The Department of Physics admitted its first undergraduate students in 1978, and its first permanent faculty in 1980. As of September 2016, it numbers 22 faculty members and about 40 scientists in visiting or project-funded positions. Housed in temporary buildings near Knossos during the first years of its operation, in 1995 the Department moved to its permanent campus, situated eight kilometers south-west of the city of Heraklion.

In addition to its teaching and administrative responsibilities, the physics faculty engage in the following research areas:

- Applied physics
- Astrophysics and space physics
- Atomic, molecular, and optical physics
- Condensed matter physics
- Nuclear and elementary particle physics

The Department of Physics has developed over the years a close and productive collaboration with the Institute of Electronic Structure and Laser (IESL) [1] of the Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas (FORTH) [2], while at the same time having collaborative research links with several other research establishments in Europe and overseas. Up until 2008 the Department also hosted Crete University Press [3], a publishing house it helped found in 1985 with the support of the Pancretan Association of America.

Since 1987 and in collaboration with FORTH [2] and the Max-Planck-Institut fur Extraterrestrische Physik [4] of Germany, the Department also operates Skinakas Observatory [5], which currently houses two optical telescopes and it is located at an altitude of 1760 m nearly 60 km from Heraklion.

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