

**Strategic Plan for
Graduate Advising and Mentoring at MIT**

DRAFT

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A supplemental document for recommended Tactics for each Strategy can be found [here](#).

Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan provides a framework for MIT to achieve its Vision for excellence in graduate advising and mentoring and has three critical priorities:

- Provide to faculty, thesis supervisors, and graduate students professional development **resources** designed to promote excellence in mentoring and advising. The [Center for Excellence in Graduate Advising and Mentoring](#) will be the primary infrastructure and will be advised by an [Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring](#).
- Develop a **structured feedback system** of evaluation of advising and mentoring that is constructive, fair, and straightforward to implement; fosters continuous improvement; and has appropriate protections.
- **Prevent** negative advising and mentoring experiences as much as possible, and when they occur, **address** them promptly and appropriately. A centralized [Advising and Mentoring Grievance Response Team](#) will serve as an entry point for graduate students to report advising and mentoring grievances.

Center for Excellence
in Graduate
Advising and Mentoring

Advisory Committee

Surveys + Feedback
(Quantitative + Narrative)

Advising and Mentoring
Grievance Response Team

Upon completion of its ongoing robust stakeholder engagement process, the Committee will deliver a final Strategic Plan on Graduate Advising and Mentoring to the Chair of the Faculty, Provost, Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Faculty Policy Committee, Committee on Graduate Programs, and other appropriate offices and committees.



Introduction

A. Background

Graduate students¹ are essential to the MIT Community and are the leaders of tomorrow in their disciplines. One of the important roles of faculty and thesis supervisors is to provide an environment in which graduate students can learn experientially during their research. Typically, graduate students are highly dependent on a faculty member or thesis supervisor for research opportunities, letters of recommendation, authorship credit, and future career support. Moreover, the faculty member or thesis supervisor often has the greatest decision-making authority in whether or not a graduate student is recommended for a degree. For these reasons, graduate students are vulnerable to the power differential between them and their advisor(s). Nevertheless, upon arriving at MIT, our faculty and thesis supervisors often do not have any formal training in or exposure to the principles of excellence in mentorship and advising, and they generally are not provided consistent modes of constructive feedback on their mentoring and advising over the course of their career. Furthermore, the existing processes to mitigate, or enforce accountability for, negative mentoring experiences are opaque and unclear to students.

To address these challenges, the [Refinement and Implementation Committee for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring](#) from the second phase of [Task Force 2021 and Beyond](#), recommended an [Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring](#). This Committee was charged with developing a Strategic Plan for Graduate Advising and Mentoring that would include (a) the creation of a platform for faculty and thesis supervisor professional skill development and lifelong learning in mentorship; (b) mechanisms for graduate student feedback; and (c) normalized, equitable metrics of assessment of mentoring that support professional development and can be readily adopted into performance and promotion reviews.

The resulting Committee was formed in late Spring 2021 and launched its efforts in June 2021. The Committee is co-chaired by Paula Hammond (Institute Professor and Head of the Chemical Engineering Department), and Tim Jamison (Associate Provost and Robert Robinson Taylor Professor of Chemistry), and is composed of a total of 10 graduate students and 11 faculty and staff with representation from the MIT Graduate Student Council ([GSC](#)) and each of the Schools and the College. A list of the names and affiliations of each Committee member is found in [Appendix A](#).

B. Strategic Plan Development and Architecture

¹ For the purpose of this Strategic Plan, graduate students are defined as full-time masters or doctoral program students as well as students in professional programs who are advised/mentored by a faculty member or thesis supervisor. Not included, for example, are students in the Sloan School of Management Executive MBA program.

The development of the Strategic Plan for Graduate Advising and Mentoring described herein builds upon ongoing initiatives led by the Provost's Office, the Chancellor's Office, the Schools and College, and the GSC. These efforts include the MIT response to the [NASEM Report on the Sexual Harassment of Women in Academia](#) including [guaranteed transitional support for graduate students who switch advisors](#); a pilot mentorship training program for faculty in the School of Engineering drawing upon expertise from the [Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research](#) (CIMER); the [MIT Graduate Advising Playbook](#), a list of advising and mentoring best practices developed in 2019; and the Graduate Student Council's (GSC) [Research Advising Survey](#).

Figure 1 summarizes the architectural layout of the Strategic Plan. Included are a [Mission Statement](#), which summarizes the charge of the Committee, and a [Vision Statement](#), which describes the Committee's aspiration for advising and mentoring at MIT. A [Values Statement](#) unique to the charge of this Committee was not developed. Rather, the Committee was guided by the current draft of [MIT's Values Statement](#), along with an understanding of the importance of cultural awareness in mentoring.

The Committee set four **Goals**, listed below. These general themes align with MIT's [Values](#), enable the [Mission](#), and delineate the Committee's [Vision](#) for graduate student advising and mentoring at MIT.

- [Goal 1](#) - Ensure an Institutional Culture of Excellence in Advising and Mentoring
- [Goal 2](#) - Enhance Knowledge and Skills in Effective Advising and Mentorship
- [Goal 3](#) - Incentivize and Reinforce Individual Excellence in Advising and Mentoring
- [Goal 4](#) - Address Negative Advising and Mentoring Experiences

In order to achieve these Goals, the Committee designed 11 specific and measurable **Objectives**. These objectives consider the recommendations from both the [NASEM Report on the Science of Effective Mentorship](#) and the 2021 GSC [Research Advising Survey](#). The Committee developed **Strategies** for meeting each objective and has recommended **Tactics** for their implementation.

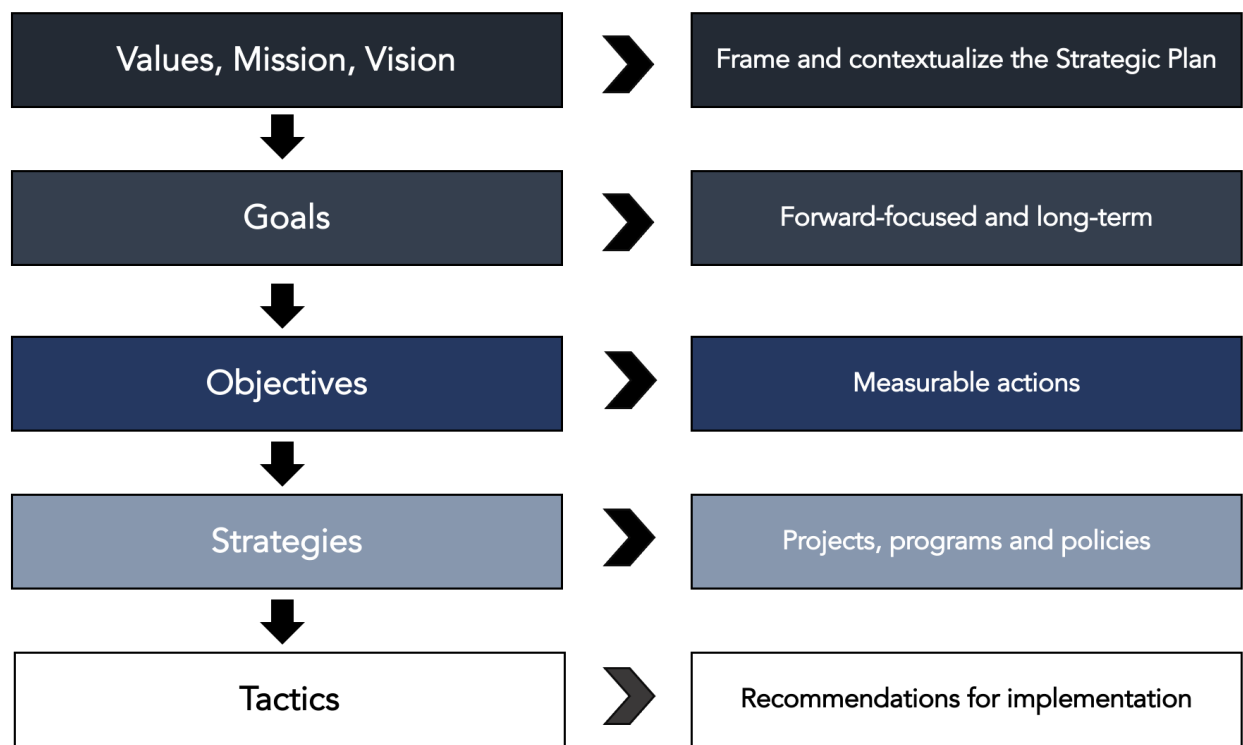


Figure 1. Architectural layout of the Strategic Plan for Graduate Mentoring and Advising.

C. Committee Process

The Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring met 15 times as a group. Four subgroups were formed, each with a focus on one of the four Goals of the strategic plan. Each subgroup developed Strategies and Tactics for each of the Objectives associated with their Goal. Each of these subgroups met several times in addition to the all-group meetings. Meetings of the entire Committee were dedicated to learning about best-practices in the field, related initiatives at MIT, and discussing and revising the recommendations of the subgroups. Revisions were solicited from all Committee members and are reflected in this version of the Plan.

D. How to Read this Strategic Plan

In this document, the Objectives and Strategies for each of the four Goals are provided starting on page 10. Recommended Tactics are presented in a [supplemental document](#).

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring is to develop a strategic plan focused on excellence in graduate student mentoring and advising that provides a platform for skill development for faculty, thesis supervisors, and graduate students; lifelong learning in mentorship; mechanisms for graduate student feedback; and normalized, equitable metrics of assessment of mentoring that can be adopted in faculty development and promotion reviews.

Vision Statement

Our Vision for MIT is a culture of excellence in mentoring and advising, one that fosters the well-being, research, and professional development of *all* graduate students, faculty, and thesis supervisors.

Values Statement

[MIT's Values Statement](#) (currently under development) + culturally aware mentoring.²

² CIMER defines culturally aware mentoring as “mentoring practices in which mentors recognize their own culturally shaped beliefs, perceptions, and judgments and are cognizant of cultural differences and similarities between themselves and their mentees.”

Essential Infrastructure

Excellence in advising and mentoring requires that resources and support be available to all faculty, thesis supervisors and graduate students across MIT. The Committee therefore proposes that MIT expand its current infrastructure to include the following:

- Center for Excellence in Graduate Advising and Mentoring
- Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring
- Advising and Grievance Response Team

1. MIT's Center for Excellence in Graduate Advising and Mentoring

As illustrated in Figure 2 left, the **primary role** of the **Center** would be to offer an array of **programming** including professional development workshops, as well as to provide **tools and other resources to graduate students, faculty and thesis supervisors** to support excellence in advising and mentoring. Such offerings are detailed in [Goal 2](#), and further elaborated upon in the [supplemental document](#). The Center would also support and provide expertise to stakeholders in the implementation of select Strategies defined within [Goal 1](#), [Goal 3](#) and [Goal 4](#).

As one of the primary functions of the Center is to develop and provide professional development resources for faculty and thesis supervisors, the Center would reside within the Office of the Provost and would be led by full-time, PhD-level personnel, as is the case in comparable Centers at other academic institutions.

2. Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring

As illustrated in Figure 2 right, the **primary role** of the **Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring** would be to serve as an **advisory body to MIT's Center for Excellence in Graduate Advising and Mentoring**. It would also stay apprised on trends in advising and mentoring across MIT, raise awareness of resources and best practices in advising and mentoring, as well as work closely with stakeholders on select Strategies described throughout the Plan.

The Committee would be a Standing Institute Committee that reports to the Chancellor. That the Center reports to the Provost and is advised by a Committee that reports to the Chancellor exemplifies the shared responsibility of faculty and graduate students in the professional relationship. The Committee would have a rotating chair with a membership described below.

Committee Membership

Rotating Committee Chair + Faculty Members (5 faculty total) - Chair of [CGP](#) or designee + Chair of [FPC](#) (Chair of the Faculty) or designee + two faculty members who have demonstrated a commitment to mentoring and advising.

Graduate Students (5 total) - GSC President + four appointed graduate students.

Staff (5 total) - Senior Associate Dean of OGE or their designee + Director of TLL or their designee + three Graduate Administrators.



Figure 2. Summary of MIT’s Center for Excellence in Graduate Advising and Mentoring and the Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring.

3. **Advising and Mentoring Grievance Response Team**

The **primary role** of the **Advising and Mentoring Grievance Response Team** would be to serve as an entry point for graduate students to report a grievance (Strategy 4.2.1). The Team would make DLC Heads aware of potential response options upon a graduate student filing a grievance, and would prepare an annual aggregated report that is shared with the MIT community.

This Team would be a centralized resource chaired by the Vice Chancellor or designee within the Office of the Vice Chancellor. It would be composed of representatives from OGE and/or IDHR and/or HR. Two faculty members experienced with graduate advising and mentoring matters would serve in a consulting capacity. The duration of service in this role for faculty members would be anticipated to be two years.

GOAL 1

Ensure an Institutional Culture of Excellence in Advising and Mentoring

Objective 1.1

Define excellence and communicate the definitions throughout MIT.

Strategy 1.1.1

Determine the attributes that define a culture of excellence in graduate advising and mentoring.

Strategy 1.1.2

Communicate the attributes that define a culture of excellence in graduate advising and mentoring.

Objective 1.2

Provide Institutional resources designed to foster excellence.

Strategy 1.2.1

Develop a Center that provides resources to faculty, thesis supervisors and graduate students to support excellence in advising and mentoring.

Objective 1.3

Incentivize excellence throughout the organization.

Strategy 1.3.1

Incentivize and reward DLCs that collectively excel in graduate advising and mentoring.

Strategy 1.3.2

Identify and highlight advising and mentoring best practices that have been demonstrated in the Schools, the College, and the DLCs.

Objective 1.4

Assess MIT's progress in advising and mentoring on an ongoing basis.

Strategy 1.4.1

Conduct assessments to identify Institute, School, College, and DLC trends in graduate advising and mentoring.

Strategy 1.4.2

Review and discuss with appropriate protections the results of Strategy 1.4.1.

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GOAL 2

Enhance Knowledge and Skills in Effective Advising and Mentoring

Objective 2.1

Provide faculty and thesis supervisors with evidence-based resources that support excellence in advising and mentoring.

Strategy 2.1.1

Provide professional development workshops for faculty and thesis supervisors.

Strategy 2.1.2

Increase awareness of resources that support faculty and thesis supervisors in their roles as graduate advisors and mentors.

Strategy 2.1.3

Establish programs and provide discussion opportunities to share experiences and best practices.

Objective 2.2

Provide graduate students with evidence-based resources that enable them to establish and maintain effective mentorships.

Strategy 2.2.1

Provide information to graduate students on how to establish a mentoring network.

Strategy 2.2.2

Provide workshops and information to graduate students on how to excel as *mentees*.

Strategy 2.2.3

Provide workshops and information to graduate students on how to excel as *mentors*.

Strategy 2.2.4

Increase awareness of resources for the professional development of graduate students.

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GOAL 3

Incentivize and Reinforce Individual Excellence in Advising and Mentoring

Objective 3.1

Include consideration of advising and mentoring plans in the hiring of faculty.

Strategy 3.1.1

Encourage graduate advising and mentoring statements in applications for faculty positions.

Strategy 3.1.2

Provide best practices to search committees for evaluating the graduate advising and mentoring potential of faculty candidates.

Strategy 3.1.3

Discuss graduate advising and mentoring with faculty candidates during their interviews.

Objective 3.2

Use structured feedback systems both to evaluate the mentorship competencies of faculty and thesis supervisors and foster continuous improvement.

Strategy 3.2.1

Implement two-way feedback mechanisms for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Strategy 3.2.2

Establish annual assessments to evaluate the advising and mentoring experiences of all graduate students.

Strategy 3.2.3

Conduct exit surveys of graduate students.

Strategy 3.2.4

Include graduate student feedback in annual merit performance review and promotion and tenure processes.

Objective 3.3

Incentivize and recognize faculty and thesis supervisors for exceptional advising and mentoring.

Strategy 3.3.1

Incentivize faculty and thesis supervisors to be proactive in amplifying their advising and mentoring practices.

Strategy 3.3.2

Create an Institute-level award that recognizes excellence in mentoring and advising.

Strategy 3.3.3

Highlight demonstrated excellence in advising and mentoring throughout the Institute.

GOAL 4

Address Negative Advising and Mentoring Experiences

Objective 4.1

Enhance support for graduate students experiencing negative advising and mentoring situations.

Strategy 4.1.1

Identify a centralized Advising and Mentoring Grievance Response Team.

Strategy 4.1.2

Raise awareness of resources whose aims include fostering reconciliation (when possible and appropriate) between graduate students and faculty or thesis supervisors.

Strategy 4.1.3

Raise awareness of the options available to graduate students for formal and informal reporting of advising and mentoring grievances.

Strategy 4.1.4

Increase awareness of [Potential Outcomes and Sanctions](#) and [MIT's non-retaliation policies](#).

Strategy 4.1.5

Amplify awareness of the [Guaranteed Transitional Support Program](#) for graduate students who wish to change research advisors or groups.

Strategy 4.1.6

Provide DLC Heads with information and resources for addressing advising and mentoring grievances.

Objective 4.2

Enhance existing reporting processes, intervention mechanisms, corrective measures, and protections.

Strategy 4.2.1

Establish options for informal and formal reporting of an advising and mentoring grievance.

Strategy 4.2.2

Implement resolution practices and enforce retaliation policies related to advising and mentoring grievances.

Strategy 4.2.3

Enhance the EthicsPoint Hotline for graduate students who wish to report an advising and mentoring grievance using this mechanism.

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APPENDIX A

Committee Members

Co-chairs and staff

- **Paula Hammond** (Co-Chair) - Institute Professor of Chemical Engineering and Department Head
- **Tim Jamison** (Co-Chair) - Professor of Chemistry and Associate Provost
- **Rachel Beingessner** (Staff to the Committee) - Director of Special Projects, Office of the Associate Provost
- **Lauren Pouchak** (Staff to the Committee) - Director of Special Projects, Office of the Vice Chancellor

Students

- **Noam Buckman** – Mechanical Engineering, School of Engineering, GSC Nominee
- **Paula do Vale Pereira** – Aeronautics and Astronautics, School of Engineering, GSC Nominee
- **Alvin Harvey** – Aeronautics and Astronautics, School of Engineering
- **Laurel Kinman** – Biology, School of Science
- **Levi Knippel** – Chemistry, School of Science
- **Luis Kumanduri** – Mathematics, School of Science
- **Zanele Munyikwa** - Information Technology, Sloan School of Management
- **Devora Najjar** – Media Arts and Sciences, School of Architecture and Planning
- **Cynthia Ni** - Chemical Engineering, School of Engineering
- **Gabrielle Robbins** – History, Anthropology, Science, Technology and Society, School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

Staff and Faculty

- **Lourdes Aleman** - Associate Director for Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Lab
- **Suraiya Baluch** - Associate Dean for Graduate Student Advising, Office of Graduate Education
- **Amy Keating** - Professor of Biology and Biological Engineering, Associate Department Head, Biology
- **Leslie Kolodziejski** - Professor of Electrical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- **Joe Paradiso** - Professor and Associate Academic Head, Media Arts and Sciences
- **Heather Paxson** (January 1, 2022 - present) - Professor and Head, Anthropology
- **Ray Reagans** - Professor of Management and Work and Organization Studies, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Sloan School of Management
- **Brad Skow** (June 2, 2021 - December 31, 2021) - Professor of Philosophy, Linguistics and Philosophy