

MEMORANDUM

To: Physics Faculty

From: Peter Fisher

Subject: Guidance for students with fellowships

Date: October 30, 2018

The Physics Department enrolls mostly students with first year or multi-year fellowships. These fellowships serve as both a recruiting tool and support for our faculty. The fellowship serves the valuable purpose of allowing a student and prospective thesis advisor to get to know each other before the student makes an intellectual commitment to the advisor's project and the before the advisor makes an intellectual and financial commitment to the student.

Agreeing to work with a fellowship student does not necessarily imply a long term commitment on the advisor's part and sometimes, the potential advisor decides not to continue to work with a fellowship student. In this case, the faculty member's obligation is to help their student to find a new place to work in the Department. The following are guidelines to faculty in how to manage this transition.

1. Tell your Division Head right away that the student may need a transitional TA.
2. Meet with the student as soon as you have decided you cannot support them when their fellowship ends. Let the student what you have decided and give any useful feedback you can.
3. Talk with the student about their interests and aspirations with the aim of finding researchers at MIT they may be able to work with. Make a list of potential faculty or research scientists the student could work with. Edit and prioritize the list with the student.
4. Introduce the student to potential advisors by in person, by phone, or by email. Convey whatever information you can about the student.
5. Encourage the student to followup with researchers on the list, as well as the Division Head.
6. Ask the student to get back to you within a week and let you know how finding a new advisor is progressing.
7. If you exhaust all the possibilities working with the student, tell the Associate Head and your Division Head. Ask the student to meet with them.
8. There are cases where a student decides to look outside the Department (or even outside MIT) for a research advisor. In this case, please contact the Academic Administrator and the Associate Department Head right away - these cases can be complicated and the student will need guidance in their decision making.

Being told that you do not want to continue to work with a student may be hard on them and this is a case where extra kindness and patience are warranted. Most of our students who change advisors end up succeeding at MIT, and letting them know that can help.