The 2013 Student Quality of Life Survey, administered in March 2013, included several opportunities for students to provide open text comments. This document summarizes six of the open-ended survey questions:

1. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most positive aspects of the current MIT environment for you. (3,412 total comments)

2. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most negative aspects of the current MIT environment for you. (3,279 total comments)

3. Please list up to three places, groups, or activities on campus where you feel especially welcome, supported or comfortable. (11,107 total comments)

4. Please list up to three places, groups, or activities where you do not feel especially welcome, supported or comfortable. (9,470 total comments)

5. Is there anything MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress? (2,311 total comments)

6. What one thing could MIT reasonably do to better support your health and wellness? (2,171 total comments)

Each response was read and hand-coded to align with a set of key themes and phrases. The most common responses and representative comments are presented below.

1. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most positive aspects of the current MIT environment for you.

![Positive aspects of the current MIT environment](image)
MIT Culture

- 34% of respondents cited “MIT culture” as a positive aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as intellectual stimulation and sense of community.
- “Creative and inspiring and pushes people outside of their comfort zone.” – Undergraduate student
- “Vibrant energetic, absolutely fascinating.” – Undergraduate student
- “I am very pleased with the intellectual and extra-academic atmosphere at the institute. MIT is quirky, nerdy, and proud of it. This is where I belong.” – Graduate student
- “MIT brings together some of the most brilliant people and creates an environment that encourages collaboration.” – Graduate student

Academics and Academic Resources

- 29% of respondents cited “academics and academic resources” as a positive aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as courses offered, research, lab space, and lectures.
- “I love many of my classes. They are challenging and they push me, but I am willing to work hard and learn the material because it is interesting.” – Undergraduate student
- “I have never been anywhere else in the world that has the breadth and depth of extraordinary research that MIT offers--truly amazing.” – Graduate student

Peers

- 20% of respondents cited “peers” as a positive aspect of the current MIT environment.
- “I have great friends here who all go through similar struggles form being in the same environment, so we know how to support each other in tough times.” – Undergraduate student
- “I'm motivated by other students successes and my desire to pursue my goals.” – Undergraduate student
- “MIT fosters an environment of people with similar interests and mental abilities. Simultaneously, MIT has a diverse student population. This combination creates a stimulating environment where opinions can be easily shared.” – Graduate student

People in General

- 17% of respondents cited “people in general” as a positive aspect of the current MIT environment.
- “Community of people who want to change the world, tolerant, dedicated.” – Undergraduate student
- “Being around so many incredibly intelligent and ambitious people has helped me push myself further.” – Undergraduate student
- “The constant ability to stumble upon a new concept through interactions with inquisitive minds across a wide spectrum of fields. The place buzzes with curiosity, and that is contagious.” – Graduate student
Other

- 42% of respondents cited other topics as positive aspects of the current MIT environment. Some included faculty (9%), challenge (9%), extra curriculars (8%), reputation (5%), housing (5%), diversity (4%) and Greek life (2%).
- “I really appreciate how most faculty are willing to get to know their students on a personal level.” – Undergraduate student
- “I feel challenged to perform on a level I haven't been forced to reach before.” – Graduate student
- “I am proud to be a student of MIT, outside of MIT's context. It's name precedes it's experience.” – Undergraduate student
- “I love my dorm. I have never felt more accepted in my life.” – Undergraduate student
- “Dorm and Greek life aren't for everyone and it turned out ILGs were a great fit for me.” – Graduate student
- “Diversity in academics, extra-curricular activities, student population, professors and perspectives” – Graduate student
- “Openness of campus (can always find rooms to go into)” – Undergraduate student
- “emphasis on mental health and counseling; funds and support for graduate life outside of academics” – Graduate student

2. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most negative aspects of the current MIT environment for you.

Negative aspects of the current MIT environment
Stress

- 26% of respondents listed “stress” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment.
- “Stress from classes negatively affecting my physical and mental health.” – Undergraduate student
- “It's high stress and it's easy to feel like you're the dumbest one here, like it was a mistake you got in and that there will be no mercy if you screw up.” – Undergraduate student
- “Stress can breed stress and lots of people are stressed out here.” – Undergraduate student
- “I think that the workload can be very overwhelming, the expectation of success can sometimes be crushing, especially after we graduate.” – Graduate student
- “Very stressful. I feel underappreciated and underpaid. I’m not sure if this is best for my future.” – Graduate student

Academics

- 18% of respondents listed “academics” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as heavy workload, difficult PSETs, and demanding qualifying exams.
- “Insanely intensive workload that stifles the social/emotional/physical wellbeing of students -- no matter how extremely this affects the student population, it is chalked up to be ‘part of the MIT experience’ and swept under the rug!” – Undergraduate student
- “lack of emphasis on culture as a part of undergraduate education (i.e. literature, history, philosophy, etc.)” – Undergraduate student
- “way too unmanageable amount of work, sometimes have to rush through work and cannot absorb.” – Graduate student
- “overwork -> lack of creativity” – Graduate student

MIT Culture

- 17% of respondents listed “MIT culture” as negative aspects of the current MIT environment. This category includes responses relating to daily life and the MIT administration.
- “Being "hosed" and hardly sleeping are matters of pride, which is downright stupid.” – Undergraduate student
- “Sometimes there does seem to be a sense of arrogance/a fear of asking questions for fear of feeling dumb or being judged for not knowing something” – Undergraduate student
- “For a place that prides itself on diversity, faculty and staff have significant prejudice against people of faith or people with non-liberal political views” – Graduate student
- “I’ve faced some chauvinism on campus (both in lab and some social settings) which makes me feel uncomfortable and as though I am not accepted professionally by my male peers.” – Graduate student
- “A huge gap between grad and undergrad communities” – Graduate student
- “I do not like how Social Sciences and Humanities are not given their proper merit at MIT.” – Graduate student
- “The lack of overlap between departments that have related research fields.” – Graduate student
Social Life / Other People
- 15% of respondents listed “social life / other people” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment.
- “People don’t say hi to each other in the hallways! People aren’t friendly and don’t bother to make friendships that aren’t logistically convenient.” –Undergraduate student
- “Students tend to stick with their own dorms or course” –Undergraduate student
- “People are afraid to show weakness or be real people” –Graduate student
- “It’s sometimes awkward to talk to many students about things outside their research...” –Graduate student
- “There is relatively little inter-departmental mixing of social groups. I think more of that would improve both the research and social community at MIT.” –Graduate student

Competition
- 11% of respondents listed “competition” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as competition amongst and feelings of inadequacy in the midst of accomplished peers.
- “Everyone is fueled by achievement, so there’s a constant unspoken competition between students for who can do more, better, with less sleep. It becomes very demoralizing and discouraging.” –Undergraduate student
- “Hard not to try and compare yourself to all the amazing people on campus and dispel thoughts of inadequacy. Students in my program are extremely competitive with each other.” –Graduate student

Lack of balance
- 11% of respondents listed “lack of balance” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as spending too much time on academic pursuits and not having time to take advantage of MIT’s numerous extracurricular opportunities.
- “Pushes you to prioritize work over relationships and health” –Undergraduate student
- “Opportunity-overload: Too many opportunities are available that one often feels that they are missing out on some amazing opportunities. Its very hard to balance everything.” –Undergraduate student
- “A certain feeling that personal life - romantic life, financial comfort, non-professional activities - is on hold for the duration of the graduate program” –Graduate student
- “Lots of great extracurricular activities, but no time to explore them.” –Graduate student

Poor support
- 10% of respondents listed “poor support” as a negative aspect of the current MIT environment. This category includes such responses as poor academic, career, and emotional support.
- “I’ve never felt like much more than a number to professors and a burden to teaching instructors.” –Undergraduate student
• “It would be nice if MIT supported the careers of students who are not course 6 or 2.” – Undergraduate student
• “There’s no where I’d really feel comfortable going for help with non-academic or personal issues.” – Undergraduate student
• “No support structure to notice when students are not making progress for whatever reason” – Graduate student

Other
• Respondents also listed other qualities as negative aspects of the current MIT environment. Common responses mentioned MIT’s facilities (6%), cost (4%), food (4%), location (<1%), weather (<1%), and childcare (<1%).
• “Drastic range of quality/upkeep of facilities from building to building.” – Graduate student
• “Could have more places to stop and rest, hang out so as to take breaks from work” – Graduate student
• “The graduate student stipend is very stingy considering the exorbitant cost of living in the Boston area” – Graduate student
• “We need more places with cheap, healthy food” – Graduate student
• “lack of transportation on weekends (safety concerns)” – Graduate student
• “Unreasonably long waiting list for MIT childcare, and its high cost.” – Graduate student
• “We could celebrate more our accomplishments as a community” – Graduate student
• “I would like more minority faculty” – Undergraduate student

3. Please list up to three places, groups, or activities on campus where you feel especially welcome, supported or comfortable.

Students were provided with three empty boxes to enter their responses. They were instructed to put an X in the box if they could not think of three places, groups, or activities; 24% of students included at least one X in their responses.

Among the non-“X” responses, various living groups (dorms, FSILGs, etc.) and sports-related activities, clubs, and teams were the most frequently cited broad categories of responses. Below are two word clouds showing the frequency of common responses, one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students.

Undergraduates were more likely to list FSILGs, general living groups and sports-related items as places, groups, or activities on campus where they feel especially welcome, supported or comfortable. Graduate students were more likely to list libraries, academic departments, and labs.
Undergraduate Students

Sports: Team/Club

Dorm Living Group general

Graduate Students

Dorm Living Group general

Lab

Gym/Z-Center

Sports: Team/Club
4. Please list up to three places, groups, or activities on campus where you do not feel especially welcome, supported or comfortable.

Of the 9,470 entries for this question, fully three-quarters were marked as “X.” This suggests that students had more welcoming places/groups/activities on campus to share than non-welcoming.

Among the non-“X” responses, the two categories with the overall highest frequency were items dealing with classes/recitations and interactions with faculty and advisors. Below are two word clouds showing the frequency of common responses, one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students.

**Undergraduate Students**

**Graduate Students**
Undergraduates were more likely than graduate students to list class/recitation and FSILGs as places on campus where they do not feel especially welcome, supported, or comfortable. Graduate students were more likely than undergraduates to list the student center. Dining issues were not heavily cited by undergraduate or graduate students.

Some places, groups, and activities were heavily cited in question #3 as welcoming, supportive, and comfortable as well as in question #4 as unwelcoming, unsupportive, and uncomfortable. Such examples include FSILGs for undergraduates and medical/mental health services, departments, and labs for graduate students.

5. Is there anything MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress?

Ways MIT could reasonably help students reduce stress

![Bar chart showing different ways MIT could help students reduce stress]

Nothing / don’t know
- 27% of respondents listed “nothing or don’t know” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress.
- “Not without compromising the academic integrity of the institution.” – Undergraduate student
- “Not really - I believe we come here to work, and to work hard. Being stressed out sometimes helps to push that progress along. Stress isn't always a bad thing.” – Graduate student

Extracurricular
- 17% of respondents listed “non-academic support” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress. This category includes such responses as informational seminars and social events.
- “Offer more direct assistance in finding jobs? Career office is a bit too broad in my opinion.” – Undergraduate student
- “Bring in puppies occasionally :/” – Undergraduate student
- “Free yoga classes/meditation classes.” – Graduate student
- “Maybe provide more stress-reduction workshops? Time-management workshops?” – Graduate student
Decrease workload

- 12% of students listed “decrease workload / difficulty” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress.
- “For freshman: don't set it up so that all the GIRs end up having tests in the same week” – Undergraduate student
- “Reduce workload (often unnecessary) in order to be able to dedicate more time to families, health, and extracurricular activities.” – Graduate student

Academic support

- 12% of respondents listed “academic support” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress.
- “Ensure that classes that are marked as 12 units or 9 units actually have that amount of workload and not more or less.” – Undergraduate student
- More flexibility on assignments would help with the days when everything has to be done simultaneously. Some classes have a certain number of extension days per semester, to be used as students desire - I like that system.” – Undergraduate student
- “facilitate a better environment/atmosphere between advisor and students: nice, a bit more hands-on than currently, give more guidance, provide students with academic network” – Graduate student
- “More tutoring services!!! Often times the TA is too busy to help.” – Graduate student

Broad policy recommendations

- 11% of respondents listed “broad policy shifts” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress. This category includes such responses as campus culture and administrative decisions.
- “shift main focus from grades to learning material” – Undergraduate student
- “Try to change the culture that directly ties the amount of work you have to your worth as a person.” – Undergraduate student
- “Fostering a feeling of unity between the schools - we are all MIT, would help cultivate a familial culture.” – Graduate student
- “Providing clearer metrics for evaluation of grad school careers.” – Graduate student

Financial support

- 8% of respondents listed “financial support” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress. This category includes such responses as lowering costs and increasing funding.
- ”Increase financial aid to students!!” – Undergraduate student
- “Providing more financial guarantees to admitted grad students at their beginning of their programs” – Graduate student
- “Increasing stipend, which would help increase the quality of living and reduce stress” – Graduate student
Medical / mental health support

- 6% of respondents listed “medical / mental health support” as something MIT could reasonably do to help students reduce stress.
- “Ensure that lines of help are open. Increase Mental Health hours. Reinstate programs such as NightLine” – Undergraduate student
- “Improve mental health program, add cognitive psychologists to the clinic, make them more approachable, and more available for meeting. Too many friends have had to wait weeks for a meeting and can only get meetings once every 5 weeks.” – Undergraduate student
- “Make information about MIT Mental Health Services and other resources more easily available.” – Graduate student

Other

- 15% of respondents also listed other things MIT could reasonably do to reduce stress. Common responses mentioned were food (4%), time off (3%), facilities (3%), and childcare (2%).
- “healthier and cheaper food on campus” – Graduate student
- “Give vacations with NO WORK assigned over that period of time.” – Undergraduate student
- “More workspaces! I often have to search around for 15-20 minutes before I can find a nice table in a quiet place to do my homework.” – Graduate student
- “Create more spaces on the main campus to "recharge", e.g. lounges, meditation rooms, etc.” – Graduate student
- “Better access to on-campus child care for graduate students. Also, please bring back subsidies for child care for graduate students - the ones that need it the most!” – Graduate student
- “Fix saferide and daytime shuttles to run more often, track more effectively, and be sure not to leave people in the dark/cold” – Undergraduate student
- “Help international students more with immigration matters after graduation.” – Undergraduate student.
6. What one thing could MIT reasonably do to better support your health and wellness?

What one thing could MIT reasonably do better
to support your health and wellness?

Meal Plan/Meal Choices
- 58% of respondents listed “Meal Plan/Meal Choices” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness.
- “There is almost no Vegan food on campus. I know this isn't a real concern of MIT but when I'm in a rush and can't go to a food truck it would be nice if there was something other than hummus and crackers to eat at Stata café.” –Undergraduate student
- “Provide better eating options on campus that are not part of the meal plan. A nice coffee shop with healthy sandwiches (e.g. flour) and/or pasta to go (e.g. Sebastian’s) for healthy/sustaining lunch/dinner options.” –Undergraduate student
- “Regular, healthy, affordable dining facilities for Grad students! Regular, healthy, affordable dining facilities for Grad students! None exists.” –Graduate student
- “Not require the meal plan in dorms with dining halls so my friends don't move out to get off the dining plan.” –Undergraduate student
- “Need more affordable and healthy food options around campus, particularly at night and on weekends.” –Graduate student

MIT Medical
- 17% of respondents listed “MIT Medical” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness.
- “When you walk into MIT Medical with a minor problem, most of the time they tell you to get rest/take Ibuprofen. Unless you are really sick, they don't prescribe you actual medicine.” –Undergraduate student
• “Going to MIT Medical takes probably at least 2 hours. You are waiting to see someone for that long and then they tell you to get some readily available drug that is not very helpful. They do not diagnose you effectively.” –Undergraduate student
• “I'd like to have more information about what my insurance actually covers and what is available at MIT medical.” –Graduate student
• “The wait at medical is always incredibly long and medical seems very inefficient which bothers me because I don't have time to wait around all day for treatment when I'm sick.” –Undergraduate student
• “Better dental. 24-Hour on call medical.” –Graduate student

PE/Gym Services/Athletics
• 17% of respondents listed “PE/Gym Services/Athletics” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness.
• “Keep the gym open later, and longer on weekends (both Wang and main campus).” –Graduate student
• “Provide more free classes at the gym, such as yoga, at a time when people are available - in the evening.” –Graduate student
• “Provide PE classes that meet on weekends so I can take them without conflicting with my classes during weekdays or extracurricular in the evenings.” –Undergraduate student
• Expand the facilities/or increase the operating times, over the past three years I've noticed an increase in the number of people using the gym and it's getting difficult to find space to workout.” –Undergraduate student
• “The PE classes allow grads to sign up AFTER the undergrads. This makes it very hard to get into interesting PE classes. I'm also not aware of other classes (which are free) that are offered to students if there are any. That would be great to have.” –Graduate student
• “Help with procuring exercise facilities for students down on Cape Cod, if either subsidizing gym memberships or giving a small amount of money to establish a small gym.” –Graduate student

Other
• 7% of respondents listed topics that have been included in the “Other” category as things MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness. Of those topics, students most frequently mentioned community/culture (1%), housing (1%), financial aid (>1%), and religion (>1%).
• “Create more livable and workable indoor and outdoor spaces. Buildings 6C and the new Media Lab are good examples of buildings that promote healthy interactions and positive thinking. Building 48 is an embarrassing example of an overlooked and under-care for space.” –Graduate student
• “Help students use weekends as regenerative breaks (making psets assigned at some point in the week due by the end of the week; initiating more shuttles to/from useful places in Boston and Cambridge; working with UA/living groups to organize recreational time and activities on weekends; etc.).” –Undergraduate student
“Lack of funding has been a large source of stress, along with high fees, etc. The prospect of destroying my savings and future to attend MIT is stressful.” – Graduate Student

“For housing, take money into consideration - get the MIT Housing Office to see that some students cannot afford to live in dorms with dining plans.” – Undergraduate

“Housing should also be subsidized by MIT more, so that the price would be lower. Housing should not make a profit. Housing should be provided at a very reasonable cheap cost for students, so that everyone can attend (meritocracy) instead of becoming more and more based on how much personal money you have to spend. Housing should not make a profit, but be a service that MIT provides for the students.” – Graduate Student

“Provide meditation zones throughout campus where people can go, sit and reflect.” – Graduate Student

“More bike racks.” – Graduate Student

“Shaw’s/Trader Joes shuttles later in the day (like around 7) on weekends would be nice.” – Undergraduate student

“I honestly think that MIT should transition to being smoke-free. We're a really smart bunch of people and MIT shouldn't allow something as risky as smoking. We can't graduate without passing the swim test, but we're allowed to smoke?” – Graduate student

“Childcare for graduate students with families.” – Graduate Student

**Student Support Services**

- 4% of respondents listed “Student Support Services” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness.

- “Double the number of mental health professionals to deal with students problems. They were so busy when I went to see them a month ago, I never heard back.” – Graduate student

- “Longer walk-in hours and more staff at mental health.” – Undergraduate student

- “There's a lot of complaining about mental health. Students are afraid to go to mental health because they don't want to be forced out for a semester.” - Undergraduate student

- “Have Mental Health reach out to more people. I've gone and it helps (a little bit) and I know several people who don't go because of the stigma when I think they could probably benefit. Re-brand it or something. A lot more need it than who go.” – Undergraduate student

- “More availability of therapists.” – Graduate student

**Nothing**

- 3% of respondents listed “Nothing” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness.

- “I am content with what exists” – Undergraduate

- “Good job!” – Graduate Student
Time outside of classroom

- 2% of respondents listed “Time outside of the classroom” as something MIT could reasonably do better to support their health and wellness. Of that percentage, 1% of respondents specifically cited more time for exercise a way MIT could better support their health and wellness.
- “Help students have some more hours of sleep.” –Undergraduate student
- “I think the opportunities are there: the only concern is that academic commitments can become overwhelming and limit time available for exercise.” –Graduate student
- “Allow me more time to care for myself. Between research, classes, homework and other obligations I find it extremely difficult to shop for food, exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle.” –Graduate student
- “I wish I had more free time to exercise.” –Undergraduate Student