

Physics Department Advising Guidelines

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These guidelines aim to create a reasonable minimum level of expectations between students and their advisors in the Physics Department. They also lay out when and how responsibility shifts in unusual circumstances.

Prime directive: advisor and advisees are partners in ensuring the advisee completes their degree in a timely fashion, usually by the end of the student's senior year.

QuickStart for advisors

- Schedule a 15-minute meeting for Registration Day.
- Know the [course requirements for the Physics degree](#).
- Know if your students are progressing well or not.
- Do not agree to a schedule you do not think your student can complete. Do not be shy about refusing to sign off on an unrealistic schedule.
- Be available to communicate about CAP-flagged students with academic administrators after grades are posted each term.
- Show up for the CAP deferred action meeting if necessary.
- Ask your student if there is anything going on that you should know about.
- If a student has trouble outside academics, work with them to find the right office to help them.
- Make sure you check up on your advisee two or three times during the term. Discuss with your advisees the best way to stay in contact.
- If your student is a senior planning to graduate, find out if they plan to write a thesis, and with whom. Check in with them (and if possible, with the thesis supervisor) during the spring term to make sure the thesis is on track.

QuickStart for students

- Show up for your meeting on time.
- Know the [requirements for your degree](#). If you have questions, ask your advisor.
- Do not ask your advisor to sign off on a schedule you cannot complete. Be aware that he or she can refuse to do so. If that happens, understand their objection.
- Tell your advisor of anything going on in your life that could affect your academic performance. If you are not comfortable sharing the details, don't; but be sure to let your advisor know if you are having problems.
- If you are having problems, work with your advisor to find the right office to help you.
- Read your MIT email daily and respond to your advisor's check-ins.
- Remember that advisors should not be expected to be available on a 24/7 basis; they have lives outside MIT, and cannot always help if you have left an issue until the last minute.

Advisors meet their advisee on Registration Day at the start of each term. The goal of this meeting is for the advisor to approve a set of courses for the coming term that advances the student to their degree. The level and number (*) of courses should be appropriate for the student. The student and advisor should agree on plans for completing any outstanding work from previous semesters (e.g., resolving

incompletes and OX grades). The student should inform the advisor of difficulties of any kind that have an impact on their ability to complete their work. The advisor should alert the student to any difficulties the advisor sees concerning unfulfilled requirements or incomplete work.

If a student and advisor do not reach agreement on a course schedule, the advisor should not approve the schedule. Instead, the advisor should put the student in immediate contact with the Department Head, [Peter Fisher](#), or Associate Head, [Nergis Mavalvala](#). The advisor should also send a note to all concerned clearly stating the advisor's misgivings about the student's proposed schedule. The student, advisor, Head, Associate Head and/or Undergraduate Coordinator will work together to resolve the situation. The Department takes the attitude that the student should ultimately decide on the schedule. The advisor is just that: one who gives advice. However, a student who rejects the advisor's advice and then turns in an unsatisfactory performance should acknowledge responsibility and should plan to be more attentive to advice in future.

Advisors should check in with advisees two or three times during the term. Ideally, the student and advisor will see each other around the department enough for this to happen casually. If that is not the case, the advisor should send a short email and the student should provide a short update. Several days before add date, before drop date, and before the end of a semester are good times to reach out; midterm is often a particularly stressful time and students could benefit by a check-in at this point. If a student is a senior who is writing a thesis, check in more often to make sure the student is making good progress. It will be useful to know who is supervising the thesis, so that the advisor can confer with the thesis supervisor if necessary.

Advisees have the responsibility to let their advisor know of any problems they are having that could have an impact on their academic performance. The advisor does not necessarily need to know the issues in detail, but they need to know that issues exist. If necessary, the advisor should meet with the student as soon as possible with the goal of directing the student to the office at MIT that can best help them. Students are encouraged to proactively take advantage of resources such as S[^]3.

Each term there are students whose academic performance warrants consideration by the Committee on Academic Performance (CAP). Advisors of these students are asked to provide feedback to the Associate Head, who meets with CAP. In some more complicated cases, the advisor is asked to appear and give input to the CAP's decision; in these cases, the student is asked to provide a written statement to CAP, and should provide as forthright a statement as possible, as CAP takes a student's non-participation in its process very seriously. The Department strongly recommends that the advisor meet with the student prior to attending the CAP meeting. The advisor's role at CAP is to provide information, and CAP works best when it has good information that the advisor is best able to provide.

More informal contact between the student and advisor is always nice, but it is up to them to organize. Advisors are certainly encouraged to arrange a group lunch or dinner with their advisees at some point in the year, ideally when a new group of advisees is assigned. Some students would like time with their advisor outside formal meetings; others are not so interested. If an advisor is willing to spend additional time with his or her advisees, the advisor can suggest this and the students should be candid about whether this is of interest. Time spent in meeting with advisees outside an office or classroom setting should be in a setting with at least one other person participating, not a one-on-one activity.

*Students sometimes enroll for many subjects so they can shop around during the first week. This is of course fine. The injunction relates to the courses students will actually try to complete during the term.