

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the structure of the course?

The core USAPhO material is covered in 24 units. It covers roughly the material of the first two years of an honors-level university physics degree, but with more difficult problems. Essentially all USAPhO problems, and many IPhO and APhO problems are included in the curriculum, along with problems from many other textbooks and Olympiads. After the core material, there are 3 units devoted to USAPhO review, and 6 units of advanced topics, more relevant for IPhO preparation.

The course is at least twice as intense as any other that I know of, with handouts totaling 1,000 pages in length, containing 250 worked examples and 1,000 challenging problems with detailed solutions, along with 7 practice USAPhOs. It has enough content that I doubt anybody, even students who already have IPhO gold medals, could run out of things to do.

How did you select the students?

Applications are closed now, but there were two main criteria for acceptance. Students were expected to complete the preliminary problem set, and to have a strong enough mechanics background to easily qualify for USAPhO.

How have previous students done?

Here's the progress students have made in a year of training.

- For the 2017/2018 academic year I had two students.
 - USAPhO Gold → USAPhO Camp, IPhO Gold (now at MIT)
 - Did not qualify → USAPhO Camp (now at MIT)
- For the 2018/2019 academic year I had four students.
 - USAPhO Camp → USAPhO Camp, IPhO Gold (now at MIT)
 - USAPhO Gold → USAPhO Gold (now at Carnegie Mellon)
 - USAPhO Bronze → USAPhO Silver
 - USAPhO qualification → USAPhO Gold (now at MIT)
- In the 2019/2020 academic year, competitions were cancelled.
- For the 2020/2021 academic year I had five students.
 - USAPhO Camp → USAPhO+
 - USAPhO Bronze → book prize (now at Stanford)
 - USAPhO qualification → USAPhO+, IPhO Gold
 - USAPhO qualification → USAPhO+
 - USAPhO qualification → book prize

This year, a condensed version of the problem sets was also used to train the US IPhO team, which achieved the first five-gold performance in its 30 year history.