



Graduate Student Council

of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The MIT Graduate Student Council is the graduate student government on campus, representing over 6000 graduate students. The GSC is primarily concerned with promoting the general welfare and concerns of the graduate student body, and communicating with the MIT Faculty and Administration on its behalf.

Graduate students attribute much of the satisfaction and productivity in their academic experience to the quality of advising they receive and to the working relationship with their advisors. Based on the experience of generations of MIT graduate students, we offer the following suggestions to incoming MIT faculty.

Graduate Student Mentorship and Advising

Be direct about the following logistical issues:

- Work Expectations: Discuss mutual expectations regarding work schedules, work ethics, project deliverables.
- Funding: Provide an outline of current and future funding availability to allow student a reasonable time to seek alternative sources. Update these discussions regularly.
- Thesis Expectations: Schedule regular meetings to facilitate the early identification and resolution of potential thesis-related issues.

Be a skills consultant to help increase your students' aptitude in:

Scientific Ethics, People Skills, Leadership, Teamwork, Creative Thinking, Communication, Teaching, Planning, Time Management

Graduate Student Resources

The following resources are available for graduate students, which serve to complement graduate advising by MIT faculty:

When graduate students need help:

Ombuds Office, <http://web.mit.edu/ombud>
MIT Mental Health Services, <http://web.mit.edu/medical/>
MIT Board of Chaplains, http://web.mit.edu/dsl/religious_life.html
Office of the Dean of Graduate Students, <http://web.mit.edu/gso>

Graduate Student Life:

MIT Graduate Student Council, <http://gsc.mit.edu>
Graduate Students Office, <http://web.mit.edu/gso>
International Student's Office, <http://web.mit.edu/iso>

Career Advising:

MIT Careers Office, <http://web.mit.edu/career/www>

The MIT Careers Office (MITCO) provides a bridge between academic life and professional development and career preparation. MITCO serves as a resource for graduate students considering either an academic career or a career beyond academe. Each year many graduate students attend MITCO's workshops and panels as well as *individual counseling sessions*.

Graduate Student Mentorship Wisdom

Taken from: Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend

The Council of Graduate Schools (1995) cites Morris Zelditch's useful summary of a mentor's multiple roles: "Mentors are advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models, of identity, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic."

MENTORSHIP

ADVICE FOR NEW MENTORS

For most people, good mentoring, like good teaching, is a skill that is developed over time. Here are a few tips for beginners:

- ▶ **Listen patiently.** Give the student time to get to issues they find sensitive or embarrassing.
- ▶ **Build a relationship.** Simple joint activities—walks across campus, informal conversations over coffee, attending a lecture together—will help to develop rapport. Take cues from the student as to how close they wish this relationship to be. (See "Sexual harassment" in section on Population-diversity issues.)
- ▶ **Don't abuse your authority.** Don't ask students to do personal work, such as mowing lawns, baby-sitting, and typing.
- ▶ **Nurture self-sufficiency.** Your goal is not to "clone" yourself but to encourage confidence and independent thinking.
- ▶ **Establish "protected time" together.** Try to minimize interruptions by telephone calls or visitors.
- ▶ **Share yourself.** Invite students to see what you do, both on and off the job. Tell of your own successes and failures. Let the student see your human side and encourage the student to reciprocate.
- ▶ **Provide introductions.** Help the student develop a professional network and build a community of mentors.
- ▶ **Be constructive.** Critical feedback is essential to spur improvement, but do it kindly and temper criticism with praise when deserved.
- ▶ **Don't be overbearing.** Avoid dictating choices or controlling a student's behavior.
- ▶ **Find your own mentors.** New advisers, like new students, benefit from guidance by those with more experience.

TIPS

CAREER ADVICE

Summary Points

- ▶ Advise students that a career is seldom a straight line to an imagined goal. Careers today are usually a series of "branching decision points" requiring an increasing degree of flexibility and versatility.
- ▶ Suggest a balance between breadth and specialization. Too much breadth might not provide needed expertise; overspecialization can be perilous if a "hot" field or technique suddenly cools.
- ▶ Don't regard your students as clones of yourself. All students are unique and need to be encouraged to find their own paths.
- ▶ Encourage off-campus internships and part-time or temporary jobs. There is no substitute for practical experience in the workplace.
- ▶ Introduce students to members of your own professional network.
- ▶ Be aware of local resources for job-seekers, including your institution's career center, bulletin boards, Internet sites (see "Resources"), and professional meetings where jobs are advertised.
- ▶ Keep in touch with job-seekers' progress by discussing results of their interviews and job applications. Be a partner in the job search.

The above is adapted from: "Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend -On being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering", National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. 1997

This reference also has an excellent bibliography on many topics of interest to new faculty members.