

Physics Major Scores Highest Possible on GRE

Robbie Polski credits internship, good prep, professors

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Robbie Polski, senior physics major, recently received a 100% score on the physics GRE.

By: Sam Fry

Robbie Polski, senior physics major at Andrews University, recently achieved the highest possible score on his GRE Physics Subject Test—an exam intended to measure the extent of an examinee’s mastery of the fundamental principles of physics. Though he can't know his exact score, Polski does know he fell within the 94th to 100th percentile, the best score possible on this particular test.

The exam, consisting of 100 multiple answer questions, is grouped into sets based on content. The GRE Physics Subject Test includes diagrams, graphs, experimental data and real-world applications problems.

Prospective graduate school applicants take the GRE Subject Test, and the test scores are used, in addition to other academic records and letters of recommendation, by admissions panels to compare candidates’ qualifications.

Preparing for a GRE Subject Test can be a difficult, even arbitrary, process. Similar to other standardized tests, it is impossible for an examinee to know what questions will appear on the test, which makes adequate preparation crucial.

“You never know exactly what will be on the test, so you need to study for everything,” says Polski. “It’s a lot of problem solving on the spot.”

Polski maintains that his extraordinary performance on the GRE Physics Subject Test was the result of practice and determination. Polski claims that one factor influencing his score was a paid undergraduate research experience at the University of Michigan he attended this past summer.

“I was working with a group that grows semiconductors in ultra-high vacuum chambers, they have a lower pressure than outer space,” says Polski. “There were several graduate students in attendance who gave us tips and walked us through some of the practice problems.”

A resident of Keene, Texas, Polski initially chose Andrews University for the engineering program, but decided his passion was for physics.

“I started my undergraduate studies in mechanical engineering,” says Polski. “If you ask some of my friends they would say that I always liked physics and would end up going that direction eventually.”

Finishing his fifth year at Andrews in May 2016, Polski plans on pursuing a graduate degree in physics after graduation—a choice that would enable him to teach later in his career.

“I’m looking to go into some sort of research—whether it be academia or a national lab. In the long run I would like to go into academia,” he says.

When asked about his success, both at Andrews and on the GRE Physics Subject Test, Polski maintained that throughout his entire undergraduate experience it has been the faculty at Andrews that made a difference.

“You get the idea that the big schools must have superior programs, but you realize that it depends on how much work you put into it yourself, and how dedicated you are,” says Polski. “Also, I think it depends on the professors. At bigger universities the professors dedicate so much time to their research. Here, they are really good mentors and role models for their students.”

Correction: This story originally stated that Polski had scored a perfect 100%; this has been updated to reflect more accurate data.

Contact:

PR

pr@andrews.edu

269-471-3322