

METEOROLOGY AND ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE, B.S.

Begin Campus: Any Penn State Campus

End Campus: University Park

Program Description

Meteorology and atmospheric science is a rigorous scientific discipline devoted to the attainment of an increased understanding of the atmosphere and the development of methods for applying that knowledge to practical problems. Although this field is usually associated with weather prediction, it also has significance in environmental, energy, agricultural, oceanic, and hydrological sciences. For students wishing to pursue many of these areas, the department offers several options within the major.

The major requires a solid foundation in mathematics and the physical sciences, and it provides a comprehensive survey of the fundamentals of atmospheric science. It has sufficient flexibility to permit intensive advanced study in such related areas as mathematics, Earth sciences, or engineering. The department has particular strengths in weather analysis and prediction, including forecast uncertainty and severe weather; physical meteorology, including radar meteorology, instrumentation and atmospheric measurements; and applied areas, including atmospheric diffusion, air pollution chemistry, dynamic meteorology, tropical meteorology, climate, weather risk, and remote sensing.

Graduating meteorologists are prepared for professional employment with industry, private consulting firms, government, and the armed forces or for further study toward graduate degrees normally required for research, university, or management positions.

The first and second years are largely devoted to preparatory work in science, mathematics, and the liberal arts. The junior and senior years involve a core of basic courses in applied and theoretical topics and a choice of courses offering specialized training. The courses unique to each option are normally taken in the junior and senior years.

Atmospheric Science Option

This option challenges students to strengthen and broaden their understanding of the physics and chemistry of both the atmosphere and oceans. It helps prepare them for employment in the diverse field of the atmospheric sciences and for graduate study in the atmospheric or related disciplines. Students are encouraged to participate in undergraduate research projects under the supervision of atmospheric and oceanic scientists in the department college.

Environmental Meteorology Option

Environmental Meteorology prepares the student for understanding the impact of the weather and climate on the environment, which is to say the impacts of air and water on natural and human-altered ecosystems. In order to do this, the option establishes links between atmospheric physics and a variety of environmental disciplines pertaining to land, water, soils, and plants. Depending on his/her interests, the student will select courses in Air Quality and Dispersion, Ecology, Environmental Chemistry, Geographic Information Systems, or Hydrology.

General Option

This option has sufficient flexibility to serve the needs of students who wish to pursue topics chosen broadly from subdisciplines of meteorology or from related areas in consultation with the academic adviser. The General option is appropriate both for students who intend to pursue postgraduate degrees and for students who want to emphasize a topic for which no option exists.

Weather Forecasting and Communications Option

This option prepares students for careers in which their skills as weather forecasters are effectively used in a variety of ways, from science reporting and television broadcasting to web design and computer-based weather graphics production, and developing innovative applications of weather and climate data to industry.

Weather Risk Management Option

The option combines study of meteorology and atmospheric sciences with training in risk, finance, and quantitative decision-making. Weather affects a wide range of industries, including energy, agriculture, insurance, construction, retail, and transport, among others. Weather and climate variation play central roles in the availability of water resources, the spread of disease, and an array of other processes vital for human welfare. There are, consequently, many organizations that confront risks related to weather, and that have a demand for experts who can help them manage these risks. The option in Weather Risk Management is designed for students who wish to work professionally at this intersection of meteorology and risk management.

What is Meteorology and Atmospheric Science?

Meteorology is one of the oldest of modern sciences. The word itself was coined by Aristotle more than 2,000 years ago for the first book on the science of "things lifted up." Meteorology and atmospheric science is an interdisciplinary field that uses scientific principles to explain, understand, observe, and forecast the behavior of the Earth's atmosphere. Meteorologists and atmospheric scientists explore the significance of weather and climate as it relates to the environmental, energy, agricultural, oceanic, and hydrological sciences. From severe weather, numerical weather prediction, and climate change to weather risk and air pollution—there's no shortage of practical applications in meteorology and atmospheric science.

You Might Like This Program If...

- You are interested in applying mathematics, physics, and computer programming to real-world problems.
- You are fascinated with weather, climate, or the environment.
- You are a self-described "weather geek."
- You would like to be a "weather communicator" such as a television meteorologist or science writer.
- You want to study global warming and the Earth's changing climate.
- You would like to work with data from satellites, radar, and other environmental sensors.