

SMU Honors Physics Section

SMU Department of Physics

FALL 2015

SPRING 2016

Professors Stephen Sekula and Rick Guarino

Syllabus for Honors Physics

General Information

The Honors Physics Section is intended to provide honors students with additional activities, information, and challenges to allow them to broaden and deepen their physics knowledge while concurrently taking the introductory physics course sequence. The framework of this syllabus is intended to allow honors students to go above and beyond the normal classroom environment without creating a huge additional burden on the students. Honors students should be looking to go a little further than non-honors students, and this syllabus reflects that.

Participants in the Honors Physics Section will engage in the following activities each semester:

- They will use class time to engage in learning exercises that synthesize information from the 130X introductory physics courses, allowing them to find more breadth and depth in the subject of physics.
 - They will have access to expertise from outside the classroom environment, including faculty, staff, and students from SMU and other institutions, as well as individuals with a physics background working in private industry. The goal here is to enrich their learning environment by giving them direct access to experts at various levels of the field.
 - They will engage in a coherent, semester-long project. Preparing for, and delivering, this project will be the focus of various activities throughout the semester. Honors students will be expected to learn to present their work to an audience, including (but not limited to) their peers in the Honors Physics Section.
 - Students will pass or fail the section based on an assessment of their work and participation, to be determined by the instructor.
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(TA: Eric Godat)

Students will engage in a semester-long “Grand Challenge” problem-solving exercise. This will define the arc of the semester, setting the tone for planning out classroom activities and eventually defining the deliverable at the end of the course. In between class periods relevant to the development of solutions to the Grand Challenge Problem, the students will be engaged in demonstrations of physics principles and exercises to explore these demonstrations. These class periods will follow a pattern consistent with the scientific method: observation of a physical phenomenon, hypothesis building to explain the phenomenon, and calculation and testing to assess the hypothesis. The details of this program are given below. Taking into account Thanksgiving in the Fall and Spring Break in the Spring, each semester has 14 weeks in which a classroom period of the Honors Physics Section is possible.

Plan of Activities

WEEK	FALL 2015	SPRING 2016
1	Introduction to the Honors Physics Section	
2	Development of teams for Grand Challenge Problem <i>Why do we fall? So we can learn to pick ourselves up</i> (demonstration of a device that rolls uphill)	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>
3	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>
4	<i>Cold Hard Physics</i> (observation of a coin exposed to dry ice; demonstration of superconductors)	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>

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5	First “Honors Collaboration Meeting” Presentation of status of solutions to the Grand Challenge Problem	
6	Guidance on Writing Good Presentations (e.g. posters)	
7	<i>Seeing the Unseen</i> (Building a Cloud Chamber, observing particles, controlling particles with electromagnetism - see http://www.symmetrymagazine.org/article/january-2015/how-to-build-your-own-particle-detector)	TBD
8	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>	SPRING BREAK
9	Second “Honors Collaboration Meeting” Presentation of status of solutions to the Grand Challenge Problem	
10	<i>A Super-RC Circuit</i> (RC Circuit built with a 1F Capacitor and a bulb)	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>
11	<i>Electromagnetism v. Gravity</i> (magnet drop in copper pipe and associated exercises)	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>
12	<i>Just Remove the Electrons</i> (explorations of and exercises in the photoelectric effect)	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>
13	Third “Honors Collaboration Meeting” Final presentations of status of solutions to the Grand Challenge Problem, including poster drafts.	
14	THANKSGIVING	<<ACTIVITY - TBD>>

15	<p style="text-align: center;">Final Poster Presentations Fondren Science Building Foyer All 130X students are invited to ask questions of the presenters. Food and beverages will be provided.</p>
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Assessment

Student performance for Honors Credit will be assessed as follows:

- Attendance in weekly classroom meetings
- Participation in weekly classroom meetings
- Quality of presentations at “Honors Collaboration Meetings”
- Quality of final poster
- Quality of final poster presentation and Q&A skills

The Grand Challenge Problem

The focal event of each semester is the solving of a “Grand Challenge” problem. This is a physics problem with no textbook solution. Rather, you will draw upon your own creativity, informed by the principles of physics you are learning in PHYS 130X, to address the question in as detailed a manner as possible. You will be assessed on:

- your incremental progress on developing answers to the question (see below);
- the creativity, originality, or novelty of the ideas that lead to your final answers;
- your ability to investigate the ideas through physics calculations and supporting material;
- and the reliability and accuracy of your calculations.

This is not purely a storytelling process; rather, you will engage in a mathematical and physical exercise where the math speaks, and you will describe what it says. The Grand Challenge process and solution will build gradually over the semester, woven into the fabric of the Honors Physics Section.

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The Grand Challenge will be a team exercise¹. You will be randomly assembled into teams at the beginning of the semester. Your team will be expected to meet at least once a week outside of class to discuss the Grand Challenge and, in particular, how what you have learned that week might be used to explore a consequence of the theme of the Grand Challenge. Your team will report the status of your work (each individual presenting a brief, 5-minute overview of their status) at the “Honors Collaboration Meetings” - periods of in-class time (see schedule) devoted entirely to a public airing of progress. Members of other teams are free to ask questions and offer suggestions or criticism of presented work. This entire exercise is to model how real, collaborative, scientific work, as well as peer review, operates in the real world.

A separate and detailed explanation of the entire Grand Challenge exercise will be made available by the instructor.

University Honor Code

The student honor code can be found on page 32 of the 2014-2015 student handbook². All students will be expected to adhere to it. Any student found cheating or plagiarizing another's work will be given a zero for that work and a complaint will be filed through the Vice President for Student Affairs Office. If you are uncertain of the definition of plagiarism as it regards independent works of mathematical and physical computation, documentation, and demonstration, it is your responsibility to speak with the instructor and understand these rules.

Disability Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit the DASS website³ to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the

¹ Depending on the number of students in the Honors Physics Section, we will revisit this aspect of the Grand Challenge Problem.

² <http://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/StudentLife/StudentHandbook>

³ <http://www.smu.edu/ALEC/DASS>

professor to make appropriate arrangements.

Please find detailed information about DASS at the end of this syllabus.

University Policy on Religious Holidays

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

GRAND CHALLENGE PROBLEM (FALL 2015)

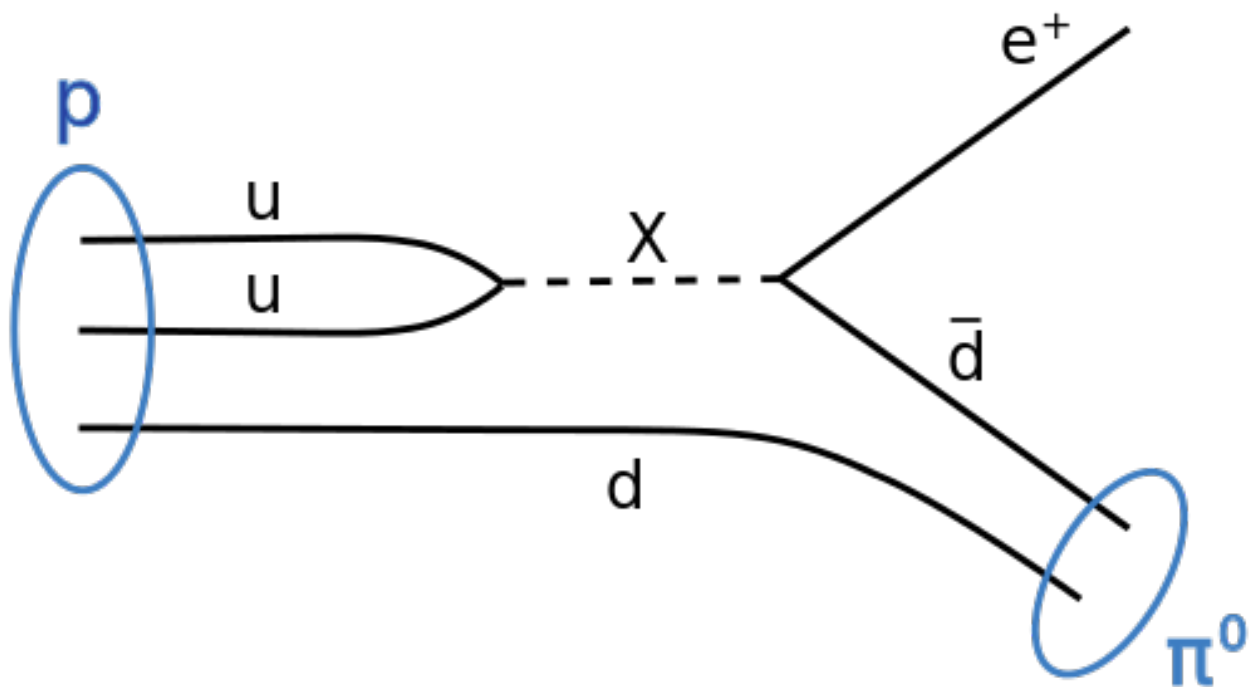


Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Every proton in your body suddenly and spontaneously decays.
Describe three distinct things that could happen next.