

**Year 3 Public Description of Work for  
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

MIT

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

**Relevant Rubric Area(s): Prevention; Remediation, Organization Change**

**Background and Vision** – Building upon ongoing Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) initiatives, MIT’s [Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring](#) envisions a culture of excellence in mentoring and advising at MIT, one that fosters the wellbeing, research, and professional development of all graduate students, faculty, and thesis supervisors.

Graduate students 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, and more. 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 and/or ensure accountability for negative mentoring experiences are opaque and unclear to students.

**Committee and Strategic Planning** – To address these challenges, MIT’s Task Force 2021 and Beyond recommended the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring. The committee was charged with developing a strategic plan to guide policies and programs that support excellence in graduate advising and mentoring at MIT.

The Ad Hoc Committee—composed 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—launched its efforts in June 2021. Members met 15 times as a group and formed subcommittees for each of the four goals in the draft strategic plan (outlined below). The [draft strategic plan](#) was sent to the entire MIT community for review on April 27, 2022 and is expected to be finalized June 2022. Implementation would occur over the next several years.

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The four goals outlined by the draft strategic plan are:

- 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

It is important to note that this effort is inspired by and builds on ongoing initiatives led by MIT's Provost's Office, the Chancellor's Office, the Schools and the College, and the NASEM Report on the Science of Effective Mentorship in STEMM and Report on the Sexual Harassment of Women in Academia. Those efforts include [guaranteed transitional support for graduate students who switch advisors](#) (the progress of which was submitted to the 2021 Action Collaborative); 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; and the GSC's [Research Advising Survey](#).

**Next Steps for Meeting Our Goals** – The Ad Hoc Committee proposes to meet these priorities by expanding MIT's current infrastructure of resources and support for all faculty, thesis supervisors, and graduate students to include:

- The establishment of a **Center for Excellence in Advising and Mentoring** that would offer programs and resources to faculty, thesis supervisors, and graduate students across MIT to support excellence in advising and mentoring. 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.
- The creation of an **Institute Committee on Graduate Advising and Mentoring** 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, and work closely with stakeholders on select strategies described throughout the strategic plan. This would be a Standing Institute Committee that reports to the Chancellor. The Center reporting to the Provost and being advised by a Committee that reports to the Chancellor exemplifies the shared responsibility of faculty and graduate students in the professional relationship.
- The establishment of an **Advising and Mentoring Grievance Response Team** that would augment the resources of the Institute for addressing negative advising and mentoring experiences and serve as an entry point for graduate students to report concerns. 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 the Office of Graduate Education and/or the Institute Discrimination & Harassment Response Office and/or Human Resources. Two faculty members experienced with graduate advising and mentoring matters would serve in a consulting capacity.

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The program is responsive to the following elements of the 2018 NASEM Report Rubric:

- **Prevention:**
  - ***Civility or Respect Promotion Programs:*** This is an effort by MIT to better equip both mentors and mentees with the skillset to improve civility. The draft strategic plan includes a list of essential competencies and expectations of mentors and mentees, including discussing/agreeing on what mentors expect from mentees, and vice versa; communicating effectively; fostering wellbeing by creating achievable workload assignments and reflecting on/incorporating the components of work-life balance; and addressing equity and inclusion by reflecting on biases and assumptions and the mentor fostering a welcoming work environment. Workshops that build civility skillsets are also part of the plan: Goal 2 proposes providing “faculty and thesis supervisors with evidenced-based resources that support excellence in advising and mentoring,” through MIT-level workshops focused on enhancing skills and knowledge on essential advising and mentoring competencies, tailored to faculty at different career stages and fields. Pilot workshops included cultivating ethical behavior and addressing equity.
  - ***Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values*** aligns with Goal 1 of the draft strategic plan: to “Ensure an institutional culture of excellence in advising and mentoring” by “defin[ing] excellence and communicat[ing] the definition throughout MIT.” The recommended tactics for doing this include determining the attributes that define a culture of excellence in graduate advising and mentoring, which would include a statement on how mentoring and advising relate to MIT’s [Values Statement](#).
- **Remediation:**
  - MIT’s draft strategic plan’s Goal 4, “Address[ing] negative advising and mentoring experiences,” proposes increased resources to address negative advising and the creation of a new centralized grievance team of subject-matter experts. This would also include:
    - raising awareness of the options available to graduate students for formal and informal grievance reporting as well as of resources for fostering reconciliation (when possible and appropriate);
    - increasing awareness of possible outcomes, sanctions, and non-retaliation policies;
    - enhancing existing reporting processes and enforcing policies; and
    - enhancing the [EthicsPoint hotline](#) for students who wish to report

**Website for further information (if applicable):** <https://gradadvisingmentoring.mit.edu/>

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