Program: Physics M.S., Ph.D. Program; Astronomy M.S.
Rating: Good

The Department of Physics and Astronomy offers a PhD and MS in Physics and an MS in Astronomy. The Plasma Physics specialty area is ranked very highly nationally. The TF was impressed with the large amount of external funding garnered by physics faculty. The Physics graduate program self-identified as being undersized given the current faculty size (~60 graduate students for ~30 faculty). Funding for PhD students is very good and students are typically supported as TAs for two years and then as RAs for the remaining time. TTD at 5.8 yrs is comparable to the discipline. The program has a low PhD completion rate (38%), which was attributed to the fact that all students are admitted as PhD students, despite the fact that some students only wanted an MS degree. However, for the 1996-2001 cohort, 26% left UI with no degree at all. The department is trying to improve the qualifier pass rate for graduate students, which has traditionally been quite low, but is now improving. The Strategic Assessment narrative discussed the possibility of adding a PhD degree in Astronomy since the department only currently offers an MS degree in Astronomy. The TF does not see evidence of student demand that would justify a PhD program in Astronomy at this time.