

Physics

“I believe that the purpose of college is to give students the experiences they need to succeed in the real world. Cornell College’s academic calendar is ideally suited to this task because it allows students to engage in more real-life experiences than they could under the semester system.”

Derin Sherman, Professor of Physics

Cornell physics majors are introduced to the foundational theories of physics—classical mechanics, electricity and magnetism, quantum mechanics, and statistical mechanics—and to the ways physicists “do” physics, as students engage in research projects at Cornell and at larger research institutions. The department also offers a major in engineering sciences, as well as courses and research experiences in astronomy and astrophysics.

The physics major prepares students for graduate work in physics or related fields such as astronomy and engineering. But within the liberal arts environment at Cornell, students also find connections between physics and other fields. Many students discover that their analytical and problem-solving skills are highly valued in a variety of occupations, including software development, financial markets, business, and technical fields.

Cornell physics faculty have varied backgrounds and interests in biophysics, condensed matter, astrophysics, medical imaging, nuclear magnetic resonance, and acoustics, but they all share a dedication to teaching and innovation in the classroom. Professors take the opportunity to get to know each of the students in the department, and they tailor experiences to meet individual interests and goals.

BENEFITS OF ONE COURSE AT A TIME

Cornell College’s academic calendar allows students to engage in more real-

life experiences than they could under the semester system. It also encourages faculty to use active-learning techniques beyond traditional lectures.

In Cornell physics classes, students frequently work in small groups on hands-on activities or problem solving, while the professor is present to provide guidance and feedback. The curriculum also devotes one entire block to the introductory labs after students have been through two blocks of physics. This is a good review, allows students to concentrate on lab technique and presentation skills, and uses labs that involve several areas of physics.

During the advanced physics lab capstone course, students spend an entire block researching a physics topic of their own choosing. Working with a small team, students plan, design, construct, and carry out their own experiments, much like in an actual research lab. Students who go on to work in research labs, either in graduate school or industry, find the advanced lab to be good preparation.

Other benefits of One Course include:

- Students cannot postpone studying for most of the semester and then cram before a few exams, because assignments are often due the next day rather than the next week or month. Students must keep pace, which helps deepen their understanding of the material.
- Students can use the classroom to work with other other students on homework beyond normal class hours.
- Students complete longer lab experiments, not be confined to two or three hours.
- It’s easier to take calculus before physics.

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Faculty Bios & Courses

KARA BEAUCHAMP *Professor of Physics and Engineering*

Teaches courses in physics, including Astronomy, Introductory Mechanics, Modern Physics, and Astrophysics. She currently collaborates with students on astrophysics research projects, and she has also studied high-temperature superconductors, magnetic materials, dye-sensitized solar cells, and local wind energy project feasibility. Ph.D. in physics, University of Minnesota.

BRIAN D. JOHNS *Assistant Professor of Engineering*

Teaches courses covering a range of engineering topics, including design principles, mechanics, thermodynamics, and materials. He also teaches upper-level electives and the engineering capstone course. He is a member of the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE) and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). Ph.D. in industrial engineering and M.S. in mechanical engineering, University of Iowa.

LYLE LICHTY *Professor of Physics and Engineering*

Teaches courses in physics, including Electronics, Intro to Quantum Mechanics, and the nonmajors courses Astronomy and Acoustics, Music, and Audio Systems. His current research with students explores the use of remotely controlled Android phones to produce acoustic phased arrays and large scale video displays. Ph.D. in physics, Iowa State University.

DERIN SHERMAN *Professor of Physics and Engineering*

Teaches courses in physics and engineering, including Engineering Circuits, Lagrangian Mechanics, upper-level Electricity and Magnetism and the physics capstone Advanced Experimental Physics. He also teaches the nonmajors courses Science through Film and Fiction and Electronics for Everyone. Ph.D. in physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

RESEARCH AND PROJECTS

CAPSTONE PROJECTS

The following are examples of projects that recent physics and engineering science majors designed and completed during their advanced lab capstone course:

- Designed and built a muon detector to show relativistic time dilation.
- Created graphene and used it to make a supercapacitor.
- Constructed a quantum teleportation device based on classical linear optics.
- Created a user interface control system using Doppler Shifted Ultrasound to recognize hand gestures.
- Created a DC-DC converter to create a usable solar power supply.
- Created a quantum logic gate using C-13 chloroform and an NMR machine.
- Built an exoskeleton arm controlled by an EMG signal.
- Made a high resolution scanning tunneling microscope.
- Used holographic interferometry to study vibrational patterns of musical instruments.
- Studied solar cells based on quantum dots.
- Built a detector to study cosmic ray muons.
- Studied extrasolar planets by observing planet transits.
- Built and studied a system to wirelessly transfer electric power using magnetic resonance.
- Built a ruby laser for the purpose of making pulsed laser holograms
- Built a device for studying sonoluminescence, which uses ultrasound to produce light.

ON-CAMPUS RESEARCH

Physics and engineering sciences majors and faculty regularly engage in collaborative summer research projects. These projects allow students to develop important research skills while working both independently and alongside faculty mentors, and they often provide a stepping stone to research opportunities at larger institutions. Current research projects include:

- Development of an acoustic phased array using remotely controlled Android phones.
- Exploring advanced topics in astrophysics.

OFF-CAMPUS RESEARCH

Majors in the department have had great success in their acceptance to major summer research programs (REUs) at places like Cornell University, Indiana University, and the CERN particle accelerator lab in Switzerland. Department faculty come to know their students and their lab skills well, and they're able to write strong, detailed letters of recommendation. Recent REUs were completed at:

- Albert Einstein Institute in Hannover, Germany
- Indiana University
- Los Alamos National Lab
- University of Florida
- Space Telescope Science Institute
- University of Oklahoma
- Kansas State University
- Baylor University

- The Institute Of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai, India
- Cornell University
- Bucknell University

AFTER CORNELL

ALUMNI CAREERS

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reports that demand for physicists is projected to grow 7 percent from 2014 to 2024, with a typical starting salary of \$55,710. Physicists are in demand as researchers, computer programmers, teachers, and data analysts in the financial sector and other fields.

Research technologist, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois (Class of 2014)

Seaman (E-3) at U.S. Navy, Fontana, California (Class of 2014)

Project administrator at BI Worldwide, Saint Cloud, Minnesota (Class of 2014)

Web development track at Startup Institute, Boston, Massachusetts (Class of 2013)

Electrical engineer at Textron Aviation, Wichita, Kansas (Class of 2012)

Photographer at Paramo Group, Seattle, Washington (Class of 2012)

Associate technician at NSF International, Ann Arbor, Michigan (Class of 2011)

Advanced support services engineer at LogRhythm, Boulder, Colorado (Class of 2011)

High school physics and engineering teacher at Boston Public Schools, Boston, Massachusetts (Class of 2011)

Lead hardware engineer at Corsica Innovations, Boulder, Colorado (Class of 2010)

Research technician, Sundrop Fuels, Longmont, Colorado (Class of 2009)

Research chemist, Inovatia Laboratories, Columbia, Missouri (Class of 2008)

Environmental scientist, Naismith Engineering, Corpus Christi, Texas (Class of 2007)

Program manager, ACT, Iowa City, Iowa (Class of 2006)

Safety basis and technical services engineer, URS Corp., Oak Ridge, Tennessee (Class of 2006)

Firmware engineer, HID Global, Eden Prairie, Minnesota (Class of 2006)

Physics instructor, North Iowa Area Community College, Mason City, Iowa (Class of 2006)

GRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Ph.D. in physics, University of California, Davis (Class of 2015)

M.S. in sustainable engineering, Rochester Institute of Technology (Class of 2013)

Ph.D. in chemistry, University of Oregon (Class of 2013)

M.S. in electrical and electronics engineering, Wichita State University (Class of 2012)

Ph.D. in computer science, University of Colorado Boulder (Class of 2012)