

) MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Dear Members of the MIT Physics Community,

One of the major events in the Department each year is the Graduate Fellowship selection meeting that takes place in late January. Choosing our graduate students is one of the most important things we do each year, and by the time new graduate students show up in September we have already spent nearly a year getting to know them.

Professor Joe Formaggio, Academic Administrator **Cathy Modica**, and Graduate Administrative Assistant **Katie Lewis** orchestrate the effort that sometimes begins years before when students first contact the Department for information about the graduate admission process, or visit the Department to see if MIT is right for them. **Professor Scott Hughes** arranges meeting prospective students and putting them in touch with the research groups that match their interests. In early fall, the Division Heads—**Profs. Deepto Chakrabarty** (Astrophysics), **Bolek Wyslouch** (Nuclear and Particle Experiment), **Eddie Farhi** (Center for the Theoretical Physics), **Vladan Vuletic** and **Mehran Kardar** (jointly Atomic, Biophysics, Condensed Matter and Plasma Physics)—poll their faculty to see how many available graduate openings we have, and appoint admissions coordinators for each division. At the same time, Administrative Officer **Matt Cubstead** and Associate Department Head **Prof. Nergis Mavalvala** work out how many Fellowship offers we can afford to make.

In November and December, student applications start to roll in and the admissions coordinators for each Division carefully read and send them to the faculty best able to assess each applicant's undergraduate work. At the same time, **Prof. Joe Formaggio** reads every application, over 800, to get an overview for the Department. All in all, at least three, but usually many more, faculty read each application. Around mid-January, each Division meets and chooses their "wish list" of top students.

This past academic year, about 825 undergraduates applied to our graduate program for about thirty available fellowships.

Joe Formaggio chairs the all-day Graduate Fellowship selection meeting attended by all Division Heads, laboratory directors, admission coordinators, and academic services staff, about thirty people in all.* Each candidate is individually presented and discussed, with the Chair making the final admissions decision. The end result is a total number of top candidates with a strong probability of accepting our offer that matches the number of Fellowships we have available.

* This year, an epic snowstorm hit the day before the Fellowship Meeting, and MIT closed. Graduate assistant Katie Lewis trudged in through hip-deep snow to spend the day getting ready for the meeting.

The Department does not use scoring or any other algorithms; we look at each student, what they have done, who they have worked with, and what they want to do at MIT, to reach our decisions. In this way, we can best ensure that the fellowships provided by our friends, supporters, and the Institute are used to attract and retain the very best students to our graduate program.



Cathy Modica and **Katie Lewis** send out the good news to those students we have admitted and the Department hosts a Graduate Open House in late March for them to come meet our faculty, staff, and current students. By April 15th, we receive word from these students on their final decisions.

How well does the Graduate Admissions Committee do in guessing the probability that a student will come? Two years ago, we made 120 Fellowship offers and 45 students accepted, which was a 38% yield. Last year, there were 80 Fellowship offers with 45 students accepted, a 56% yield; and this year, we had 60 offers and 30 acceptances, a 50% yield. These yields tell us that MIT Physics remains in high demand. However, graduate fellowships play an essential role in attracting these outstanding young physicists to MIT. With Federal research funds shrinking and competition among top universities for the best students growing, private fellowship support is greatly needed. Please consider supporting the Department's Alumni Fellowship Fund; for more information, contact Development Director **Erin McGrath** at either emcgrath@mit.edu or 617-452-2807.

This year also marks a number of important transitions amongst the faculty and staff who are part of this process: **Katie Lewis** is leaving MIT to become a Montessori teacher; **Bolek Wyslouch** will become the new Director of the Laboratory for Nuclear Science, replaced by **Joe Formaggio** as Division Head of Nuclear and Particle Experiment (NUPAX); and departing NUPAX Division Head **Richard Milner** will end seventeen years of Institute service, returning to teaching and research. Finally, **Krishna Rajagopal** will become Chair of the Faculty, replaced by **Nergis Mavalvala** as Associate Department Head.

One thing that will not be changing is the superb quality of the undergraduates who apply to our graduate program.

With best regards,

Peter Fisher
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Head, Department of Physics