Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Departmental Advisor Handbook

MIT Undergraduate Advising Center

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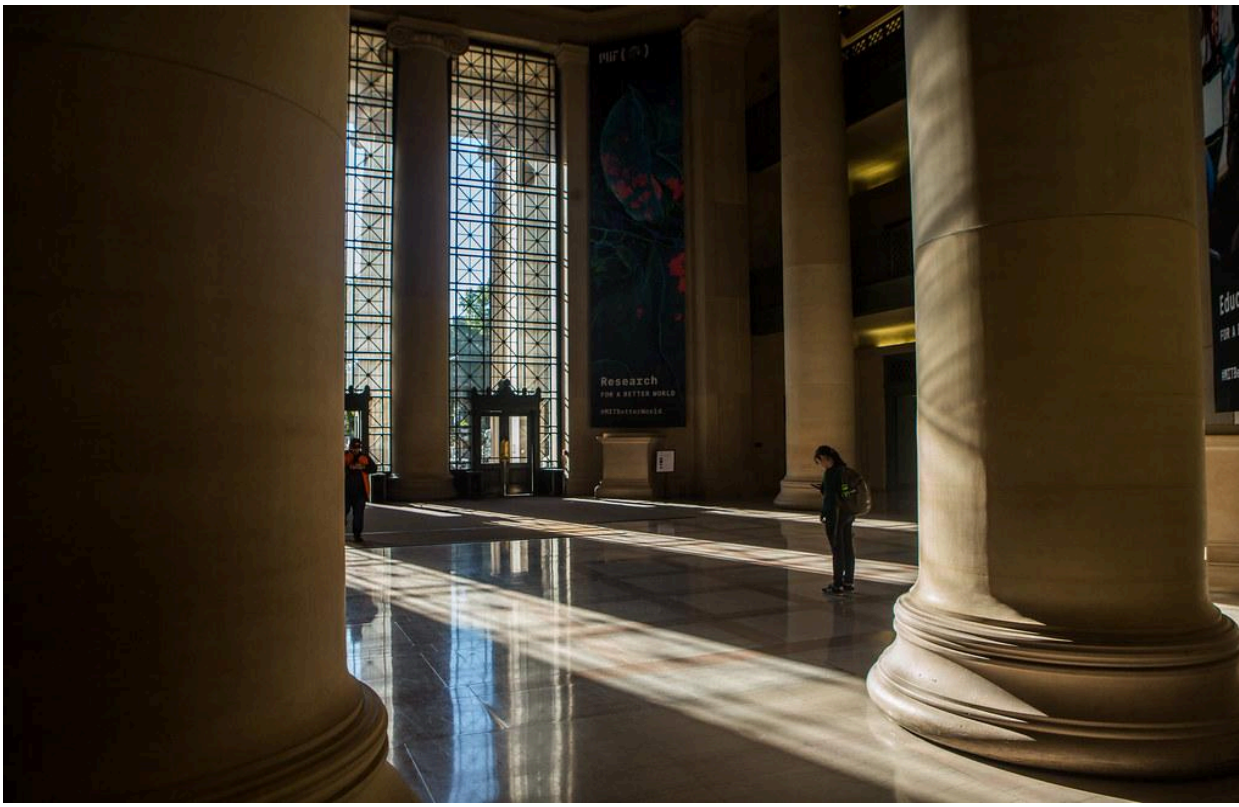

Welcome

At MIT, advising is more than just helping students choose classes or navigate requirements—it's about building relationships that support students as they explore who they are, what they care about, and how their academic path connects to their larger goals. As a departmental advisor, you play a pivotal role in this process. You are often the first person who students turn to when they're making decisions; not only seeking guidance within their major, but also on how to shape their MIT experience in a way that aligns with their interests, strengths, and aspirations.

This handbook is designed to support you in that role. While it includes practical resources—like General Institute Requirements and key advising milestones—it also offers a broader perspective on the values and purpose of advising at MIT. It reflects our belief that meaningful advising happens

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when students are seen not just as learners, but as whole people navigating a formative chapter of their lives.

The Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC) and departmental advisors work in partnership to provide students with both holistic and disciplinary guidance. While UAC advisors support students in broader reflection, goal-setting, transitioning to their major, and navigating resources, departmental advisors offer the deep, field-specific mentorship that becomes especially important once students declare a major. Together, we create an advising ecosystem that is both comprehensive and personal.

We invite you to explore this handbook not just as a reference tool, but as a shared framework for the kind of advising culture we're building at MIT—one that is thoughtful, inclusive, and student-centered.

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Historical context for the UAC's relation to Departmental Advising

In 2023, the Undergraduate Advising Center was established to strengthen MIT's advising infrastructure and create a home for holistic student support. This guide builds on that foundation by honoring the autonomy and depth of departmental advising while connecting it to an Institute-wide vision of integrated, student-centered advising.

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I. Advising at MIT

Advising at MIT: A Shared Model

MIT is devoted to enhancing the undergraduate advising experience. Through the recent development of the Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC), the institute has created a holistic advising culture that builds on the excellent advising already recognized at MIT.

Departmental advisors primarily support sophomores, juniors, and seniors while UAC advisors provide advising for first-year students and holistic general advising for upper-level students. Below is a table to help further delineate the differences:

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Departmental (Primary) Advisor

- Curriculum expert on specific classes, course substitutions, graduation requirements in the major, etc.
- Can advise students on graduate school, research, and field-specific networking options.
- Approves student registration.
- Advising and communication are major/department specific.
- Programs and engagement opportunities are major/department specific.

UAC Advisor

- Generalists who will help students navigate MIT and connect students with the right campus resources and opportunities
- Focus is holistic advising (academic, personal, and professional)
- Help with interpreting academic policies and general graduation requirements, including the GIRs.
- Engagement opportunities are designed for and open to all upper-level students.
- When in doubt, come to us for help!

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UAC Liaison Initiative

The UAC liaison model is designed to strengthen collaboration and communication between the UAC and academic departments. Select UAC advisors will be assigned as a liaison to one or more departments, serving as a generalist advisor who develops context for the department and supports department-specific advising efforts over time.

Goals of the Liaison Role

- ***Build relationships*** with departmental advisors and staff to strengthen advising partnerships
- ***Serve as a resource*** for both students and faculty on general academic planning and institutional advising practices

UAC liaisons maintain light communication with departments throughout the year to stay aligned, informed, and responsive. They can participate in key events for your department, such as sophomore orientation and advisor training, plus other appropriate departmental programs. Most importantly, liaisons offer context and support on advising issues, including trends you're seeing or concerns that arise. To learn more about who your department's liaison is, please visit: https://advising.mit.edu/uac-departmental-liaisons/

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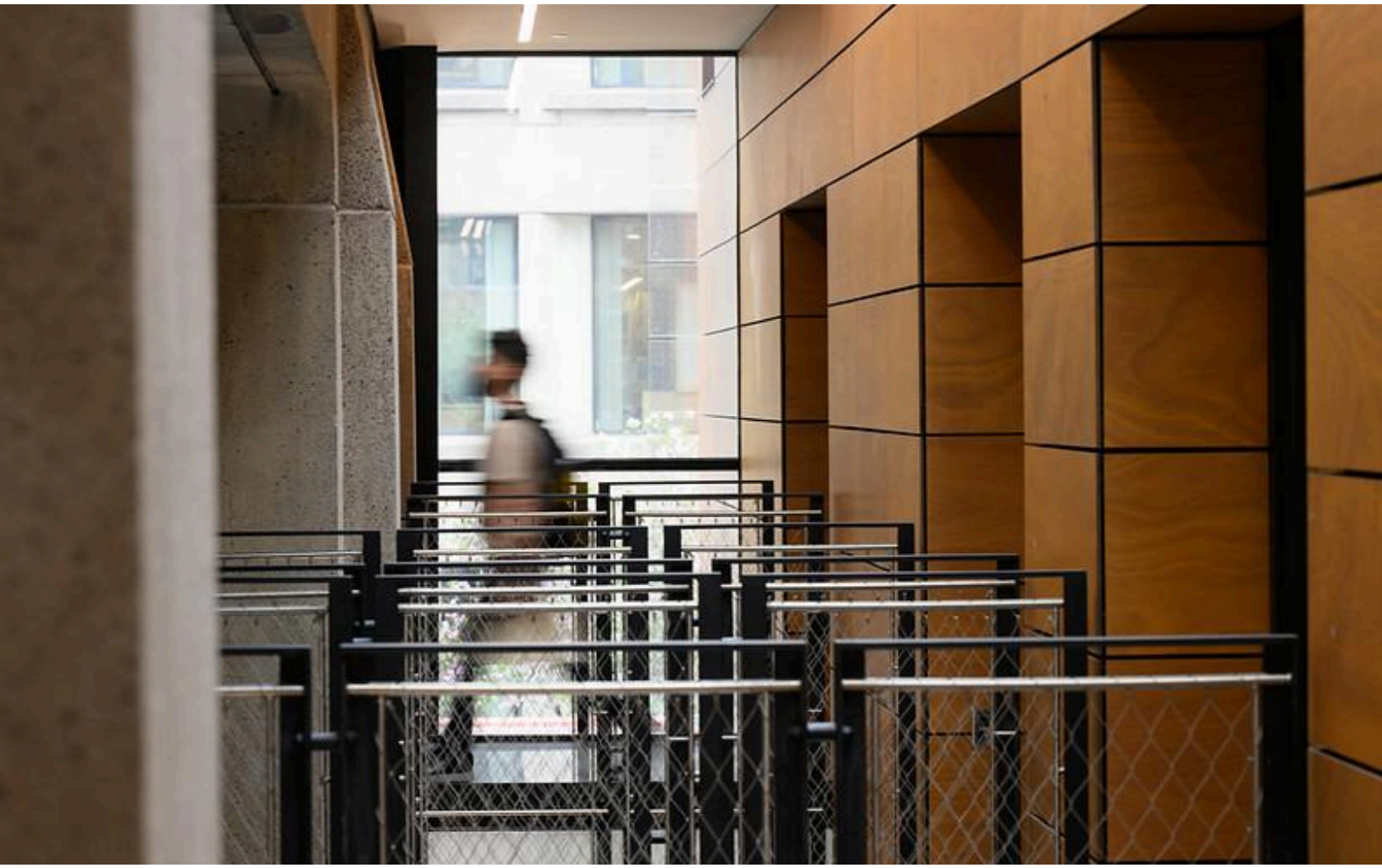

II. Navigating MIT Academics: General Institute Requirements, Milestones, & Advising Touchpoints

This section offers an overview of academic structures and policies that apply to all MIT undergraduates, including the General Institute Requirements (GIRs), credit and registration policies, and key advising milestones. While it does **not** include major-specific requirements, we link out to departmental resources where appropriate. Departmental advisors play a crucial role in helping students integrate these Institute-wide frameworks with their academic goals within the major.

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MIT Undergraduate Degree Requirements

Undergraduate students must complete the below requirements in order to complete their degree. Each degree program is designed to be completed with a normal academic load – the equivalent of 8-8.5 subjects each year, for a total of 32-34 subjects. More details can be found here.

- General Institute Requirements: 17 subjects
- 180-198 units beyond the GIRs:
    - Major: 114-186 units (Between 12-72 units in a major also satisfy GIR requirements)
    - Unrestricted Electives: 48-138 units

Credits/Units: Most classes are worth 12 units. The Subject Listing displays units for each subject as a series of three numbers (e.g., 3-2-7). The numbers added together (3+2+7) equal the total credit for the subject (12). In order, the three numbers represent:

- Units assigned for lectures and recitations
- Units assigned to laboratory, design, or field work
- Units for outside preparation

It's important to note that first year students are subject to a credit limit. First year students cannot earn more than 54 credits in the fall term, 12 credits during Independent Activities Period (IAP), and 60 credits in the spring term.

Why Do MIT Students Take the General Institute Requirements (GIRs)?

The GIRs form the academic foundation of an MIT education. They have always existed in MIT curricula in some capacity, going all the way back to the first class of MIT students in 1865. While the specifics of these requirements have certainly evolved over the past 150 years, they have remained a fundamental pillar of the MIT undergraduate curriculum. Far

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from being a set of disconnected prerequisites, they are designed to help students think critically across disciplines, develop quantitative and analytical reasoning, and understand the societal and ethical implications of their work.

At their core, the GIRs reflect MIT's belief that future scientists, engineers, and thinkers must be more than technically proficient—they must also be curious, well-rounded, and prepared to make meaningful contributions to a complex world. Through coursework in science, math, the humanities, arts, and social sciences, students develop the intellectual flexibility and communication skills they will need to thrive not only at MIT, but long after they graduate.

As advisors, you play an important role in helping students see the GIRs not as hurdles to overcome, but as opportunities to explore new interests, sharpen their thinking, and make informed decisions about their academic paths.

GIR Overview

Students must complete the General Institute Requirements (GIRs) in order to graduate. The GIRs are comprised of 17 subjects:

- 6 Science Requirements
- 2 Restricted Electives in Science and Technology (REST) Requirements
- 1 Laboratory Requirement
- 8 Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) Requirements
- Communication Requirement

Science GIRs

All MIT undergraduates are expected to gain a basic understanding of concepts and methods of the physical and biological sciences by the time they graduate. There are 6 Science GIRs:

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- Biology
- Chemistry
- Calculus I
- Calculus II
- Physics I
- Physics II

More information about the Science GIRs can be found at the links below:

Science Requirement

Science GIR videos

Restricted Electives in Science and Technology (REST) Requirement

REST subjects are meant to broaden and deepen a student's educational foundation in basic science and further the understanding of scientific inquiry. These subjects are designed to give students the opportunity to proceed further in areas already studied, or to explore other areas of potential interest. Students typically take REST subjects in the second year, although with the proper prerequisites they may begin taking them in the first year.

Students meet the REST Requirement by taking two subjects from this list. Of the subjects used to fulfill the requirement, students can take no more than one in their department.

Laboratory Requirement

The Institute Laboratory Requirement consists of subjects that require student's attention in comprehensive projects rather than stand-alone experiments or exercises. Each Laboratory subject fulfills a designated number of units toward the Laboratory Requirement. Laboratory subjects may be taken in any combination to fulfill the Requirement so long as the

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student completes at least 12 laboratory units in total. Any laboratory units taken beyond the 12 needed for the Laboratory Requirement will be counted towards units beyond the GIRs. Learn more here.

Physical Education (PE) Requirement

In addition to the 17 GIR subjects, students are required to earn a total of 8 Physical Education (PE) Points in order to graduate. To fulfill the PE Requirement, students must take four physical education and wellness courses (worth 2 PE points each for a total of 8 PE points) and complete the swimming requirement. Students are responsible for completing the PE requirement by the end of their second year. More information about the PE requirement can be found here.

Alternative ways to receive PE points are:

- Varsity sports: Four points awarded to players for each year of competition.
- ROTC Programs: Two points are awarded per year of ROTC participation up to a maximum of four points.
- Approved personal training, private swim lessons, and group exercise classes offered through the Department of Athletics, Physical Education, and Recreation.

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Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) Requirements

HASS requirements were first implemented post-World War Two, as part of recommendations by the Lewis Report to support the preservation of democracy in the face of Communism[1]. Commissioned in 1947 and published in 1949, the Committee observed the similarities between MIT's current curriculum and those of Soviet universities', and encouraged changes emphasizing the humanities, civics & social sciences, and the arts. It was also from these recommendations that the Committee on the Undergraduate Program (CUP) was first formed to oversee and manage the undergraduate curriculum, as well as the School for Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences.

Over the following 70+ years, HASS requirements have evolved into the current set that today's MIT graduates must complete:

Students are required to take 8 HASS subjects before they graduate. To stay on pace, we recommend that students take one HASS subject each semester during their four years at MIT. There are three components to the HASS requirement:

- Distribution: Students must take at least one subject from each category within HASS (at least one Humanities subject, at least one Arts subject, and at least one Social Science subject)
- Concentration: Students must designate a field of concentration, consisting of either three or four subjects. One of the subjects that counts towards the distribution requirement may also be designated as a concentration subject.
- Electives: The remainder of the 8-subject requirement may be fulfilled by subjects from any distribution category or by subjects that are designated as HASS electives.

More information about the HASS requirement can be found here.

[1] Whitney Zhang, "Evolution of the first-year academic experience." *The Tech* (Cambridge, MA), September 21, 2018. https://thetech.com/2018/09/21/evolution-of-the-first-year-academic-experience

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Communication Requirement

Although formalized much later, the Communication requirement is rooted in the same principles driving the formation of the HASS requirements. Leadership recognized the importance of nurturing MIT students' abilities to write and speak effectively throughout the entire undergraduate career. After a committee review of the writing requirements, amendments were first proposed in 1997 and later accepted at the faculty meeting in March of 2000. The Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement (SOCR) was also established at the same meeting.

Today, the Communication Requirement lives under the HASS umbrella, and consists of four communication-intensive (CI) subjects taken throughout a student's undergraduate career:

- 2 CI subjects in the humanities, arts, and social sciences (CI-H)
- 2 CI subjects in a student's major program (CI-M)

Additional notes about the Communication Requirement:

- With the exception of those students who received a score of 5 on AP Language and/or AP Literature exams, all first-year students are required to take the First-Year Essay Evaluation (FEE) before starting at MIT. The results of the FEE determine whether or not students are required to take a writing- focused (CI-HW) subject as their first CI subject.
- Students must complete one of their CI subjects by the end of their first year; two by the end of their second year; three by the end of their third year; and four by the time they graduate.
- Only one CI-H subject per term may be counted towards the Communication Requirement. However, students may receive credit for more than one CI-M subject in the same term or a CI-H and CI-M completed concurrently.

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Unrestricted Electives

Unrestricted electives are courses taken outside of a student's GIRs and major programs that diversify and enhance their learning at MIT. Students must complete a minimum of 48 units in unrestricted electives, and may complete a maximum of 138 units. If they are bringing transfer credits to MIT, students may have those credits allocated toward unrestricted electives, but this depends on the subject and relevant grade or test score.

Changing Majors & Double-Majoring

All incoming first-years at MIT arrive undeclared and must choose a major by the end of their second semester of sophomore year. However, it is not uncommon for students to change majors during their undergraduate careers. Encourage students to communicate with their new department administrator and the Registrar to ensure smooth transitions and appropriate transfer of credit. More detailed information, including the link to the change of major form, can be found on the Registrar's website.

Declaring a double-major involves several steps, and students must follow the guidelines and additional requirements laid out by the Registrar. All instructions and special considerations, as well as the link to the double-major request form, are available on the Registrar's website.

Minors

MIT offers a wide variety of undergraduate minors to students interested in broadening and deepening their understanding of 1-2 subjects outside of their declared major(s). Each minor's program requirements are determined by their host department.

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Students can access an up-to-date list of minors and their respective requirements through the MIT Catalog. Specific guidance for declaring a minor is available on the Registrar's website.

Academic Policies & Procedures

Registration & Credit Limit

- Add/Drop/Change
- First Year Credit Limit

Grading Options

- Flex P/NR
- Incomplete
- Changing A Grade
- Listener
- IAP Grading

Committee on Academic Performance (CAP)

CAP oversees academic record petitions, enforcement of credit limits, end of term academic reviews, degree candidate reviews, and recommendations to the faculty on matters relating to academic standards, exams, degree requirements, and grading.

CAP Overview
Leaves of Absence
Returning from Leave

Transfer Credit

Students may request transfer credit for subjects taken before they arrive at MIT or while they are currently enrolled as an MIT student. Credit for previous study is awarded as either the equivalent MIT subject or

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unrestricted elective credit, at the discretion of the department granting credit.

For First-Year Students:
Many MIT students have done college-level study while in high school. MIT grants placement and credit for:

- Advanced Standing Exams (tests taken at MIT during May, August, and January/February)
- Advanced Placement (College Board Advanced Placement) Exam scores
- International Examinations (including A-Levels, Cambridge Pre-U, International Baccalaureate, French Baccalaur.at, Abitur), and
- Transfer Credit for study at another college or university.

It's important to note that these guidelines are subject to change for each entering class.

***For Upper-Level Students*:**
If students wish to receive transfer credit after starting at MIT, they should refer to the policies outlined on the Registrar's website. Some important things to note:

- Transfer credit will appear on students' academic records with a grade of S.
- Although the grade is not used in calculating term or cumulative GPA, the credit counts towards Institute requirements.
- If there is no equivalent subject at MIT, the department transfer credit examiner may award elective credit.
- Transfer credit requests must include an official transcript showing work and final grade.

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Advanced Standing Exams (ASEs)

MIT offers Advanced Standing Exams (ASEs) as an alternate way for students to earn credit for specific courses. ASEs are typically offered four times throughout the year: Late August/Early September, December, Late January/Early February, and May. ASEs are typically offered in math, physics, chemistry, biology, and electrical engineering and computer science. Students may only take an Advanced Standing Exam in a class for which they have never registered nor attended at MIT.

Advanced Standing Exam information & grading policies for first year students is available here. Upper level students (including transfer students) must petition to take ASEs. More information about ASE petition deadlines, procedural information, and grading policies are available here.

First-Year Advising Overview

The Office of the First Year (OFY) oversees first-year advising. Departmental advisors volunteer to serve as first-year advisors, so not everyone will be advising first-years in their caseload. For those who do volunteer, below are some semesterly milestones and pre-term preparation guidance:

Preparing for Fall

1. Review advisees' information in their First Year Folders. The first-year folder will contain your advisees' incoming credit, FEE results, and information about ASEs.
2. Connect with your associate advisor (AA) (learn more about the Advising Network).
3. Send welcome emails to advisees, scheduling both group and individual meetings.
4. Review important academic dates and deadlines from Advising Calendars and Meetings and the Academic Calendar.

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Fall

You will conduct your first advising meetings during Orientation at the end of August. After you've registered your students and the semester begins, you are asked to meet with your advisees at least once more in the fall term. Your meetings should center around your advisees' transition to MIT, their academic and co-curricular exploration, and their plans for IAP and Spring. You can find a suggested meeting schedule as well as topics of discussion for each meeting on the OFY Fall Advising Calendar and Advising Meetings page.

IAP & Spring

Some of your students may enroll in Independent Activities Period (IAP), which takes place in January. Whether or not your students are on campus during IAP, it's good to stay connected to your students during this time to ensure that they are prepared for the Spring term.

Once classes begin in early February, you should plan to meet with your advisees at least once more in the spring term. Your meetings should focus on major exploration, major selection, and plans for summer. Refer back to the OFY Spring Advising Calendar and Advising Meetings for more detail.

Exploring Majors, Interests, and Pathways

All matriculating first-years arrive at MIT with “undeclared” majors to encourage exploration of their interests. Some students may already know what they want to study, some may not have any idea, and others still may want to pursue one course, but feel pressure from familial or societal expectations to pursue another. No matter the situation, you as an advisor can support your students’ decision-making process:

- If a student is anxious about changing majors, remind them that changing majors is normal! According to NCES data from 2017,

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one-third of undergraduates on average change their major at least one time
- Encourage your advisees to reflect on their values, interests, and goals in writing. Often, putting thoughts to paper helps students organize and clarify their wants and needs. Further encourage them to talk about their findings with their community.
- Lean on GIRs to support exploration – it's a core tenet of their purpose!
- CAPD is a fantastic place to go for students exploring potential courses. They offer programs like micro-internships, career prototyping, strengths assessments, and more

Even if they feel confident in their path toward a certain major, students may still not know how that translates to real-world results in the job or research market. You can do a LOT with a major in anything, but being able to specify (as an advisor) what you did with your degree/skills and how it unlocked each step of your career is a valuable, tangible outcome of advising.

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III. Deepening the Advising Conversation

Building Relationships with your Advisees

Connections with faculty and staff on campus are a critical factor in student success, retention, and sense of belonging. Even so, it can be difficult to start new relationships or build on existing ones. This section offers jumping-off points for conversations with your advisees and walks you through how to record your appointments for reference and record-keeping.

Establishing Rapport: Questions you can Ask your Advisees

The advising relationship is enhanced by advisors showing genuine interest in their advisees. Although many of these conversations come naturally, if you

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get stuck, the questions[2] below can help you get started or inspire other questions you may have:

Commitment to Learning:

- Describe what your ideal time at MIT looks like. Why?
- What class are you most excited to take?
- What impact do you hope your degree will have on your life?

Positive Values:

- What obstacles have you overcome in order to be a successful student?
- When was the last time you handled a difficult situation well?

Social Competencies:

- Tell me about a positive relationship you have or have had with a professor here at MIT.
- Can you think of a person at MIT to whom you could go to and talk about life decisions?

Positive Identity:

- What's the best part about being a college student here?
- Describe your biggest success to date.
- Tell me about a current goal. What is one thing you have done in the past week/month to move toward reaching that goal?

Support/Connectedness:

- What kind of community activities do you participate in?
- If you were going to go to someone for advice, who would that be?

Empowerment:

- What is the best activity that you have participated in on campus? Why?

[2] Adapted from the Appreciative Advising Revolution, 2008 by Bloom, J.L., Hutson, B.L., & He, Y.

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- Tell me about a project or activity that made you lose track of time.

Documenting Advising Conversations

In the future, advisors at MIT will have a Student Success Platform to record and keep notes on each of their advisees. However, keeping a record of interactions with your advisees in the meantime is still a valuable practice. Keeping notes creates a comprehensive picture of each student's experience and the support they've received during their time at MIT, which can help jog your memory during meetings. Detailed notes on your interactions also serve multiple additional purposes: they provide accountability, aid in resolving disputes, strengthen relationships by showing your investment in their academic journey, and offer an effective way to track and follow up with your students.

Notetaking Guidelines:
As advisors, we aim to record detailed and accurate notes after each student interaction. Refer to the MIT Departmental Advising: Note-Taking Guide for a full list of Dos and Don'ts. In general, here are a few things to keep in mind when recording advising notes:

- Eliminate judgment and maintain objectivity
- Only include information you are comfortable with the student seeing
- Notes are considered to be an academic record and can be requested under The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Student Success Toolkit: Recommendations by Year

Below are recommendations for each class year created by the UAC. Each link provides recommended activities tailored to the specific class year. UAC advisors use these toolkits to guide conversations with students about opportunities that are relevant for each year of their MIT journey.

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Students also have access to a Canvas site that provides links and resources to help them get started on the toolkit items:

Student Success Toolkit: Recommendations for Making the Most of Your First Year
Student Success Toolkit: Recommendations for Making the Most of Your Second Year
Student Success Toolkit: Recommendations for Making the Most of Your Third Year
Student Success Toolkit: Recommendations for Making the Most of Your Senior Year

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IV. Supporting the Whole Student

Use Your Resources

As MIT advisors, we have access to certain information about each of our students. Take some time to learn more about your advisees before you connect with them in person.

- Review your advisees' First-Year Folders, which house their application essays, information about transfer credit and Advanced Standing Examinations, and their first year advising assignments.
- Review MITSIS to see what subjects your students are taking currently and what subjects they have taken in the past.

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Use Inclusive Communication Strategies

Using inclusive communication can help us create an environment where our students feel welcome, respected, and appreciated.

- Ensure you are using the pronouns with which your students identify. Sharing your pronouns when you introduce yourself opens the door for students to share their own. You can also help normalize this practice by adding your pronouns to your email signature.
- Use inclusive language, avoiding phrases or terms that could reinforce stereotypes.
- Ask open ended questions, allowing your student to lead the conversation.
- Practice active listening- listen to learn and understand rather than to respond.
- Address your biases- the National Education Association shares helpful strategies to recognize and combat our implicit biases.

Create a Welcoming Physical Space

Take a moment to think about the physical space in which you meet with students (including virtual spaces, such as your Zoom background). What does the environment feel like? What might students notice? What types of students might feel more or less welcome in your space?

- A FLI Tim the Beaver or "You are Welcome Here" (LGBTQ+) sticker can be a small gesture to welcome traditionally marginalized students.
- Be aware of your body language. Certain behaviors, like crossing your arms, may come across as dismissive. Try to be open and friendly while maintaining personal space, and keep in mind that different cultures define personal space differently.

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Notice Your Cultural Norms

Differences in beliefs or communication styles between cultural groups can lead to misunderstandings if left unnoticed. Take the time to assess your communication norms and to learn about the norms in different communities that your students may be part of.

- Tools like Globesmart can provide a quick and easy way to assess your own beliefs and compare them to other countries. Note, however, that these norms are just generalizations, and your advisees may not reflect the listed norms of their country of origin.
- Take the time to learn about your students' cultural, linguistic, social, and personal backgrounds, interests, and goals.

The Hidden Curriculum

The term “hidden curriculum” has ties to MIT. Though it was first coined by Dr. Philip Jackson in 1968, it was popularized by psychiatry professor and then-Dean of Institute Relations, Dr. Benson Snyder, with the publication of his book, *The Hidden Curriculum,* by MIT Press in 1971. He expanded on Jackson’s concept, positing that **the hidden curriculum is a set of unspoken educational norms and values shared implicitly by institutions which are spread through social interactions.** This curriculum reinforces inequalities between students across economic and social classes, affecting student engagement and success. Typically, marginalized student populations are the most impacted: first-generation students, low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities.

Dr. Idalis Villanueva Alarcón, associate chair of the Engineering Education department at University of Florida, visualized the different messages students receive in the classroom in a recent session with MIT’s Teaching and Learning Lab:

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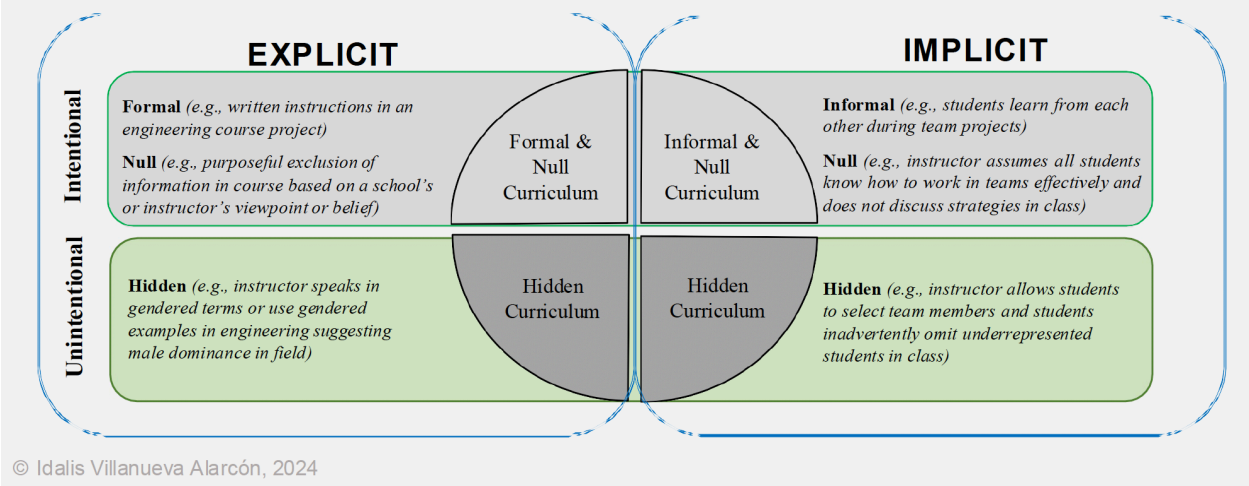

The Coalition for College identifies additional examples of hidden curriculum:

- **Office Hours:** Knowing when and how to visit professors during office hours can make a significant difference in academic success. It's an opportunity to ask questions, clarify assignments, and build relationships with faculty who can provide mentorship or write recommendation letters.
- **Networking:** College is as much about relationships as it is about academics. Building a network of peers, professors, and professionals opens doors to opportunities like internships, research, or even future jobs.
- **Advocacy:** Learning to advocate for yourself is critical. This includes asking for help when struggling with coursework, negotiating extensions if needed, or seeking accommodations for specific needs.
- **Academic Jargon:** Each academic field has its own language, and understanding this jargon is key to excelling. Whether it's knowing how to read a syllabus or interpreting feedback on a paper, familiarity with academic norms helps students succeed.
- **Collaboration:** Group work often requires navigating unwritten rules, such as respecting diverse perspectives, managing time effectively, and ensuring equitable contributions from all members.

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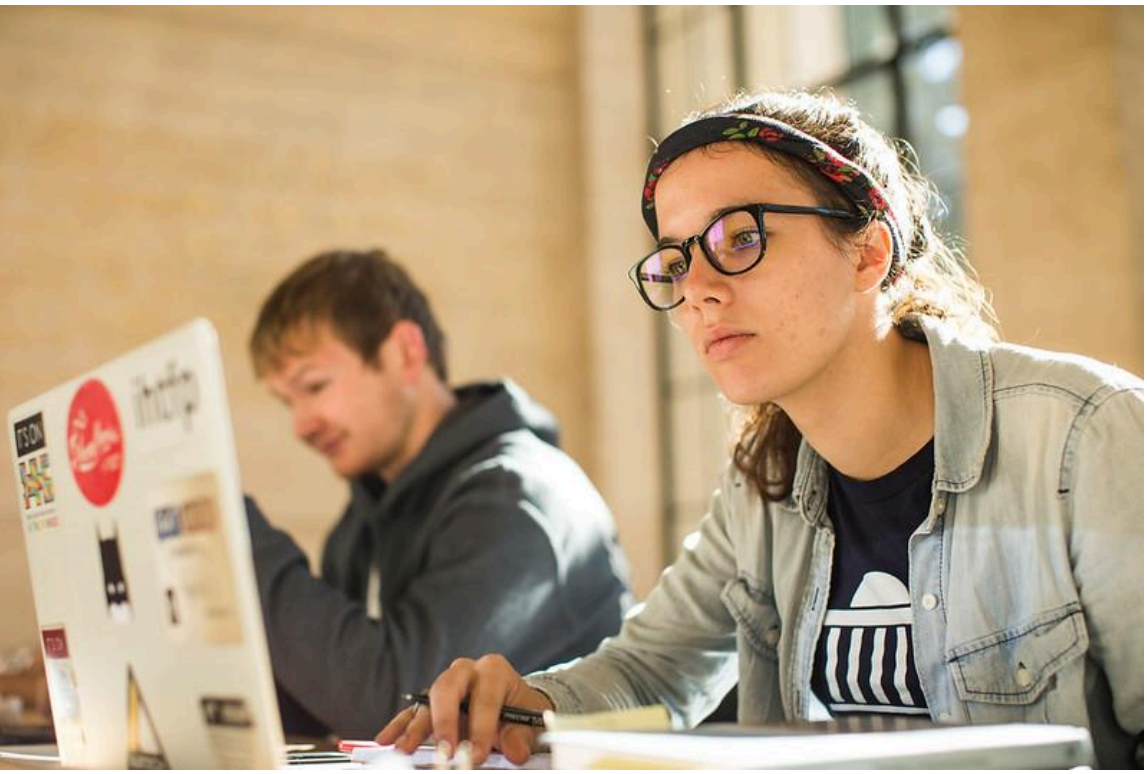
To navigate the hidden curriculum, here are some steps you can encourage your advisees to take:

- **Ask Questions:** Talk to their UAC advisor, other professors, or mentors about their experiences. Ask about unspoken norms and challenges they faced.
- **Practice Advocacy**: Learn to ask for help, whether it's requesting clarification on a class assignment or seeking advice on extracurricular activities.
- **Seek Mentorship:** Connect with older students, alumni, or community members who can share insights about their college journeys.
- **Explore Resources:** Familiarize yourself with resources like college websites, virtual tours, or mentorship programs designed for first-generation or underrepresented students.

Adapted from The Hidden College Curriculum, n.d., by the Coalition For College



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Recognizing Students in Distress: S^3 and DAS Referral Guidelines

Student Support Services (S^3)

S^3 is available for anything that gets in the way of a student's academics. This can be something acute (like an unexpected illness) or long-term (like a student with a challenging personal situation). The threshold to refer students to S^3 is relatively low; if it seems like there is more to discuss, referring is good. If students are hesitant, remind them that they are not alone. Most MIT students utilize S^3 services during their undergraduate career.

In addition, these are some signs of concern that could be helpful in guiding a check-in with S^3:

- Any sudden changes in behavior or appearance
- A student shares that something is going on, but they want to discuss it privately
- A student is not responding or showing up to meetings with you and/or to their classes.

Disability & Access Services (DAS)

Disability and Access Services (DAS) facilitates an accessible campus experience at MIT by ensuring access for qualified students with disabilities. When referring students to DAS, it is most commonly because a student has either:

- disclosed to you that they have been diagnosed recently with a new diagnosis that's affecting their academic experience, and they're seeking a resource on campus that can help them, or
- mentioned to you that they had accommodations in their education before MIT and would like to establish accommodations at MIT

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If a student has not approached you about accommodations, but you feel they may benefit from DAS support, contact das-student@mit.edu immediately for guidance.

For faculty departmental advisors, DAS offers a comprehensive review of faculty procedures for providing accommodations on their webpage. Accommodations can range from extra time on exams to the use of note takers, assistive technology, or alternative learning formats. Regardless of your role, it is critical to maintain prompt contact with DAS staff should a student come to you seeking accommodations or if you have any questions or concerns regarding accommodations requests.

Referring Students to Support Services

Advisors are not expected to have all the answers to our students' questions. However, we hope to act as a bridge between our students and the various resources they may want to connect with throughout their MIT experience. It's important to not only share what resources exist, but also to help students understand how to connect with those resources, and when possible, assist them in connecting with those resources. Refer to the Accessing Resources module to see a list of resources MIT students may benefit from.

How to Refer Students:
In the future, we will be able to use our Student Success Platform to create and track student referrals. In the meantime, our process to make referrals is:

1. Determine which resource you want to refer a student to
2. Discuss the resource with your student
3. Help the student connect with the resource:
    - With their permission, send a connecting email to the resource and your student, or

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- Show the student how to make an appointment with the resource online

4. Follow up with the student and/or resource to see if they were able to connect

Many campus resources have information for students on their websites. It will be helpful to become familiar with and/or bookmark the resources available online- this way, you can easily show your student during your advising meeting.

Common Resources for Students

Connecting to resources is a crucial part of building a foundation during a student's first year. Introducing your advisees to these resources will help them to transition to MIT and build a strong network early on.

Academic Support

- Student Support Services (S^3): Private resource for students who are struggling personally or academically
- Disability Access Services: Provides support and accommodations for students with disabilities
- Talented Scholars Resource Room TSR^2: Free tutoring support for a variety of subjects, including P-set nights, exam reviews, 1:1 appointments, and more
- MIT's Writing and Communication Center: Writing support for undergrad and grad students

Personal Support

- Office of Wellbeing: Coordinates programs and resources to help students prioritize wellbeing by practicing healthy habits
- Mental Health & Counseling: Offers confidential counseling (individual and group) for all students

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- MIT Medical: Provides a wide array of medical services including urgent care, primary care, and more

Research & Career

- Undergraduate Research Opportunities (UROP): Provides students the opportunity to collaborate on and contribute to real research across MIT
- Career Advising and Professional Development (CAPD): MIT's hub for career advising, distinguished fellowship advising, pre-health advising, and professional development support

Community

- Student Organizations, Leadership, and Engagement Office: Hub for student engagement and leadership development
- Fraternities, Sororities & Independent Living Groups: Oversees Greek life and Independent Living Groups on campus
- International Students Office: Aids international students in their transition to life in the US
- FLI@MIT: The First Generation and/or Low-income (FLI) program supports the ~30% of undergraduate students who identify with the first generation and/or low-income student experience
- LBGTQ+ Services: Resource for diverse gender, romantic, and sexual identities
- Student Veterans Association: Student-led organization dedicated to veterans and those affiliated with the military

For a more comprehensive list of MIT resources, please see the Accessing Resources module.

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Inclusive Advising & DEIB Practices

MIT believes in the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. We strive to be a genuinely inclusive community of scholars from all walks of life. From MIT's Institute Community & Equity Office:

> *MIT's on-campus population is made up of roughly 4,600 undergraduate students, 7,200 graduate students, 16,000 staff, 1,500 postdocs, and 1,000 faculty; Institute alumni number approximately 147,000. We come from all 50 US states and every country in the world, and we represent a broad range of faiths, races, ethnicities, ages, political views, and socioeconomic backgrounds. MIT's sense of community is defined by our values and how all of us treat each other and by the culture and climate that result from our interactions.*
>
> *To achieve the sense of community we deserve, we must look inward to understand what we can do now, we must look back to learn from our successes and our missteps, and we must look forward to achieve what we aspire to become. If we are not trying to create a culture of inclusive excellence in which all members of the community can do their best work, now and in the future, we are not fulfilling MIT's mission.*

Please see below for the many resources and initiatives that the institute has developed to support its mission:

Resources For Advisors

- Institute Community, and Equity Office (ICEO): Amplifies MIT's sense of community, inspires meaningful conversations, builds skills, and supports new inclusion initiatives
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Data: MIT's Office of Institutional Research generates and maintains a vast repository of data and interactive tools regarding multiple aspects of diversity at the Institute
- Talking About Race: Learn more about how to talk about race from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture.
- Gender Identity Initiatives: Changes to MIT systems that will improve inclusive representation of gender identities while protecting

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individual privacy, enabling greater autonomy, and meeting legal requirements
- Accessibility: Disability and Access Services ensures that students have access to all of MIT's programs, activities, and services.
- Religious Holidays: Learn more about how MIT and Massachusetts State Law regard student absence due to religious beliefs

Programs & Services For Students

- Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES, formerly OME): Promotes academic excellence, builds strong communities, and develops professional mindsets among students of underrepresented minority groups
- Intercultural Engagement: Provides tools, skills and knowledge for students to be champions of diversity and social justice
- International Students Office: Aids international students in their transition to life in the US
- FLI @MIT: The First Generation and/or Low-income (FLI) program supports the ~30% of undergraduate students who identify with the first generation and/or low-income student experience
- LBGTQ+ Services: Resource for diverse gender, romantic, and sexual identities
- Disability Access Service: Provides support and accommodations for students with disabilities

Privacy, FERPA, & Reporting Responsibilities

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

"The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that pertains to the release of and access to student education records. FERPA affords students the right to have access to their education records, the right to seek to have their records amended, and the right to have some control over the disclosure of personally identifiable information

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from their education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under applicable programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education."

Click here for a summary on MIT's policy.

Institute Discrimination & Harassment Response Office (IDHR)
"MIT is committed to providing a working, living, and learning environment free from discrimination and discriminatory harassment for all community members including students, faculty, and staff. While preventing such incidents is a community-wide responsibility, the Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response Office supports community members who have experienced harm to access available resources and reporting options."

Click here for more information support and reporting through IDHR.

Your Role as a Responsible Employee
Whether you are faculty, an academic advisor, or a department administrator, you are considered a "Responsible Employee." This means you are obligated to inform the IDHR Office if you learn of incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, or stalking involving an MIT student.

You can find detailed information and guidance on your responsibilities here.

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V. Advisor Growth, Learning, & Resources

Growing in Your Role as an Advisor

Advising is a dynamic practice. Whether you're a seasoned advisor or are just beginning, there are many resources available at MIT and beyond to support your growth in your role. In this section, we've listed

UAC Resources:
The UAC offers a variety of resources for departmental advisors. You may use any and all of them as they best fit your advising style and logistical needs.

- Departmental Advising Syllabus: an optional tool for departmental advisors who may find it helpful to share a clear, student-friendly overview of their advising approach, expectations, and departmental

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resources. It's designed to be fully customizable — feel free to edit, add, or remove sections to suit your advising style and departmental context. ***Note: this is a view-only document. Please make a copy.***
- Departmental/Faculty Engagements: each semester, the UAC hosts three workshops designed to strengthen and supplement current departmental advising efforts.

Further MIT Resources:

- MIT's Baker Foundation Guidelines for Upperclass Advising: advising guidelines from student group focused on improving the advising experience for upper-level students
- Advising Resources from MIT's Registrar: general overview and landing page for a wide variety of advisor-specific resources
- Faculty Leadership Training Programs: workshops and courses curated for School of Science faculty. Focused on leadership development, professional development for junior, tenure-track faculty
- Programming for New Faculty and Instructors: The MIT Teaching and Learning Lab offers support to new faculty in the form of 1-1 consultations, teaching workshops, and coffee + community

NACADA Resources:

NACADA, the National Academic Advising Association, is the Global Community for Academic Advising and is the leading association globally for the advancement of student success through excellence in academic advising in higher education. Please check out their Faculty Advising web page for an index of resources meant to aid advisors seeking to hone their advising skills.

While some of the titles may only reference faculty, these resources can support ALL departmental advisors at MIT.

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Some articles featured are below:

- Why Faculty Advising Matters
- How to Make the Most of Your Office Hours
- Doing It All: Adding Advising Into Faculty Workloads
- Building Student-Faculty Relationships
- Implications for Faculty Advising
- Faculty Advisor Assessment and Reward
- Professional Advisors and Faculty Advisors: A Shared Goal of Student Success
- The Importance of Face-to-Face Contact Between Faculty and Students
- Email advising: Doing it wrong, doing it right
- Improving Faculty Advising

Collaborating with Academic Administrators & Departmental Staff

As a new departmental advisor, it can be challenging to navigate the sheer breadth and depth of MIT administration. Knowing who to go to when you have questions not only streamlines your advising process, but helps you integrate into your role, your department, and your school within the Institute.

Undergraduate administrators (often referred to as UG Admins in this handbook) are essential points of contact for academic departments and programs. Their responsibilities can include, but are not limited to: "advising and mentoring; faculty advisor appointments; degree lists and graduation preparation; grade reporting; orientation; policy implementation; registration; and UROP and thesis processing."

Undergraduate officers (UGOs) are faculty and senior lecturers who advise students within their departments and support curriculum development.

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They may carry additional responsibilities as well, which vary by department.

You can view the full list of current UG Admins and UGOs and their contact information on the Registrar's website.

Insights from Advising Data & Trends

In May 2024 and May 2025, the Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC) surveyed the classes of 2027 and 2028, respectively, to evaluate first-year students' advising experiences, understanding of the UAC, and expectations for advising beyond their first year. Below is a list of common answers to the question, **"what are you most hoping to get out of your relationship with your departmental advisor?"**

1. Academic Guidance:
    - Many students are looking for advice on course selection, major-specific class scheduling, and planning their academic experience.
    - Specific guidance on navigating major requirements, minors, double majors, and educational pathways such as MEng.
    - 95% of students believe it is important that they can ask their departmental advisor about academic problems.

2. Career Advice:
    - Students are interested in receiving advice on career planning, including guidance on internships, UROP opportunities, and future career paths.
    - Some are specifically looking for advice on graduate school applications and career opportunities in their field of study.

3. Mentorship:

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- There is a desire for a mentor-mentee relationship, where the advisor can provide personal and professional growth opportunities.
- Students hope for a reliable mentor who understands their abilities and interests, and who can support them throughout their college journey and beyond.

4. Personal and Professional Development:
    - Students want to develop a positive and supportive relationship with their advisor, someone they can connect with on both academic and personal levels.
    - They are looking for advisors who can provide insight into life at MIT, extracurricular activities, and navigating the academic and cultural environment.

5. Resource Access and Networking:
    - There is a hope that advisors will help students access resources such as research opportunities, internships, and professional connections.
    - Guidance on leveraging MIT's resources and networks to optimize their academic and professional experiences.
    - 83% of students feel that it is important to them that they can ask their departmental advisor about MIT resources.

6. Individualized Advice:
    - Students want personalized advice that considers their unique academic situations, goals, and interests.
    - Specific guidance tailored to their major and career aspirations, including help with balancing course loads and avoiding burnout.

7. General Support:

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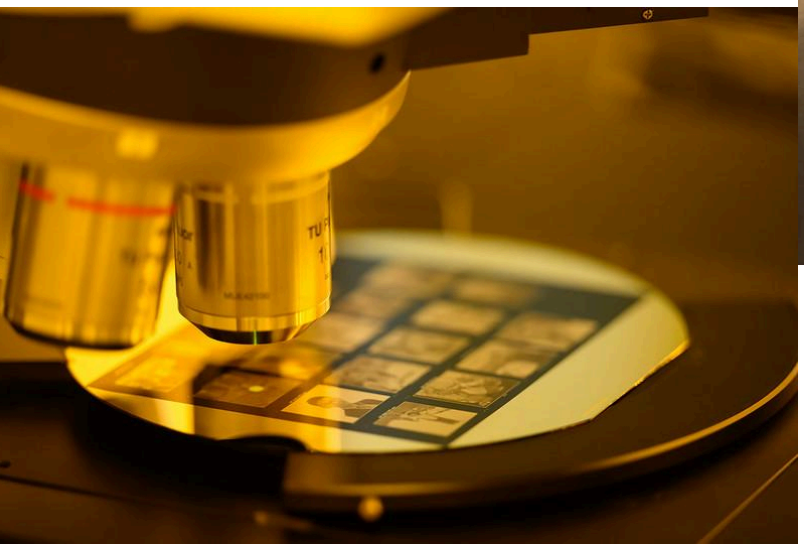
- Students seek overall guidance to navigate their college experience effectively, including understanding MIT policies and making informed decisions.
- Emotional and motivational support to ensure they feel cared for and understood by their advisor.

8. Long-term Relationship:
    - Some students hope to maintain a relationship with their advisor that extends beyond their time at MIT, providing continued support and mentorship in their professional lives.

In summary, students are looking for a multifaceted relationship with their departmental advisor that encompasses academic and career guidance, personal mentorship, access to resources, and long-term support.



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Case Studies & Common Scenarios: UAC & Departmental Advising

The following case studies were developed using the results from the above surveys. Their purpose is to provide examples and guiding questions for advisors encountering
Results from the UAC Survey:

Case Study 1: Navigating Course Load and Credit Limits

Scenario:
A first-year student expresses a strong desire to take more than the credit limit allowed for their first semester at MIT. They are confident in their ability to handle the workload and believe they need to accelerate their progress in order to keep up with peers or advance more quickly toward their goals.

Advising Context:
In this case, the advisor engages the student in a developmental conversation about balancing academic ambition with the realities of transitioning to a new, more rigorous educational environment. The advisor emphasizes that the student has plenty of time to achieve their goals and reassures them that they are not behind.

Guiding Questions:

- How would you approach this conversation to ensure the student feels supported while understanding the importance of balance in their first year?
- How might you address the student's perception of being "behind" compared to their peers?
- What campus resources could be useful in helping the student build a successful academic plan within the credit limits?

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Case Study 2: Skipping Pre-Requisites for Upper-Level Classes

Scenario:
A first-year student is eager to skip introductory courses and enroll in upper-level classes without completing the prerequisites. The student believes they already possess the necessary knowledge from high school and does not see the value in taking pre-requisite courses. They are determined to challenge themselves and are seeking advice on how to bypass these requirements.

Advising Context:
The advisor explains the purpose of pre-requisite courses, which build foundational knowledge necessary for success in upper-level classes. They also clarify that faculty have the discretion to deny a student's enrollment in a course if they are inadequately prepared. Ultimately, the advisor encourages the student to take ownership of their decision while providing guidance on the risks involved.

Guiding Questions:

- How do you navigate a situation where a student insists on skipping prerequisites despite your advice?
- How do you encourage students to take ownership of their academic decisions while also ensuring they understand the potential challenges?
- What role can faculty play in these discussions, and how would you facilitate that communication?

Case Study 3: Mental Health and Reluctance to Seek Support

Scenario:
A sophomore student is struggling with mental health challenges but is reluctant to seek support from MIT's health services or Student Support

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Services (S^3). They express anxiety and discomfort about engaging with these resources but confide in their advisor during a meeting.

Advising Context:
The advisor reassures the student and encourages them to connect with MIT Medical and S^3. They also offer to check in regularly and provide reassurance that seeking help is a normal part of the student experience.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the key considerations when advising a student reluctant to seek mental health support?
- How can you balance providing reassurance with encouraging the student to take proactive steps toward getting help?
- What steps can you take to create a supportive environment that fosters trust and openness in these situations?

Case Study 4: Family Issues and Crisis Intervention

Scenario:
A student dealing with significant family issues, including suicidal ideation, reaches out to their advisor for support. The student has built a trusting relationship with the advisor over time, meeting regularly to check in on both academic and personal matters. The advisor takes immediate action to connect the student with MIT Health and walks the student to S^3 for further support.

Advising Context:
This situation highlights the importance of the advisor-student relationship in crisis situations. The advisor's proactive approach in referring the student to the appropriate resources demonstrates how critical it is for students to know where to go for help.

Guiding Questions:

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- How can you build a trusting relationship with students so that they feel comfortable coming to you in times of crisis?
- What is your role in crisis intervention, and when should you refer students to other services?
- How can you ensure that students are aware of the mental health and support services available to them?

Case Study 5: Reassuring Students About "Being Behind"

Scenario:
Many students, particularly sophomores, express anxiety about feeling "behind" in their academic and career journeys. They worry about not having found internships, not being certain about their major, or not having a clear career direction. In advising sessions, students often seek reassurance and validation that they are on the right track.

Advising Context:
The advisor helps students reframe their concerns by reassuring them that many other students are facing similar challenges. They also guide students toward available resources, such as the Career Advising & Professional Development (CAPD) office, and encourage them to explore opportunities like UROP and MISTI.

Guiding Questions:
- What strategies do you use to reassure students who feel anxious about their academic or career progress?
- How can you normalize feelings of uncertainty and help students feel confident in their unique path?
- What resources can you direct students to that will help them feel more prepared and less anxious?

Results from the Departmental Advising Survey:

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Case Study 1: FLI Students and Culture Shock

Scenario:
A first-generation, low-income (FLI) student contacted their advisor after failing two midterms. The student, coming from a rural area, was used to working alone and found it intimidating to approach faculty or use academic resources like tutoring and office hours. They also struggled to fit in socially at MIT.

Advisor Actions:
The advisor asked questions to understand the student's academic and social challenges, such as:
• What are your study strategies?
• Are you working on problem sets alone or with others?
• What academic resources are you using at MIT?
• Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
• Are external factors impacting your academic performance?

The advisor then connected the student to resources like TSR^2, tutoring, flipping failure study strategies, and Student Support Services (S3). They encouraged the student to work in groups, use active recall, and attend office hours to get extra practice and deeper understanding.

Outcome:
Through these strategies, the student realized that culture shock and isolation were contributing to their academic struggles. Engaging in group work and building faculty relationships improved their confidence and academic performance.

Interactive Questions:

1. What additional questions might you ask this student to better understand their struggles?

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2. What strategies would you suggest for encouraging a student to reach out to faculty if they find it intimidating?
3. How might you help a student from a rural or isolated background adjust to MIT's collaborative environment?
4. What other resources could be recommended to a student experiencing culture shock?

Case Study 2: Mental Health and Academic Performance

Scenario:
A student with a history of anxiety had experienced repeated academic failures despite being in therapy. The advisor initiated bi-weekly check-ins to provide additional support, having learned that less frequent meetings were ineffective in the previous term.

Advisor Actions:
The advisor coordinated with S3 to ensure the student had access to mental health resources and monitored the student's academic progress closely. In an earlier case, the advisor even physically accompanied a student to mental health services to ensure they were connected with the necessary support.

Outcome:
The student appreciated the increased support and regular check-ins, which helped them stay on top of their academics. The advisor's proactive involvement ensured that the student had both academic and mental health support.

Interactive Questions:
1. How would you approach a student who is reluctant to discuss their mental health struggles?
2. What signs might indicate that a student's academic difficulties are linked to mental health concerns?

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3. How can advisors maintain professional boundaries while still providing emotional support to students?
4. What role do regular check-ins play in supporting students with ongoing mental health issues?

Case Study 3: Course Load Management and Overcommitment

Scenario:
A senior math student, after previously overloading on courses and dropping to three classes in earlier semesters, insisted on taking six courses again. The student felt that improvements in their living situation would enable them to handle a heavier load.

Advisor Actions:
The advisor recommended starting with four courses, with the option to add a fifth if the student performed well. This compromise allowed the student to manage a more realistic workload while testing their ability to handle additional courses.

Outcome:
The student agreed to the advisor's suggestion, adding a fifth course later in the term when their performance remained strong. The structured approach helped the student balance their ambitions with academic success.

Interactive Questions:
1. How would you handle a student who insists on taking an overly ambitious course load?
2. What factors would you consider in advising a student about their course selection?
3. How can you support students in setting realistic academic goals while still allowing them to challenge themselves?

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4. What follow-up strategies would you use to ensure the student is managing their course load effectively?

Case Study 4: Building Relationships with Students

Scenario:
An advisor found it challenging to engage a student who seemed disinterested and disengaged. The advisor tried to establish a rapport by having informal "walk-and-talk" meetings and discussing anything that seemed to be on the student's mind.

Advisor Actions:
The advisor shifted the focus of their meetings to casual conversations, modeling curiosity and a love for learning in hopes of inspiring the student. The goal was to help the student see that academic exploration could be enjoyable rather than just about accumulating credits.

Outcome:
The informal approach helped the student open up over time, and they became more engaged in their academic journey, realizing that learning could be both fun and fulfilling.

Interactive Questions:

1. How would you engage a student who appears bored or disengaged during advising meetings?
2. What creative strategies might help build rapport with a student who is reluctant to engage academically?
3. How can you encourage students to slow down and enjoy their learning experience rather than focusing solely on credentials?
4. What methods can you use to build a relationship with a student before academic issues arise?

Case Study 5: Trust and Communication Issues

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Scenario:
A student altered their course registration without informing the advisor, breaking the
advisor's trust. This led the advisor to transfer the student to another advisor, as the relationship had been damaged beyond repair.

Advisor Actions:
The advisor confronted the student about the registration changes with the help of the associate head of the department. After realizing the extent of the issue, the advisor decided that a different advisor would be a better fit for the student.

Outcome:
The student was reassigned to another advisor, but the situation highlighted the importance of maintaining clear communication and trust between students and their advisors.

Interactive Questions:

1. How would you handle a situation where a student breaks your trust by going behind your back with course registration?
2. What steps can you take to ensure open communication with your advisees?
3. How would you rebuild trust with a student after a significant breach of communication?
4. What boundaries should advisors establish to prevent misunderstandings with students?

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Departmental Advisor Handbook

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