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**Subject:** Guidelines for doctoral requirements for the Spring 2020 semester  
**Date:** March 26, 2020 at 5:40 PM  
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To all our graduate students,

I send the information below on behalf of Peter Fisher, Nergis Mavalava, and the Physics Department Education Committee.

Regards,  
Cathy

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Subject: Guidelines for doctoral requirements for the Spring 2020 semester

Dear Graduate students in Physics,

I hope you are all doing as well as can be expected in these unsettled times filled with upheaval and uncertainty.

As we respond to the covid-19 pandemic with dramatic changes to our lives, we have also revised our graduate program requirements in keeping with MIT's temporary new policies, and our own values of providing students with the greatest and most equal opportunities we can while also keeping everyone safe and healthy.

To that end, **here are new guidelines surrounding the doctoral requirements during the Spring 2020 semester.**

## 1. Written exams

1. For students taking 8.311 this spring, grading will be PE, NE. IE. If students score a C or better, they receive a PE. For spring 2020 term, a PE grade will be sufficient to pass the Electricity and Magnetism part of the written exam. Students receiving an NE will be allowed to take the next iteration of the Written Exam (or to take 8.311 in spring 2021 if necessary) even if that exceeds the normal window in which they are expected to complete the written exam requirements.
2. It is too early to know if the August 2020 offering of the written exam will go on a usual. We will aim to make that decision by early July.

## 2. Academic requirements

1. Similar to point 1a above, students currently taking a subject towards fulfilling either a specialty or breadth requirement who earn a C or better will receive a PE, and will be considered to have satisfied the requirement.

## 3. Oral exams

Students who already signed up to take the oral exam in Spring 2020 term (and only those students) have the following two options:

1. Take the exam on or near the scheduled date via Zoom.
  - a. Students are asked to arrange hardware and software for their side of the online exam. The Department commits to making tablets available to students who do not have access to the appropriate hardware.
  - b. To prepare for the logistics of an online exam, there will be a short dry run for each student with one or more members of the committee, where the technology and exam process can be given a full dress rehearsal.
  - c. Students taking the oral exam in spring 2020 will also be graded on the PE, NE system. If a student does not pass the oral exam this term, it will not count toward the two attempts, and the student can take the exam in fall 2020 without the spring 2020 exam counting as their first or second attempt (whichever attempt the spring 2020 exam is for the given student).
2. Postpone the exam to the fall 2020 term. We will extend the time window for completing the oral exam by one semester for students exercising this option.

#### 4. Thesis defenses

1. Students with thesis defenses scheduled in spring 2020 may proceed with them. All defenses must be done remotely, over Zoom or similar. All committee members must participate over the online platform. The defense should have a “public” part during the students talk and public Q&A, after which the committee can meet with the student for the “closed” part of the defense. Virtual champagne may be consumed.
2. Printed copies of theses must be submitted to the APO by special arrangements, either by dropping them off or mailing them. How best to do this is still being worked out. We will be in touch with individual students to arrange this.

I hope these new guidelines will make the challenges of continuing academic life in these difficult and stressful times just a little bit less daunting.

Be well.

Best wishes,  
Nergis