

Princeton University

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS: JOSEPH HENRY LABORATORIES
POST OFFICE BOX 708
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08544
Telephone: 609 258-0757 FAX: 609 258-2494

Office of the Chairman

August 6, 2003

Dear Colleague,

The student presenting this note has asked you to write to us concerning his or her application to our graduate program. By the time your letter arrives we shall have already received the student's course grades and GRE scores, which provide necessary but not sufficient information to select candidates from a large and highly qualified pool. While we can get a basic picture of their performance from their grades, we want to know if the candidates have done anything special—something beyond just getting good grades on exams. Since your letter of recommendation will be important in our decision, we thought it would be helpful to pose a few questions as guidelines for what we would like to learn from you. The questions that follow indicate the sort of information that we seek to aid us in evaluating applicants to our graduate program. We understand that students can have quite different backgrounds and that their interactions with their referees vary, and that it may therefore not be possible to address all of the following questions. Please feel free to bring up any other information that you consider relevant.

General:

How well do you know the applicant? In what capacity? For how long? How strong and broad are the applicant's backgrounds in physics, mathematics, and other fields relevant to his/her academic goals? How high is his/her level of interest and dedication? Can he/she work independently? Can he/she work well as part of a team? Has the student demonstrated dedication and skill that is beyond the ordinary? If possible, give examples.

Research experience:

For experimentalists: What hands-on experience have they had in the laboratory: actually building and/or designing apparatus and taking measurements; performing data analysis; etc? Specific examples of creativity in independent work are particularly useful. Did they show a good understanding of the physics of the experiment(s) they were involved in?

For theorists: Has the student performed independent theoretical research? What is his/her level of mathematical sophistication? Has he/she shown special creativity in doing research? Does the student have a sufficiently strong and broad background to understand the connection between theory and experiments?

Comparisons:

When applicable and appropriate, we encourage comparisons with other students who have applied to Princeton or other comparable programs. How does this candidate compare to them? How likely is he/she to succeed compared to other former students you have known?

Please, send your letter to the Graduate Admissions Office, not to the Physics Department.

Thank you in advance for your help and advice. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

Daniel Marlow
Chair, Physics Dept
marlow@princeton.edu

Chiara Nappi
Director of Graduate Studies
cnappi@princeton.edu

Stewart Smith
Chair, Physics Graduate Admissions
smithajs@princeton.edu