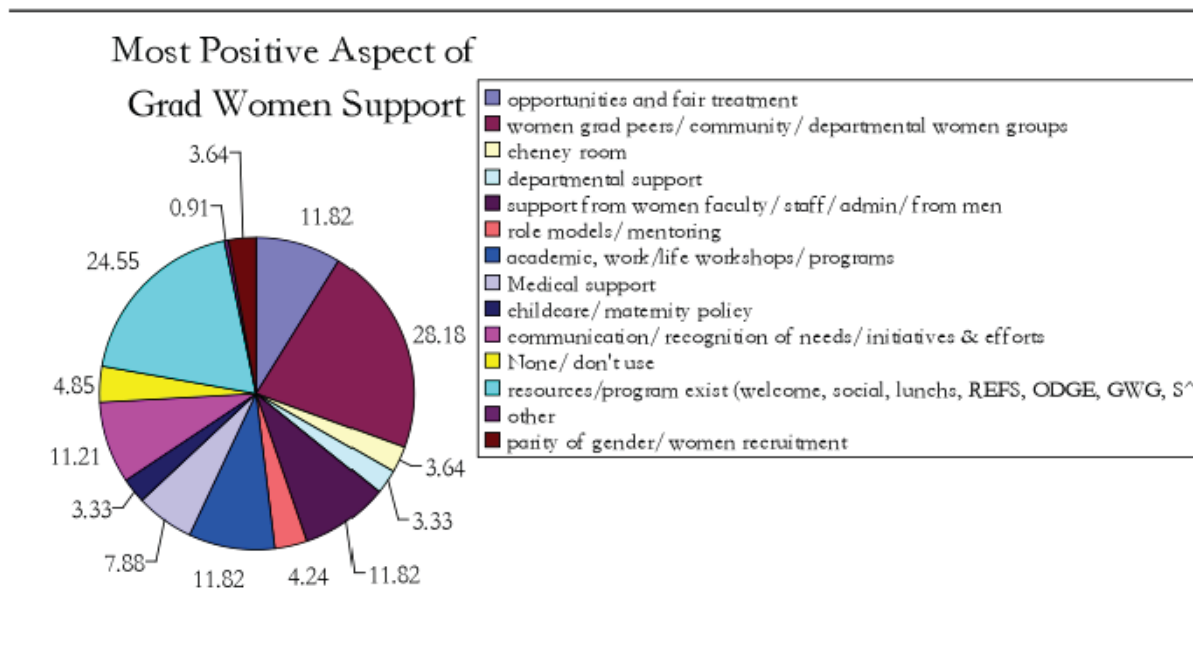


Graduate Women Student Support Survey 2009 Open Comments, Themes and Highlights



Themes and Quotes

Opportunities and fair treatment

Overall respondents do not feel discrimination – they receive fair treatment, respect, and sometimes even more opportunities compared to male peers.

“That gender does not play a role in the evaluation of the work we do. I have found that the MIT community judges the content of the work, and not the individual.”

“Overall you get the feeling when you are at MIT that women are well regarded and valued as part of the MIT culture.”

“In general, I have never felt that I have been unfairly treated or poorly as a female graduate student at MIT. Thus, many of these support services are just not necessary for me.”

“Having better access to women alum across a diversity of industries and roles is essential.”

“Because the issue of women students is an active one at the institution, it seems like I get more support for my projects and activities than I would elsewhere.”

Parity of Gender and Women Recruitment

There are 50% female students in the department or increasing representation of women in the department.

“I am fortunate to have enough graduate women in my lab, that I can get some of the advice and support I need.”

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“Seem to be fairly good at recruiting women, for example, more women here than in the same department at Harvard.”

Departmental Support

Overall respondents feel supported by their individual departments and schools.

“My department shows strong support for women in the classroom and in its admissions process.”

“My department seems to be very supportive toward graduate women, as many are mothers and seem happy and able to balance work/school with family, although I can't attest personally to this. I feel supported and that my department cares most about my well-being and success.”

“My department is very engaged in helping women both through personal networking and helping us voice and solve our concerns. This has made an enormous difference in helping me build confidence in my work and deal with motherhood issues. The 2-month maternity financial support is a wonderful initiative.”

Support from Individual Faculty and Staff

Overall respondents feel supported and encouraged by either their entire faculty or individual members, in their departments and schools.

“The most positive aspect to me is the involvement, visibility, and success of female faculty members since this has a positive impact on the culture in which female graduate students must engage on a day-to-day basis and also has the potential to provide important role models.”

“I feel supported and encouraged by both men and women faculty in my department and I am lucky to have a woman advisor and mentor.”

Role Models and Mentoring

Overall respondents feel that they have the opportunity to have mentors.

“My academic advisor is a woman and she is a great role model for me. I feel very lucky to have mentoring from her!”

“In my department there is a strong commitment to supporting female grad students and it's been increasingly effective. Interestingly the thing I have found most supportive has been an increase in the number of female postdocs in my division - they do more mentoring than the faculty.”

“I am finding many informal mentors in my program among students and faculty, but have not received any formal support.”

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Open Comments, Themes and Highlights

Resources and Programs Exist

These include both offices (ODGE and S³), events (graduate women welcome, social events, and lunches) and support groups (graduate women's groups and REFs program).

"During recruitment and in my first months at MIT, I was impressed with the women's welcome events. These were extremely welcoming and have created many of the networks that I maintain today."

"Once I became aware of all of the services available to graduate women I felt very supported in a broad range of ways. I think the very diversity of support services (academic, health, personal, professional) is fantastic."

Communication, Recognition of Needs, and Initiatives and Efforts

"There is space for voicing concerns and the resources."

"The ability to create new programs that are relevant to current students."

"I think some sort of awareness regarding the challenges that women face in professions with overwhelming male presence is important and think some collective action around this is essential."

"The fact that there is an acknowledgement that this is something important, that needs to be offered! This is half the battle in most places I have studied/worked at."

"There is clearly an initiative to address women's issues at MIT, and the effort (including this survey) is an excellent start. It is important to maintain and perhaps increase this initiative, but without making it a larger issue than it is. I feel there may be a danger in over-emphasizing women's' need to have extra support, but the support structure must still be there."

Workshops and Programs that Focus on Work- Life Balance

"Encouragement for women to take on leadership role and balance work and life."

"I love the graduate women's book group and Path of Professorship. I like the Graduate Women's Lunches, especially when half of the time is taken by a speaker."

"It's nice to see female faculty at women receptions and to hear their stories, especially how to raise a family and be a faculty member at the same time. It would be great to have more women role models."

"Participating in workshop or sessions on how to strongly communicate and realizing through sharing with other students that some behavioral patterns/comments from men are rather

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stereotyping women in general and that one has to try to not take them personally. Getting inspiration from seminar speakers, who freely share what challenges they had to face.”

Graduate Women: Individual Peers, Community as a Whole, and Departmental Groups

Overall respondents feel that there is peer support along with a supportive environment and student run women groups.

“There are a number of outstanding graduate women who have been the champions for support, respect, and resources MIT provides to graduate women students. Some departments and faculty members are also particularly supportive.”

“I can communicate with other women who can understand my problem easily.”

“I got a lot of support from various women groups at MIT in my first year. Now I am a senior graduate student and don't attend many social events anymore, but still, it is nice to know that there are a lot of resources available for woman graduate students and to feel that I belong to a community and not alone.”

“The support really comes from my peers, with financial support from the department donors. This is good because students can keep things pretty simple and still be an effective support network, and I like having the opportunity to contribute.”

Childcare and Maternity Policy

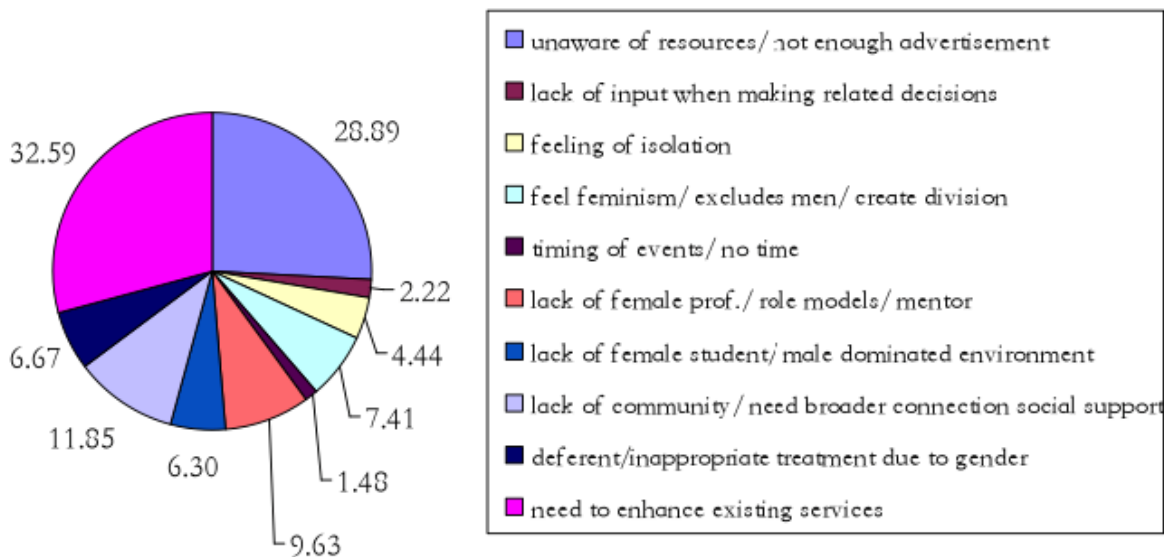
“Childbirth accommodation policy made it possible for me to continue my studies while having a second child.”

“The Childbirth Accommodation Insurance Pool will be extremely useful for when I will have my baby. This is a fantastic support and also recognition.”

“The paid maternity leave is wonderful -- should be extended to a whole term, though.”

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**Most Negative Aspect of
Grad Women Support**



Themes and Quotes

Unaware of Resources

Overall respondents are not aware of Institute-wide resources or feel that there is a strong lack of advertisement of resources.

“Though there are many support mechanisms, the fact that I am a third year graduate student and was not aware of a majority of them means that they are not well advertised. These opportunities should be better communicated so that women can find support in order to deal with issues head on. I was not aware of any of the support until after I had gone through many negative experiences.”

Feel Lack of Community

Overall respondents state the need for broader connections and social support.

“Still very difficult to establish a community across graduate women when people are in split across many different places (lab, etc.) Difficult to address tougher issues like advisor relations.”

“No central forum or group for women students.”

“Lack of understanding of resources available to me here as a woman and feeling like I'm not part of a larger support network.”

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“Could be more interaction between women groups across departments. Need better ways of publicizing or disseminating information.”

Feelings of Isolation

“I just feel isolated-- all I know about is my department's support for students generally (no women-specific groups), NOTHING from the Institute-wide perspective that addresses my experiences as a woman.”

“Isolation. Feeling that being a woman is no different than being a man (it is...even though we like to deny it).”

“lonely, very few female peers to lend support. Very few opportunities to connect with the male populations in the MIT community.”

Lack of Female Graduate Peers

Overall respondents feel that MIT is lacking in the number of graduate women and feel that they are operating a very male-dominated environment.

“MIT can be a very male-dominated, engineering-like place which can sometimes be more challenging for women to operate in.”

“As the only female student in my program in my year, I had a very traumatic first year and encountered very negative attitudes from many classmates just for being a woman. I didn't really find support until my second year and beyond, and I think it would have changed my life if I had been somehow contacted by some counselor or mentor during this time.”

Lack of Role Models and Mentors

Overall respondents feel a lack of faculty mentors – especially female faculty mentors.

“It would be great if there were good female faculty role models, but MIT is a place where work and money come before family and personal lives. MIT therefore attracts faculty that put work before family. For me, the support events and groups have helped, but ultimately, they cannot make MIT a place that is attractive for those of us who would like a more balanced life with family and career. “

“I feel that the female faculty members in my department have no interest in mentoring women or dealing with problems specific to women and I wish they were more receptive to our needs and less bitter about their own experiences.”

“Women have problems specific to their gender that should be addressed, particularly when it comes to career development. We should be made more aware of what things our gender generally does worse so that we can consciously work on them. I would love to have more

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connections with alumnae because hearing about their paths and their experiences is enormously helpful.”

“little access to female role models who balance work, life, and family”

“There are far far more female grad students in my department than female faculty, and it isn't fair to the faculty to be responsible for mentoring all of us.”

Lack of input when making related decisions

“While individuals within MIT work hard to support students, MIT as an institution seems to want to make it difficult for those individuals. The need for students to have to continuously fight the institution to keep in place the support system is a big problem. Ex. laying off support staff, cutting childcare opportunities, discussions about taking away the Margaret Cheney room...”

Singling Out Women Excludes Men and Creates Division

Respondents feel graduate women support is over-emphasizing the distinction between men and women. Also feel that many support programs should also involve men as many issues require shared responsibility and education of both genders.

“Singling out women (or any minority) and giving them special advantage causes men to have animosity towards women from being excluded, which sustains the very problem you are trying to solve. Moreover, many issues, such as having a baby, are normally associated with only women, but it is important to include men who are interested in hearing about these issues, because it is important for them to understand what it is that their partners are going through so they can be supportive.”

“I was disturbed by how much the focus of this survey was on helping women "deal with difficult situations with their advisors." I think that it is completely wrongheaded to put the onus on women. I have seen absolutely no evidence of diversity and sensitivity training for men. That has honestly made me feel less welcomed than anything else. I have received a lot of info about family and health, which is nice, but it really makes me feel like I'm being treated as a walking uterus.”

“Focusing so much on doing things "women-only" can sometimes be detrimental because we will interact with other male colleagues in our careers. It is good to have many events with just females, but maybe a few on certain topics/formats should include graduate and faculty men.”

“I think men need to also understand how to handle uncomfortable and stressful situations when it involves women. They need to get training and get accustomed to having women supervisors or co-workers. Men need to learn how to inclusive and start situations or conversations when most women feel excluded such discussing American football when there foreigners or women that do not understand this topic.”

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Negative and Inappropriate Treatment Due to Gender

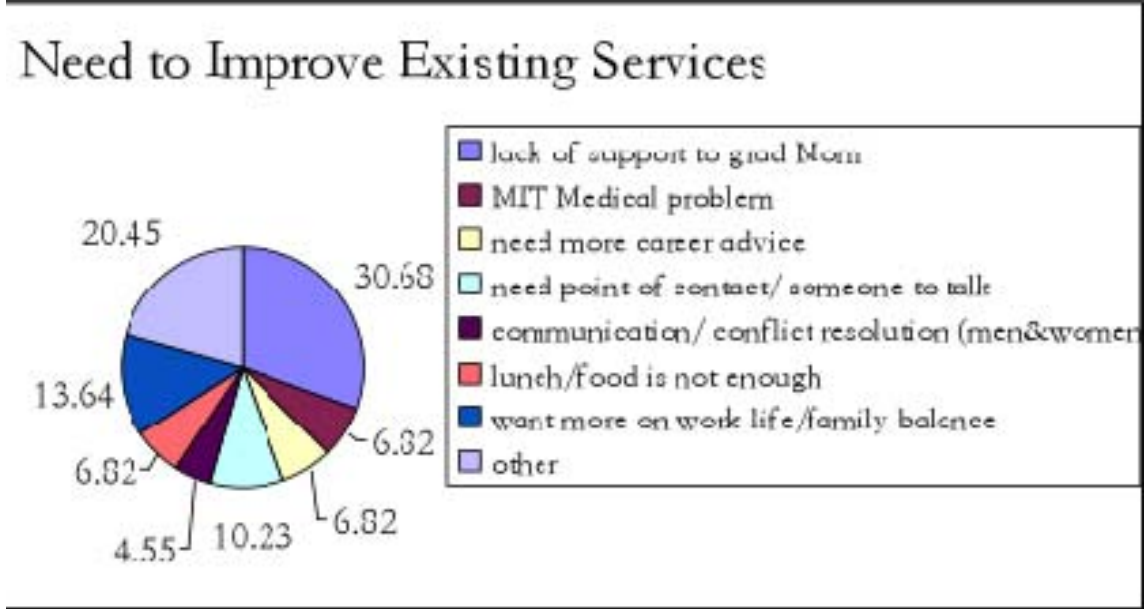
“Sexual and inappropriate comments used in the classroom, especially frequent in the entrepreneurship courses and community associated at Sloan.”

“There is a sense that women only get into the science graduate programs because they are female.”

“In the just over a year I have been at MIT, I have been told that I will be a bad mother because I plan on working, that I must a lesbian to have liked math and science, that I got in because of affirmative action, I have had comments made about my sex life, and I have been given advice on “how to attract a man” (despite the known fact that I am engaged). In general I have felt excluded and harassed. I don’t see any programs at MIT aimed at fixing attitudes about what is acceptable to say or do to female students.”

“My advisor treats women completely unequally, blocks their career and research and group resources are exclusively given to male colleagues.”

**Graduate Women Student Support Survey 2009
Open Comments, Themes and Highlights**



Themes and Quotes

Need Point of Women Specific Point of Contact

Overall respondents would like an individual or group of individuals that they trust and can go to specifically to discuss issues.

“The review and disciplinary structure for MIT faculty and staff is very poor from my vantage point. I DO NOT DARE report anything for a strong fear of retribution. I have witnessed incredibly inappropriate behavior of faculty members to myself and my peers, all of whom feel the same way.”

“I have tried to contact as many MIT offices as possible including the Dean's office, my departmental leadership, the Ombuds office, and others about my struggles as a student at MIT which I think are shared among many women students I know, but I have found the staff and leadership very unresponsive and disempowering.”

“Even if you go to the support places (ombudsman, deans office) they all basically just say "yeah, sorry you're screwed. your professor can do whatever they want." the dean also knows my advisor, which I think would make me hesitant to think my concerns are fairly discussed, so I don't even bother anymore.”

Want Improved Communication and Conflict Resolution

“I wouldn't say it's exactly negative, but I do think some male professors I have worked with had a hard time communicating well with women, not technically, but in regards to project motivation, expectations, etc. I think some of my past work would have gone a little smoother with more open discussion from my advisors.”

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Food Events Are Not Enough

“Sometimes support feels condescending - lunch in a special room is not really that helpful.”

“MIT as an institute seems to think that supporting graduate women boils down to holding seminars and introducing MIT graduate women to other women so that we can form some sort of feminine support group. This kind of boils down to “hey women let’s circle the wagons,” and doesn’t necessarily translate into an environment where women are treated equally and with respect.”

Want More Events Focused on Work-Life Balance

“My lab is 80% men and I feel that there is not a good sense of work/life balance. Even my female advisor seems to devote every waking minute to research and has been critical of my involvement in community activities/groups. I'd really like to stay at MIT to pursue a PhD after I finish my Master's, but I can't see myself staying in an environment where I'm discouraged from having a life outside of the lab. I especially can't imagine spending the next seven years of my life feeling implicitly discouraged from having a relationship (and perhaps, eventually, a family).”

“There is little or no support in terms of work-life balance. I continue to struggle with this aspect and find little or no support on how to deal with this aspect.”

“I guess the main negative aspect is our own insecurity regarding how we will be able to balance work/life later on in our careers, and what career paths allow you to have a good balance. Getting in touch with women alumni that can tell us about their experience in different careers would be great.”

How to Improve Support to Grad Moms

