA position, the decision to withhold support is in the hands of the Principal Investigator of the supporting grant, but the GSC must be informed at the time the student is given notice. The Department Chair, with the advice of the GSC, may decide to substitute alternative support for a student whose RA or TA support is withheld.

Students may appeal the probation decision to the Chair of the Department of Physics. The student must make the appeal within 14 calendar days of the date of the formal notification of probation. (The Thanksgiving holiday, Winter Break, and Spring Break will not count towards the 14 days.) The decision of the Chair is final.

IV. Dismissal

If, at the end of a probationary semester, a student has failed to meet the requirements stated in the letter of probation, or if the student is subject to immediate dismissal (V below), the GSC may authorize the DGS to send a request for dismissal and a draft of the dismissal letter to the Dean of GSAS, along with copies of all previous communications and/or warnings. The draft dismissal letter will include the grounds for dismissal, the effective date of dismissal and advice to the student that voluntary withdrawal from the program is an option. If the Dean of GSAS approves the dismissal, a formal letter will then be mailed to the student's address of record, as well as emailed to the student's Physics Department email account.

For international students, the Physics Department will first consult with the Office of International Students and Scholars prior to drafting the dismissal letter. It is often advisable for an international student to withdraw ahead of a dismissal to avoid an adverse impact on future entry to the U.S.

Students may appeal the dismissal decision. First appeal should be made to the Chair of the Department of Physics within 14 calendar days of the date of the formal notification of dismissal. If the Chair of the Department of Physics upholds the dismissal, the student may make a final appeal to the Dean of GSAS, again within 14 calendar days of receiving notice of the Chair's decision. (The Thanksgiving holiday, Winter Break, and Spring Break will not count towards either 14 day limit.) The student is not eligible to receive stipend support during an appeal of dismissal;

however, if the appeal is upheld, the student is eligible for stipend support covering the period of the dismissal appeal process. Students who have chosen to withdraw from the graduate program (as opposed to taking an authorized leave) cannot appeal or seek reconsideration of this decision.

V. Immediate Dismissal

In case of extreme academic under-performance, the GSC may propose immediate dismissal (*i.e.*, without a probationary period) to the Dean of GSAS. The following are criteria for extreme under-performance:

a. Two grades of C+ or below in one semester.

b. Three unfinished courses (I, X, or N) in one semester.

c. A cumulative overall GPA or cumulative core-course GPA that falls below 2.6.

d. Dismissal from a second research group, after adequate warning and opportunities to improve in both cases.

Students who encounter personal situations that contribute to academic under-performance during a semester should be informed of the option to request a Leave of Absence rather than continuing enrollment with poor performance.

Procedures for appeal of immediate dismissal are the same as for dismissal after a probationary period.