

# PHYS 303: Thermal and Statistical Physics

Fall 2024

Syllabus

## Instructor

Prof. Sebastian Deffner  
Physics, Rm. 311  
deffner@umbc.edu

## Time and Place

MoWeFr 3:00pm-3:50pm  
Sherman Hall 013

## Office hours

Mo 2:00pm–4:00pm  
Physics, Rm. 311

## Textbook

### Thermodynamics and an introduction to Thermostatistics

Herbert B. Callen  
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., ISBN 978-0-471862-56-7

## Scope

Thermodynamic description of systems and statistical interpretation of thermodynamic quantities. The first and second laws of physics, temperature, entropy and thermodynamics, and their relationship to a statistical description of many-particle systems. Applications to magnetic systems, gases and liquids, and radiation are discussed.

## Dates

- First day of class: August 28, 2024
- Last day of class: December 10, 2024
- Midterm exam: October 18, 2024 – October 25, 2024
- Final exam: December 09, 2024 – December 16, 2024

## Course Objectives

This course will provide a general overview of the main subjects in thermal and statistical physics. It will discuss key concepts and methods, introduce the relevant terminology, and develop the main ideas of theoretical understanding. You will solve quantitative and complex problems and develop rigorous derivations. As an advanced course, special emphasis will be put on deep understanding and mathematically thorough reasoning.

At the end of the course, you should understand systems in thermal equilibrium and in particular:

- Fundamentals of thermodynamics (laws of thermodynamics, quasistatic processes, equilibrium response functions, equations of state for ideal and non-ideal gases, Maxwell relations)
- Statistical approach (statistical ensemble, Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution, and thermodynamic ensembles)
- Equilibrium phase transitions (phase equilibrium, Clausius-Clayperon equation, Maxwell construction)

## Course Format

PHYS 303 is designed as a traditional lecture course. However, individual reading will play an important role, probably more so than in other core physics courses. Only the most important principles and connections will be discussed in lecture, the rest will be left for reading.

Feel free to ask questions during lecture, whether you have difficulty with a concept, notice an error, or want to hear more details about an aspect of the material. It is important that we do not move on until all the important issues are settled.

## Homework

There will be a homework assignment every week. The assignments will be posted on Blackboard every Friday after class, and submission is due the following Friday on 10:00am. A homework assignment will consist of two parts:

- Three more complex problems that have to be worked out and written up in detail at home as a usual homework assignment and submitted. These problems will be graded to 4 points each. It will be expected that the submitted problems be written up in a clear, legible, and organized fashion, complete with appropriate verbal comments and figures, very much like examples in the textbook.
- A reading assignment complementary to the material discussed in class. The homework assignments will contain two questions about the reading material, which will amount to another 8 points.

You are allowed, in fact, encouraged, to form study groups and discuss the material and homework questions with each other. However, at the end, the homework solution must be your own work, not a group product. I will give no credit for obvious copies. After all, you are left to your own devices at the tests and in real life. Learn from each other, but be able to work on your own.

**Late homework will not be accepted (no exceptions). Homework will be submitted at the beginning of class on the date it is due. Only submissions in OUR OWN HANDWRITING and in person will be accepted.**

## **Exams**

All exams will be “take home”. There will be one midterm exam during the semester and one final exam. For both exams you will have 1 week to work on the solutions. Expect the exams to be rather challenging and make good use of the week, i.e., do not start working the day before you have to submit.

## **Grades**

Your grade will be determined according to the following distribution of points:

1. Homework assignments (12): 20 points each; 240 points in total.
2. Midterm exam: 50 points, weighted by a factor of 7.5; 375 points in total.
3. Final exam: 50 points, weighted by a factor of 7.5; 375 points in total.

This adds up to a possible total of 990 points. Approximately, A will be given above 85%, B for at least 70%, C for at least 55%, and D for at least 40%.

Full credit requires complete and correct solutions. I also understand that even with a few mistakes, your work may have value. Thus, you can get a good grade in spite of missing a few details or making an occasional mistake in the calculation.

“Incomplete” is given only in exceptional cases. To be considered for an “I”, you must have taken at least the midterm exam, submitted 8 homework solutions, and have C or better standing at the time of incapacitation.

## **Academic Integrity**

”By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC’s scholarly community in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating on a test could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal.” More on the requirements of academic integrity can be found at <http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/procedures/integrity.html>

Applied to this course, a proven case of misconduct during a test or a blatant copy or plagiarism of a homework solution “earns” zero on the assignment in question. A second offense will result in failing the course.

On my end, I promise well-prepared lectures, careful and timely grading, and openness.

## **Title IX**

As an instructor, I am considered a Responsible Employee, per UMBC’s Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct, Interpersonal Violence, and Other Related Misconduct. While my goal is for you to be able to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, I want to be transparent that as a Responsible Employee I am required to report disclosures of sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or gender-based harassment to the University’s Title IX Coordinator.

As an instructor, I also have a mandatory obligation to report disclosures of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect.

The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to inform you of options, supports and resources; you will not be forced to file a report with the police. Further, you are able to receive supports and resources, even if you choose to not want any action taken. Please note that in certain situations, based on the nature of the disclosure, the University may need to take action.

## **COVID-19**

Please see this [Google doc](#) for UMBC Policies and Resources during COVID-19.

## **Disabilities**

- If you have any condition such as a physical or learning disability, which will make it difficult for you to carry out the work as described or which will require academic accommodations, please notify me ASAP, but definitely during the first two weeks of classes.
- If you are taking the exam with Student Disability Services, remind me by email 48-96 hours before every exam to give me time for proper preparation. You also need to schedule the exam with Student Disability Services.