

GUIDELINES FOR PHYS 497: SENIOR THESIS

PHYS 497 (senior thesis) is the physics major capstone course that students complete during their senior year. The senior thesis is a research project that is conducted under the direction of a faculty member, the product of which is a 10-20 page thesis that is submitted to the advisor and to one other faculty member who serves as reader. After submission of the thesis, the student gives a 20-30 minute oral presentation to the Physics Department. Advertising the thesis presentation within the Physics Department is the student's responsibility.

To enroll in PHYS 497, students must have already made an arrangement with an advisor and must obtain the call number from the Physics Department office. Students who require assistance in finding a senior thesis project should consult the undergraduate advisor.

There is considerable flexibility in the choice of thesis topics in experimental, theoretical, computational, educational or library research in physics. Since it is a capstone, an essential element of the thesis is to connect a topic in physics to the world at large in some meaningful way. Some students have completed a senior thesis project in chemical physics under the direction of a faculty member of the Chemistry Department, or in atmospheric physics under the direction of a faculty member of the Desert Research Institute.

Many students enroll in senior thesis during their second-last semester and get started on their project but do not complete the thesis until their last semester. In that case they receive a grade of incomplete at the end of that first semester and a final grade upon completion. They do not register for senior thesis during that second semester. Some students who had already begun a research project under the direction of a faculty member have completed the senior thesis during one semester. That decision depends mostly on the student, the project and other demands on the student's time. It is the student's responsibility to complete the thesis in two semesters and receiving a grade of incomplete for the first semester carries no stigma.