Best Practices in Graduate Student Advising

Graduate students form a large part of the MIT community, and their involvement can have a significant influence on the Institute. Training graduate students is one of MIT’s most important duties.

Expectations on graduate student advising for each advisor and advisee have been defined through the input of faculty and students, setting a high standard of conduct. This standard of conduct is expressed in Institute policy, which is based in our shared values. Additionally, each graduate student bears a responsibility for respect and maturity in their behavior towards all members of the Institute community.

These lists serve as a resource for advisors and their advisees.

1. Faculty members and graduate students are strongly encouraged to build relationships by establishing common expectations on the major elements of their professional interactions, such as:
   A. Requirements for achieving and maintaining an acceptable academic standing as well as graduation requirements for each academic unit;
   B. A regular time for meeting;
   C. Lead times for feedback on work such as thesis and manuscript drafts;
   D. A shared understanding of what constitutes sufficient notice and reasonable scheduling of events the student is expected to attend following a request from their advisor;
   E. A shared understanding of academic integrity and responsible conduct of research.

2. Faculty and students are strongly encouraged to attempt to resolve conflicts through direct discussion and other informal procedures.

3. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to keep their advisor apprised of academic progress and seek their advisor’s input on the same subject on a regular basis.

4. Graduate students should receive attribution for scholarly assistance to faculty, and vice versa, including contributions to publications and patents.

5. Faculty are expected to be supportive of their students’ participation in extra-academic activities and to recognize the value of such activities for their intellectual and professional development. Depending on the discipline, these activities might include training in job interviews, information on academic and non-academic career options, and internships.

6. A number of resources are available for graduate students who wish to terminate their relationship with their advisor and search for a new research group. These include their departmental or program graduate administrator, program head or departmental graduate officer, a dean in the OGE, or an Institute ombudsperson.

7. Graduate students share with the faculty the responsibility for securing, maintaining, and protecting the integrity of grades, scholarship, and research.

8. Faculty members have the responsibility to inform graduate students of the source and amount of their financial support and of all expectations associated with any funded position. Faculty members should inform graduate students promptly of matters that affect their funding status.

9. Graduate students and faculty have a responsibility to inform each other as soon as they have knowledge of a possible change of their status. Graduate students should provide reasonable notice to their advisor if they intend to leave or change advisors; have a medical or personal issue that interferes with study and research; or are experiencing other academic or life issues that an advisor might reasonably need to know about. When circumstances require leaving a research project, graduate students should provide a summary of their work so that any delay associated with continuation of the project is minimized.

10. Beyond the responsibility to provide an evaluation once per term via a thesis research grade, advisors should provide additional periodic feedback of academic progress, performance, and professional potential, preferably in written form.

11. Graduate students are protected by a variety of policies and procedures, as summarized in the document “Institute Policy Guiding the Graduate Student Experience.” If a student feels that they have been unfairly treated, or treated in a way that is in violation of MIT policies, and attempts at informal solutions were unsuccessful, the student can appeal by means of private Institute complaint resolution procedures.
Graduate students are protected from personal exploitation. In the case of full-time research assistants, services required of the graduate student must contribute to the student’s research or professional training. Full policy

Graduate students in a paid assistantship have a right to paid vacation in accordance with Institute policy. Full policy

Graduate students must be notified of the work requirements for each subject, including grading criteria and procedures, at the beginning of each term. Full policy

Each academic unit should ensure that students have ready access to the following information.

- A. Degree requirements
- B. Academic deadlines
- C. Time limits for seeking advanced degrees
- D. Departmental procedures for general and/or qualifying exams
- E. Guidelines for resolving concerns or conflicts within the department
- F. Individuals available for consultation regarding student issues and problems
- G. Criteria for termination or withdrawal of a graduate student
- H. Rules governing teaching assistant and research assistant appointments and fellowships

If a department is considering denying a graduate student further registration, that student should be made aware at an early stage of the reasons for such consideration, and should be notified in writing when formal consideration of denial is initiated. Full policy