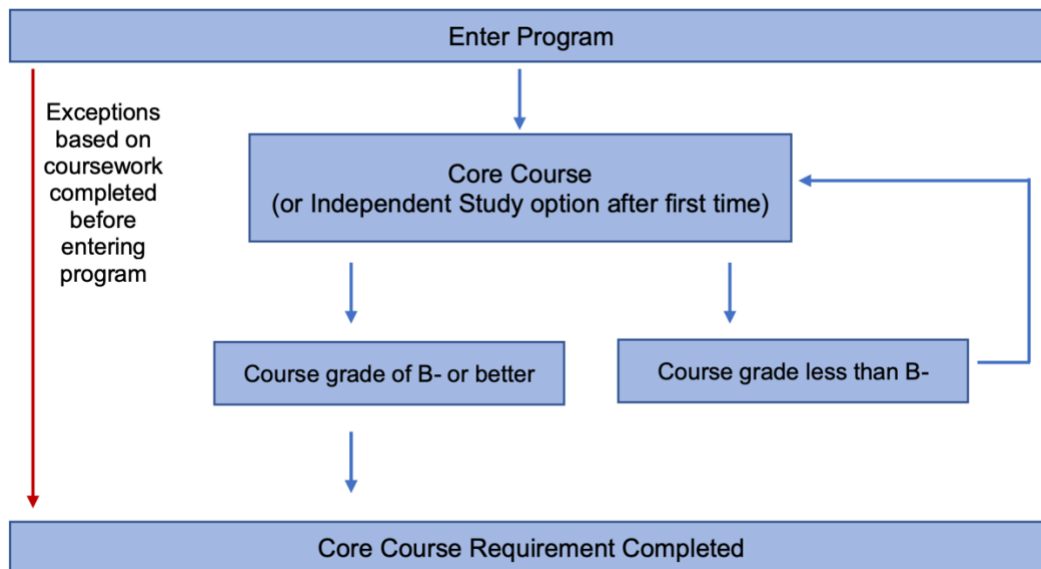


## APS Department Graduate Preliminary Examination Policy . . . . . Spring 2022

This policy was first drafted by the APS Graduate Curriculum & Concerns Committee (GCCC) in Spring 2020, and subsequently approved by a faculty vote, as a replacement for the old “Comps 1” written examination. The GCCC in Spring 2022 has implemented minor changes in wording to clarify some aspects of this policy.

For each of the 5 core courses (ASTR 5110, 5120, 5400, 5540, 5550), the nominal flowchart is given below:



### Administration:

1. The five core courses must be taken by all APS graduate students, unless preparation by a particular student prior to starting the program indicates that a waiver for individual courses is appropriate.
  - a. Evaluation of prior experience will be made by the Admissions Committee during the review of applications.
  - b. A recommendation for one or more core-course waivers will be transmitted from the Admissions Committee Chair to the APS Department Chair.
  - c. Decisions on those recommendations will be made by the Department Chair prior to the start of the incoming student’s first semester.
2. The Examinations Committee will work with core-course instructors to develop and approve the syllabus for each offering of a core course.
  - a. The core course instructor will provide the Examination Committee with the course syllabus no later than two weeks before the start of classes. Convergence on the final course syllabus will occur before the first class meeting.

- b. The syllabus will include:
  - i. a course content outline including both the required and optional elements from the departmental standard syllabus,
  - ii. an anticipated course schedule,
  - iii. a course grading and assessment plan.
3. All core courses are required to include an individual final exam (approved by the Examinations Committee) which broadly samples the course material, as one component of the course grade (as defined in the course syllabus).
4. Core course (and independent study; see below) instructors will consult with the Examinations Committee prior to assigning a failing grade to a student.

**Outcomes:**

1. The core course requirements are satisfied by successfully completing the five core courses with grades of B– or higher, meeting the Preliminary Exam requirements of the department (following [Graduate School rules](#)).
2. A class grade lower than B– triggers a mandatory retake of the core material.
  - a. The student will be assigned a faculty mentor (not their original core course instructor) who has previously taught the core material, and who has the time to work closely with the student to help in mastering the core material.
  - b. The student may decide to retake the core course itself, or to request the creation of an independent study; see item (d) below. This option is intended to address significant individual student difficulties with the core-course lecture format. Students are discouraged from pursuing the independent study option out of concerns regarding an individual core-course instructor, instruction level or quality, or grading policy. These latter issues should instead be addressed and resolved through the Department’s grievance policy (see the [Resource Guide](#)).
  - c. The choice between retaking the course or performing an independent study may require consideration of the Graduate School’s grade policies. As of Spring 2022, those policies specify that when a student’s cumulative grade point average (GPA) falls below 3.0, they are placed on academic probation. The student then has two semesters in which to raise their cumulative GPA to 3.0 or above to regain good standing. They also must demonstrate progress by achieving at least a 3.0 semester GPA for the first semester of the probationary period. When officially retaking a course, the new grade replaces the old grade automatically, and a grade of B– or above would then satisfy the Department's Preliminary Exam policy. However, if the student chooses and passes the independent study option, this would satisfy the Department's Prelim Exam

policy, but the old grade would remain in the student's cumulative GPA.

- d. If the student requests an independent study, they must:
  - i. Find a faculty member in the Department, who has previously taught the core material, to serve as the independent study instructor. The independent study instructor can be the same person as either the assigned mentor or the student's original core-course instructor.
  - ii. Define and design an independent course of study, in close consultation with the assigned faculty mentor (see item (a) above), the previous core-course instructor, and the anticipated independent study instructor.
  - iii. Obtain the approval of the Examinations Committee for the planned independent study course, which will contain a complete syllabus and plan for a final exam following the requirements outlined above under **"Administration."**
3. In exceptional cases, the faculty may vote to advance a student to candidacy without meeting the above requirements, if the student has already passed the Comprehensive Exam (previously known as Comps 2). A quorum must be present for the faculty vote, and the motion to advance the student passes if it achieves a simple majority. Discussion of this option is triggered if a student has twice failed to achieve a B- in a core course, or has failed to achieve a B- in both a core course and its independent study replacement.

#### **Additional Aspects:**

1. On occasions when different instructors are available, and if any student is retaking the class after a previous grade lower than B-, core courses should whenever possible be taught by different instructors in sequential years, to provide students who retake the course with different presentations of the material and independent evaluations of performance.
2. Faculty will teach core courses based on the department standard syllabi, which will aim provide both mandatory topical material (to fill approximately 2/3 of the course) and optional material (to fill 1/3).