Office of Graduate Education (OGE) Strategic Plan

2024-2029
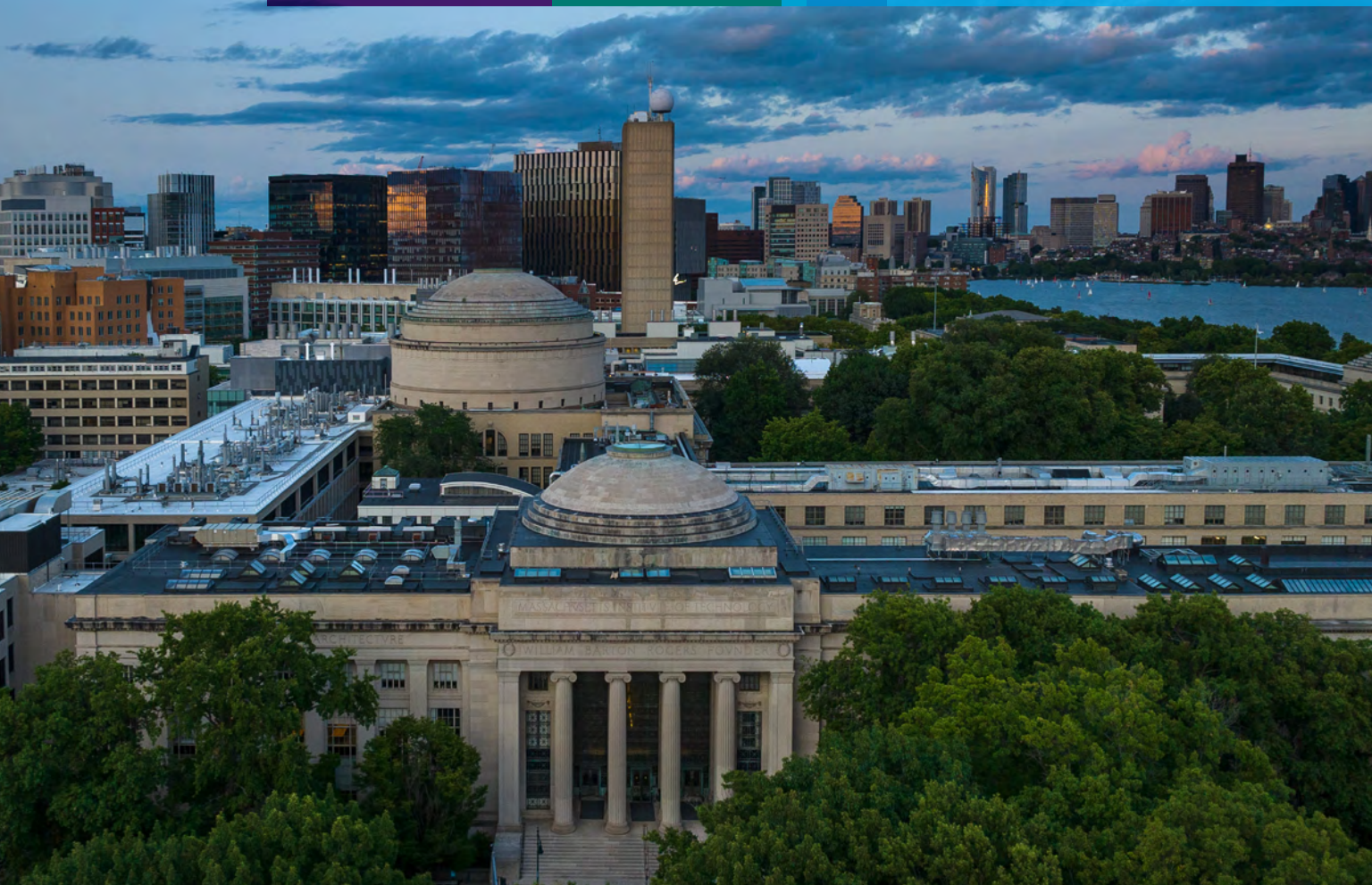
Table of contents

IIiT Office of Graduate Education

Executive summary

Mission

We are the anchor point in MIT's graduate landscape throughout the entire student journey:
- facilitating equitable access and success for prospective and current graduate students,
- enhancing academic and personal lives,
- offering support and advocacy for students to thrive,
- fostering a diverse community that supports a sense of belonging for all graduate students and their families, and
- collaborating to achieve these goals with departments and partners.

With others in the OVC, we help to bring some order to the complex and decentralized landscape of graduate education at MIT, and are the natural provider of many central services. The need for central services to supplement departmental capacity has leapt in the wake of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and the Supreme Court decisions around diversity, and the OGE has taken on work around assisting in the addressing of grievances, crafting policy, communicating around policy and best practice, and providing infrastructure for recruitment and admissions processes for all students, with the ability to outreach to diverse students.

Supporting student thriving

Central to the OGE's strategic objectives for 2024-2029 is the investment in, and implementation of, a thriving framework. Dr. Laurie Schreiner has developed a reliable, valid instrument that measures the academic, social, and psychological aspects of graduate students' experience that are most predictive of academic success, institutional fit, satisfaction with their graduate program, and ultimately graduation.

Inspired by Dr. Schreiner's work, in 2024 the OGE reorganized our administrative structure to create a GradThriving unit that brings together existing and expanding services: GradSupport, GradDiversity, Grad Families, and the Grad Experience (including support for the Graduate Student Council, central graduate orientation, and community building programs such as the Graduate Student Experience Grants and the Graduate Community Fellows). GradThriving is designed to foster the holistic wellbeing and academic success of MIT graduate students. Our goal is to create an environment where students not only survive, but thrive in the following core areas: the academic, the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, balancing academic and personal life, and psychosocial wellbeing.

In other words, thriving students are those who "not only excel academically but also actively participate in the learning process, put in effort to achieve significant educational objectives,

manage their time and responsibilities well, build positive relationships, maintain a hopeful outlook for their future, feel good about their current decisions, value diversity, and are dedicated to contributing to their community" (Schreiner, 2020, p. 20).

Schreiner's framework will provide structure for enumerating needed supports and measuring our progress.

Vision

We endeavor to create a community of graduate scholars, and the individuals who support and are supported by them. In this intentionally-connected community, members will be intellectually engaged and valued on a personal level as they forge a better future.

Values

As individuals and as a team, we cherish a number of values in our work. We are...

Student-centered

At its root, everything we do is about the MIT graduate students, nurturing their growth and championing advancements in graduate life, policy, and support. As an OVC office, "We support the teaching, learning, academic success, personal growth, and well-being of the whole student and all students." (OVC)

Collaborative

We strive to be clear, open, timely, and approachable in every facet of our work.

Compassionate

We act with kindness in our support of students, faculty, and staff, aiming to foster a caring culture.

Inclusive

We value each person as an individual, recognizing their worth and dignity; we want to make sure everyone can bring their authentic selves to the table and have equitable access to our services.

Reliable

In our work and our relationships with community members, we act thoughtfully and intentionally to be most effective.

The OGE serves the extended graduate student community

Citation: Schreiner, L.A., Louis, M.C., & Nelson, D.D. (Eds.). *Thriving in Transitions: A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success*. Stylus Publishing, 2020.

Resourceful

We find creative solutions to the challenges that face us, embracing persistence when needed.

Curious

We want to learn more: about people, so we can build bridges and understand one another's perspectives, and about processes and information, so we can be ever more effective.

Strategic Themes

We organize our work and our strategic goals around the following five themes:

1. Academics, administration, and funding

This theme encompasses our work on the MIT and MIT-GSU Collective Bargaining Agreement; Fellowships; Graduate Policies & Procedures; petitions; data retention policies; and our work with graduate administrators on best practices.

2. Building and sustaining belonging and community

This work includes outreach; yield efforts; and student success: creating a support system to connect students to resources, and to allow them to feel valued and heard, with a focus on access and support for students from historically and economically underserved populations.

3. Institute climate

This theme focuses on how groups of community members work together or relate to one another. OGE work includes the Graduate Community Fellows program; the Graduate Student Experience Grants; support of the Graduate Student Council (GSC); support of families; student orientation; institute learning; and participation on Institute-level efforts & committees.

4. Holistic support of graduate students

OGE support focuses on enabling graduate students to thrive at MIT, in areas including student wellbeing; personal and professional relationships; short and long term financial wellbeing; personal and professional development; and supporting Resources for Easing Friction and Stress (REFS). We work at the individual, course, department, school and institute level to address needs and concerns of graduate students.

5. Internal OGE processes

This theme is internally focused on OGE staffing; budgeting; data management; admissions systems; website maintenance; professional development for OGE staff; and office culture.

Strategic Theme 1:

Academics, administration, and funding

The Institute prepares MIT graduate students to be innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders in their fields, positioned to positively contribute to scholarship and the world. To support this vision of post-graduation success, graduate students must be able to dedicate themselves full-time to their academic endeavors. MIT commits to supporting graduate students academically and financially so they can focus their efforts on making critical novel contributions to their fields and positioning them to thrive while in graduate school and beyond.

The Office of Graduate Education (OGE) contributes to the entirety of the student life cycle – from admission to graduation – by providing comprehensive academic, administrative, and financial support through our oversight of academic progress, fellowship support, and graduate appointments.

Historically, graduate education at MIT has been largely decentralized. To ensure our students receive the academic, administrative, and financial support required for their academic success and degree completion, our team must continue to cultivate strong relationships with academic programs; understand the unique nature of each program; and establish academic, administrative, and funding policies and procedures that meet the needs of students today and in the future.

To implement the 2023 collective bargaining agreement (CBA), MIT took initial steps to centralize some processes and systems under the OGE. During the first year of the implementation, the OGE gained insight into department practices and policies around student appointments and supervisory relationships. We have made strides in providing vital clarification on leaves, accommodations, benefits, and employment policies for student members of the collective bargaining unit. This increased transparency continues to allow the OGE to support the overall experience of students as well as the staff of MIT's diverse departments, labs, centers, and institutes (DLCIs). Further centralization around academics and funding will provide additional relief and transparency to busy staff and students.

To support our students, we, the OGE's academic and financial teams, commit to providing comprehensive hands-on support to programs and staff. We must invest our time and resources in establishing and developing a more centralized cohesive administrative approach to graduate education. To achieve this ambitious vision of end-to-end student support, we aim to:

1. Centralize systems and processes in areas critical to the academic, administrative, and funding success of our students;

2. Increase training, clear communication, and resources related to newly centralized systems and processes to establish consistency in the graduate student experience across all programs;

3. Develop new policies and systems to support academic success; and

4. Establish a clear understanding of local departmental practices and their alignment with established centralized policies.

Addressing these critical areas will allow us to continue to offer world-class graduate education. Through interdependent action with departments and programs, we will be able to provide a consistent, equitable experience for graduate students across all departments and programs and reinforce the strong partnerships that exist with graduate administrators and faculty who are critical to our students' success.

1. Centralize fellowship and appointment administration

Our current focus is on centralizing fellowships and appointments. These efforts began with the graduate appointments process created in response to the CBA. Following up on this, the fellowship team has focused on the centralized support of MIT-administered fellowships. We began that centralization process in the fall 2023 semester and have since continued those efforts. The move towards centralizing the administration of external fellowships includes processing appointments in the Graduate Appointment Portal (GAP). For the NSF GRFP specifically, which is unique in its administration, the fellowship as well as the shortfall appointments are already centralized.

Over the next five years, we plan to further centralize the administration of fellowships at MIT, transitioning from our current system, Quickbase, to Slate. Slate will be a system that is used Institute-wide and is connected to the data warehouse. This will assist in limiting many of the manual tasks involved with tracking fellowships, allowing for easier dissemination of information, and it is a more robust system that will allow us to manage NSF GRFP. Our communication to students will feed from Slate, allowing us to track how many students are reviewing the information we share regarding fellowships. Our fellowship intake form will be moved to Slate, allowing most of the information we request from students to be pre-populated. After reviewing student submissions, department fellowship rosters will automatically be updated, as opposed to us having to create the rosters and continuously update. Over these next five years, we will work with the Slate team to develop our instance of Slate and have it evolve over time.

2. Increase training, clear communication, and resources related to newly centralized systems and processes

The MIT community has strongly desired additional training, resources, and guidance around centralized processes and reporting. This was initially affected by the collective bargaining agreement, but has extended into all aspects of graduate education. A key priority is to provide this training to support graduate students, faculty, and graduate administrators. Training efforts will involve creating and delivering resources around the collective bargaining agreement, and the impact on appointments processed; overall fellowship administration; admissions and Slate; academic performance policies; and guidance for academic department administrators who engage with OGE systems and processes.

Over the next five years, we will develop training materials, videos, and resources that support graduate admins and faculty in OGE-related systems and processes. Our initial efforts will focus on increasing the materials available on the CBA, fellowships, admissions, and academics in GradCentral. These resources will include templates, step-by-step guides, and established guidelines for administrator use within DLCs. Once resources are available to admins, we will focus on refining our processes and developing more up-to-date contact for various audiences. For example, we may produce student-facing step-by-step guides with regard to Atlas processes, and increased training for faculty. Finally, we will develop more in-depth onboarding materials for new administrators and supervisors that address the particular needs of new faculty and staff.

Once the content has been generated, we will focus on its assessment and uses to ensure the materials are meeting the needs of various audiences. This will also be tied together with an effective communication plan that notifies each audience, faculty, staff, and students of their responsibilities throughout the academic year.

The uniqueness of each DLCI is a credit to MIT, but it is important that we centralize information to ensure the preservation of institutional knowledge, compliance, and alignment with the Institute and other external policies, and to create a tool for the OGE (and by extension, the OVC) to use as a resource in our work with departments.

In order to better meet the goals outlined above, we need to have an internal OGE guide to our diverse departments and graduate programs. This foundational resource would outline graduate programs' various practices, such as degree offerings and progression requirements (e.g., required or optional masters); academic milestones and performance policies; recruitment practices (especially around diversity); funding models; and other department-specific policies. Additionally, in parallel with this living document of practices and policies, a centralized data tracking dashboard with program composition and cohort information, along with other important data metrics to the Institute, would be built out, perhaps leveraging data sets already compiled by other offices, such as Institutional Research (IR).

By reviewing and collating data and information already collected by OGE staff members, we will identify how to best organize and format the information and visualize the data. After taking a curricular audit of program websites, IR data sets, and the MIT Bulletin, we will ask our partners to fill in specific information gaps. OGE as a whole will collaborate on maintaining this guide as a living resource and commit to keeping it up-to-date and relevant.

These goals of centralization reflect the changing environment of the Institute at large. We seek the cooperation of academic departments and graduate programs to see OGE not just in the role of institutional oversight but also as a partner. We value our administrator and faculty colleagues and the work they do, and with these goals, we hope to better support them and our students.

3. Develop new policies and systems to support academic success

Starting in Spring 2024, the Graduate Academic Performance Group (GAPG), which operates under the authority of the Committee on Graduate Programs (CGP), initiated significant changes to its composition and function. The main goals of these changes are to bring more transparency around the departmental and Institute-level academic performance review policies and processes, and to ensure that students who are struggling academically receive timely support. The revised GAPG will include graduate students, faculty, and staff, similar to the undergraduate Committee on Academic Performance (CAP) structure, and will provide students the opportunity to bring forward additional information about circumstances that could affect the GAPG's decision.

Additionally, we will develop expanded guidance for departments and programs on improved methods of communicating with students about unsatisfactory academic performance and clearer and more consistent language for departmental warning letters. This information will become available on GradCentral.

4. Establish a clear understanding of local departmental practices and their alignment with established centralized policies

The Institute's highly decentralized environment has allowed administrator and faculty colleagues to have the independence and fluidity to adapt to their students' needs, and has led to significant strengths and growth at MIT over the years. However, this history of decentralization comes with a parallel history of a lack of documentation.
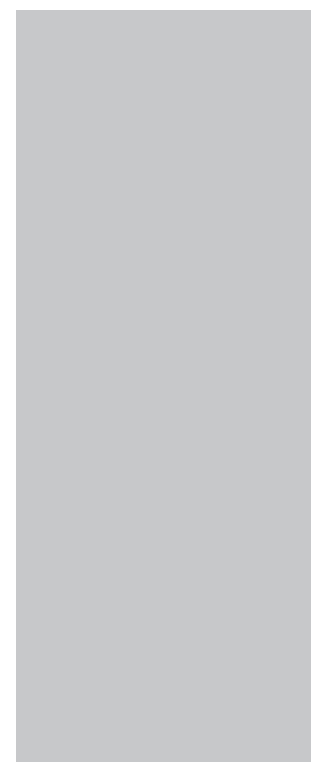
Academic departments and graduate programs are used to the lack of centralized oversight or structure. Each one has its own timelines, processes, and exceptions that work independently of other departments. With the recent institutional-level centralization, as well as a post-2020 wave of turnover among (and retirement of) department administrators, there is a depletion of institutional knowledge in departments. As we have begun to centralize various practices, this lack of insight into undocumented departmental practices has become clearer. As we continue and expand our functions as a central office, it is necessary for the OGE to have a comprehensive view of the various departments' local individual practices, knowledge, and data.

Strategic Theme 2:

Building and sustaining belonging and community

Introduction

OGE is dedicated to building a welcoming community that attracts and retains students from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. We aim to develop a community that gives voice to a broad range of perspectives, and that fosters an appreciation, respect, and acknowledgment of the unique attributes that each individual brings to our institution.

Our work and goals break into two main areas: outreach and strengthening access to graduate education, and supporting the success of current students through our thriving framework.

Access and outreach

We promote access to MIT graduate education by partnering both across the institute and externally to develop a coordinated and inclusive recruitment strategy. We also work with these partners to share best practices to identify and admit the broadest and richest pool of scholars for our master's and doctoral programs. Our GradDiversity team:

- Spearheads strategic efforts to develop and assess programs and initiatives aimed at outreach and graduate student thriving.
- Identifies policies and practices that reduce bias in admissions, remove barriers to educational access, and enhance systems for data driven outreach practices.
- Cultivates and maintains strategic partnerships that align with the Institute's mission and values, focusing on building and expanding bi-directional partnerships with community organizations, nonprofits, and educational institutions.

Over the next five years, our strategic initiatives will target:

- **Admissions**
  GradDiversity will deepen relationships with academic departments to understand their unique needs and align admissions strategies accordingly. While we primarily talk about MIT's transition to the Slate admissions platform in Strategic Theme 5: OGE Internal Processes, this work also contributes substantially to our ability to effectively target and communicate with a broad range of candidates. We will work to streamline processes using the Slate system, implementing optimal solutions to enhance the admissions experience.

We will provide advice on the application fee waiver program, which lowers a barrier for financially challenged applicants, and its implementation for underserved populations.

Additionally, in partnership with the Equity in Graduate Education Consortium, we will expand community learning opportunities for faculty and staff on equitable admissions processes and policies, ensuring that admissions strategies align with institutional and departmental, missions, interests and goals.

- **Access and outreach**
  We will develop and expand our virtual graduate recruitment efforts, providing centralized opportunities for the Institute's departments to connect with targeted prospective applicants.

  We are developing a new series of webinars for prospective students on the journey to graduate education. Dubbed "MIT Mondays" and moderated by Senior Associate Dean Denzil Streete, these sessions will offer different perspectives from current MIT graduate students as they tell their stories of finding their way to MIT. By sharing unique journeys and backgrounds of our enrolled students, we aim to communicate the critical message that a wide range of different voices, lived experiences, and perspectives *belong* at MIT.

- **Strategic partnerships**
  We will lead the development, management, and expansion of strategic partnerships with domestic and international institutions to support MIT's goals. As part of this focus, we have developed an Inclusive Pathways to the PhD Summit, bringing representatives from many other universities and programs to MIT's campus to build bi-directional partnerships.

Graduate Thriving: A framework for student success

As mentioned in the executive summary, our goal is to create an environment where students thrive in the academic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, balancing academic and personal life, and psychosocial wellbeing areas. In coordination with academic units, we foster a departmental culture that understands and supports the needs and experiences of students regardless of their background.

It's essential that we coordinate internal and external resources to meet the unique needs of underserved graduate populations at the Institute, and align them along the following themes. Each of these themes help to address one or more of the thriving areas outlined above:

- Social connectedness (an element of interpersonal thriving): Making sense of individuals, communities and societies, celebrating/honoring ethnic and cultural identity groups
- Personal wellbeing & joy (an element of psychosocial wellbeing): Nurturing holistic well-being among graduate students through comprehensive programs that address mental health, work-life balance, social connections, career development, and the cultivation of resilience.
- Mentorship (may support all areas of thriving): Providing guidance to graduate students throughout their academic journey, helping them transition smoothly into their programs, supporting them through key milestones. Our strategic plan also encompasses efforts to support our students mentoring each other.
- Community learning (primarily addressing interpersonal thriving and psychosocial wellbeing): Learning across differences; addressing the internal and external climate (sociopolitical, disaster, polarizing events etc.).

We have outlined the following new efforts to roll out over the next five years:

- **Breaking Bread:** Breakfast Club: A social event series for graduate students to collaboratively share opportunities, events, and insights in a relaxed setting while enjoying a meal.
- **Breakfast Club:** A social event series for graduate students to collaboratively share opportunities, events, and insights in a relaxed setting while enjoying a selection of breakfast foods.
- **GradDiversity Buddies:** The OGE GradDiversity Peer Mentor Program will pair first-year PhD students with 2nd year and beyond peers to cultivate a supportive network that promotes academic excellence, personal growth, and professional advancement at MIT.
- **Affinity group meetings:** A collaborative space for members to share resources, discuss common interests, and explore opportunities for partnership. These gatherings will foster connection and support among individuals with shared identities, interests, or experiences, enhancing our collective impact and strengthening community ties.
- **Thrive Forward Graduate Student Leadership Retreat:** This 2-day retreat is designed to empower graduate student organization leaders who serve historically underrepresented student populations at the institute. Participants will have the opportunity to grow as leaders, connect with peers, and make a lasting impact on their respective organizations and the broader MIT community. The retreat will cover essential topics such as changemaking, servant leadership, social responsibility, leading with mindfulness, understanding policies that impact institutional priorities, incorporating restorative practices in leadership, leading a student organization (including budgeting, marketing, and transitional planning), and prioritizing well-being and community building.
- **Restorative practices:** In collaboration with the school assistant deans for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and with partners in Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response, we will explore opportunities for restorative justice practices with students.
- **Faculty capacity building:** With the support of the Equity in Graduate Education Consortium, we will provide workshops on mentoring as well as mission-aligned admissions practices for interested faculty.

Strategic Theme 3:

Institute climate

Institute climate

The OGE sees all of our MIT constituents as a vital part of the interconnected campus community: MIT's graduate students, their partners and children, departmental staff, and graduate-serving offices. As our graduate students continue to make groundbreaking impacts on their research and on MIT itself, we seek to positively influence the Institute's climate and community toward a respectful, inspiring, curious homebase where all of our constituents feel that they belong.

We view this facet of our work as connecting all the nonacademic elements of the graduate student community at the Institute, looking carefully at how we create new or emphasize existing opportunities for mentorship and community-building; provide support for nonacademic skill development; communicate to students and their supporters; empower students to share their feedback or concerns through the most effective platforms; and continue expanding support for graduate students with children.

The OGE will continue our work on existing programs, including the Graduate Community Fellows, Committed to Caring, Graduate Student Appreciation Week, and our new administrative leadership over Graduate Student Orientation. In the next five years, we plan to integrate the following efforts:

1. Nonacademic skill development
2. Opportunities for mentorship and community building
3. Communicating effectively to students and supporters
4. Empowering students to share feedback and concerns
5. Expand support for graduate students with children

1. Nonacademic skill development

As we strive to educate the whole student, we must include opportunities to hone skills – such as **civil discourse** and **professional self-advocacy** – that both prepare them to engage in society and cultivate an ever more positive campus climate. This reflects the intrapersonal aspect of thriving.

• Build on existing resources, such as Graduate Student Orientation and the best practices in advising brochure, to help students professionally self-advocate with their advisors.

• Cultivate opportunities in graduate student onboarding and orientation so that incoming community members start their time at the Institution with a foundation of MIT values, including the Mind & Hand Book acknowledgement and targeted Orientation sessions.

• Collaborate in promoting and supporting partner offices' initiatives related to civil discourse, and explore development of additional training programs, as a regular touchpoint throughout the rest of a graduate student's career at MIT.

2. Opportunities for mentorship and community-building

The graduate student experience can often feel siloed, particularly as students build their closest connections within their own departments and schools. To promote a stronger sense of unity across the MIT graduate student body, and in turn the MIT community, we will seek to support cross-departmental opportunities for grad students to connect with one another. In addition, we will prioritize centering students within this work, through celebrating their individual accomplishments and benchmarking opportunities for community-building funding and mentorship skill-building. Within our Thriving framework, these efforts speak to interpersonal thriving.

• Prioritize funding for graduate student experience grant applications that emphasize multi-department events and activities.

• Assess the viability of, and act on as applicable, opportunities to promote or host cross-disciplinary events for graduate students. This may include exploring targeted orientation events, hiring a Graduate Community Fellow to host an OGE event series, or collaborating with Graduate Student Council (GSC) to socialize activities between departments.

• Celebrate and amplify student's academic accomplishments through the inclusion of highlights in student-facing newsletters and collaborating with GSC to elevate existing awards programs.

• Collaborate with partner offices to develop a central resource providing guidance for students on funding from various MIT sources for activities that promote community-building.

• Benchmark existing mentoring opportunities for graduate students at MIT to create a central resource.

3. Communicating effectively to students and supporters

As the central touchpoint for graduate students and their supporters, we have a strategic opportunity to streamline and enhance communications methods to these populations. Through developing new platforms and auditing existing techniques, we will promote a consistent, helpful graduate communications landscape.

• Build on the updated OGE values, collaboratively created by the staff, to ensure their alignment with the updated Institute values statement, enabling a cohesive framework from which all communications can be developed.

• In collaboration with the Office of the Vice Chancellor, develop regular methods for campus partners to share resources and events with graduate students, as well as clear guidelines for usage. These methods may include the GSC's Anno newsletter and an OGE newsletter.

• Implement and maintain the Grad Central platform to provide centralized resources and training for Graduate Administrators and other key partners. Create a plan for the socialization of this resource with existing staff and new hires.

• Audit our existing communications methods, including Orientation materials and website content, to ensure language that is inclusive of Master's students.

4. Empowering students to share feedback and concerns

Within our decentralized campus environment, it can be difficult for students to know where to express their concerns or feedback — and, after they've shared their thoughts, to trust that they will be heard. As a hub for resources within the graduate community, we will strive to identify what reporting options exist for students and how they can be effectively socialized.

• Assess what already exists for students to report concerns and identify any publication or centralization needed for existing forms, as well as any gaps in reporting that should be addressed.

• Provide training to the OGE staff and graduate administrators on reporting options for graduate students.

5. Expand support for graduate students with children

As we seek to be inclusive of all dimensions of our graduate students' identities, we look to welcome their children and celebrate their lives as parents. In continuation of the OGE's work to support graduate students with children, we will promote existing opportunities, provide chances to build community among parents, and advocate for resources.

• Increase promotion of back-up childcare resources and family-friendly events to include graduate students with children in community-building events.

• Advocate for a better childcare subsidy for students, which may involve subsidizing spots for student parents or providing the same employee sliding scale/scholarship to students in the bargaining unit.

• Lay the groundwork for longer-term improvements to graduate student childcare, such as providing funds for off-campus childcare, increasing the Grant for Graduate Students with Children, and building relationships with off-campus centers to offer an MIT student rate.

• Develop programming for student parents (without partners and children) to give the students a chance to network with each other and for OGE to invest in them as individuals, not only as parents.

Strategic Theme 4:

Holistic support of grad students

Regardless of where they start at the beginning of a masters or doctoral program, graduate students will experience the ups and downs of life during their years at MIT. High academic pressures, imposter syndrome, and the uncertainty of job prospects after graduation contribute to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and burnout among increasing numbers of our graduate students. Some students struggle to balance academic and personal life, which can exacerbate these challenges. Culturally, many of our students struggle with the stigma associated with seeking mental health services from Student Mental Health and Counseling (SMHC), and often OGE serves as an entry point for these students before they become comfortable enough for a referral to SMHC.

Our GradSupport team helps students navigate the intersection of the academic and the personal, and while some cases are straightforward, a greater level of complexity is becoming much more common, particularly in the mental health arena. We are constantly monitoring potential risks, as students may become a danger to themselves or others. We routinely help students with issues such as:

• Mental and physical illness
• Family issues
• Financial hardship
• Interpersonal conflict (in-and-outside-of MIT)
• Thesis progress
• Advisor/advisee relations and communication
• Academic issues
• Organization and executive functioning

GradSupport Deans provide individual guidance to students, but also work closely with graduate administrators, faculty advisors, and supportive resources across campus (e.g., CARE Team, Student Mental Health and Counseling, Disability and Access Services, Residential Life) to ensure that students receive wrap-around care for all personal and academic challenges that may arise during their time at MIT.

1. Communication with grad admins and partners

Given that MIT is decentralized, it is crucial that GradSupport and all of OGE maintain open communication and strong relationships with the graduate administrators and department leadership in order to effectively support and convey relevant policy and procedural information to MIT grad students from a holistic perspective. To nurture these close relationships, GradSupport will:

• Develop weekly drop in office hours for grad admins to meet with a member of the GradSupport team and discuss any student- or policy- related concerns or questions they may have.

• Develop and distribute a medical leave resource guide and a more robust medical leave return form. The resource guide will be geared toward grad admins and will outline the medical leave of absence (MLOA) process and policies, and address common questions. The MLOA return form will include an updated clinical form to assess and approve a student's return from medical leave.

• Develop targeted communications for faculty to highlight the benefits of partnering with GradSupport, and clarify expectations, processes, and resources for supporting students who are not meeting academic standards.

2. Reporting

Because we support all graduate students in each department and program, it is important that we track our utilization and trends from student cases. To achieve this, we will:

• Produce a yearly report on our short term emergency hardship fund for the academic year. The report will demonstrate the total amount requested, the amount that was given and will be broken down by departments and schools.

• Create an annual report on our utilization numbers. Our data sources will be from Maxient, Filemaker Pro, world event notifications, the ServiceNow ticketing system, food resources applications, applications from the emergency short term emergency and the long term doctoral fund. The data will be presented by department, it will illustrate weekly utilization to highlight times of higher volume, the number of medical leaves and returns and unique student cases. The report will also include outreach events requests, our community involvement and recognition we have received.

3. Increased resources for a proactive approach

With limited staff compared to the size of the graduate student population, the OGE has largely focused to date on helping those students who reach out to us or are flagged by other faculty/staff; on maintaining programs such as REFS that extend our reach and address some number of issues before they become worse; and on a few targeted programs such as maintaining a periodic presence in graduate residences. However, we can do better.

As we continue to provide high-touch guidance and assistance to grad students at all points in their graduate school career, we envision proactive measures that our team, and other areas across campus, can take to connect with and support graduate students in the beginning stages of an issue or problem.

• Because students who are not thriving academically typically receive a "J-" or "U" grade, we can use these as an early warning flag. With more bandwidth, one of our staff members will touch base with DLCIs and students about the context of each student's performance (e.g., health issues, family challenges, their fit with research/lab/PI). In this way, we can provide necessary outreach to students who may be struggling prior to a personal or academic crisis.

• When students are experiencing financial troubles or mental health difficulties, they may fail to pay rent or housing fees for one or more months. These issues are not currently flagged. Our goal is to work with Student Financial Services and Housing to identify students who may be in difficulty, as revealed by late rent payments or other challenges. We aim to work with SFS to flag issues before they become larger.

• We envision a set of GradSupport drop-in hours or a monthly lunch to create a low-stakes opportunity for students to develop a connection with caring and helpful members of the GradSupport team and discuss any issues that may be top-of-mind. If students are not ready to talk about personal challenges during drop-in hours, they will hopefully call upon the already-established relationship created with GradSupport if/when future challenges arise.

• While our staff have deep knowledge of, and connections to, the MIT support network, no one staff member knows everything, and bringing new staff up to speed takes time. We envision a "knowledgebase" for GradSupport that captures themes and trends (e.g. identifying a program where a large number of students are struggling with interpersonal and academic dynamics); key contacts (e.g. the best person in a particular program with whom to begin a conversation when a student loses funding); and processes (e.g. best practices on appropriate steps in the event of a world event, or multiple student suspensions; fine detail on excused absence procedures; what to do when student is suicidal; what to do when a student is homicidal). This knowledgebase will be an invaluable resource for our staff.

Our ability to be proactive depends on increased staffing for GradSupport, so additional resources for these measures are critical. In the next five years, we will use the reporting above to support this argument and advocate for the resources we need.

Strategic Theme 5:
Internal OGE processes

It has become increasingly clear that there is a growing need and interest among graduate program administrative staff for written documentation, resource guides, and other initiatives to support job training and upskilling, whether those materials and efforts relate to technical system processes or simply to Institute-level policies and procedures.

This demand for additional training infrastructure and resources corresponds with the Institute's shift in recent years toward greater centralization of processes that impact graduate students, a cultural sea change that has become all the more urgent in the wake of the MIT and MIT-GSU collective bargaining agreement and the 2023 *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* decisions rolling back race-aware admissions practices. For this reason, while we received requests for training to support a range of needs, most involved the Institute's adoption of new admissions policies and systems.

GradSystems and Admissions Operations

Until AY2023, the graduate admissions ecosystem at the Institute consisted of a decentralized network of academic departments and graduate programs that behaved independently of one another. Each of the Institute's forty-six departmental degree programs—offering over one hundred different degree objectives, with differing curricula and selection processes—had its own application portal, review and selection practices, and decision processes, which often lacked written documentation and institutional oversight from our or other central offices. This long standing culture of departmental independence led to significant inconsistencies across the Institute's graduate admissions practices, which in turn contributed to some programs executing practices in ways that did not align with central institutional procedures simply due to a lack of awareness.

During and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the administrative staff members who had worked in these graduate programs for years or decades retired, leading to higher levels of turnover and a massive loss of institutional knowledge. These administrative transitions have only made the need for best-practice documentation and training materials more crucial, especially as the OGE leads the effort to implement centralized admissions processes and systems across the Institute.

- Enhance the admissions support of these programs through cooperative centralization, providing pathways for knowledge and data sharing not just up through the Institute and down to the programs, but across the programs as well;

- Coordinate with expert consultants to provide workshops and other training for key stakeholders administering localized graduate admissions;

- Create and develop a database of written guides, recorded demos, and reference materials to navigate and execute a range of admissions procedures in Slate and other systems;

- Grow internal team and resources to support the diverse needs of a high-touch, high-demand cohort of programs within the graduate admissions and systems landscape at MIT serving and supporting the community in the areas of admissions operations, best practices, policy and procedures, prospecting, data analysis and reporting, security and compliance, and other systems improvements and implementations.

GradCentral and communications

In response to input from our campus partners, our strategic plan places a high importance on training opportunities for departmental staff and faculty, particularly for graduate program administrators and grad officers. Many requests focus on process-based training, regular training options, and additional resources. Some requests cited mentorship programming and professional development workshops.

The small-group meetings held by the MIT-Slate team further confirmed some of this partner feedback: there is high demand for a central repository to house requested training resources, whether those resources relate to Slate, internal MIT systems, new practices following graduate student unionization, or OGE policies and procedures.

To this end, the OGE Communications team will develop an internal site, called GradCentral, for departmental admins and leadership that will gather technical and systems training guides; documentation on policies and procedures; presentations and recordings of Graduate Administrator Roundtable meetings; mass communications to graduate administrators and students; and other materials relevant to the goal of clarifying and standardizing inter-departmental practices. GradCentral will roll out in several phases, with the first iteration of the site launching in fall 2024.

Initial offerings will organize currently available information. Throughout the next five years, we will work to create training modules to be housed on the site, and work with partners such as Student Financial Systems to offer their own guides for faculty and staff.

Since 2022, staff members in the OGE, IS&T, and the OVC have collaborated to migrate individual departmental and programmatic admissions processes from GradApply to Slate, a third-party database platform that serves as the industry leader in higher education admissions. The Slate implementation project was organized into a multi-phase rollout, with 10-12 graduate programs moving their graduate application, review procedures, and decision processes onto the software platform each academic year. By the start of the 2025-2026 academic year, all graduate degree programs at MIT, as well as key non-degree programs in the OGE and the Schools of Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science, will be using Slate.

Implementing a new admissions platform and set of technical procedures for dozens of programs is an enormous undertaking, the success of which hinges on comprehensive training and support for the staff and faculty of those DLCIs.

To that end, GradSystems/Admissions and the cross-functional MIT-Slate team (composed of OGE and IS&T staff) is structured around providing services and systems to the community:

- Use the learnings from small-group meetings with individual graduate programs to understand and respond to the unique concerns of their staff and faculty while communicating central Institute admissions policy and best practices back to the programs, creating Institute-wide standards, and facilitating admissions operations knowledge sharing between the programs;