

Graduate Application Assistance Best Practices

2019-2020



GSC Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee

Department and Classroom Inclusion Subcommittee

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Overview

While under-represented minorities (URMs) constitute 29.3%¹ of the US population according to the 2010 US census, they represent only 8.3%¹ of STEM doctorates and [8% of MIT graduate students in 2019](#), slightly worse than the national average. However, at the undergraduate level, MIT has attracted more URMs than the national average ([26% URMs](#) vs 14.7%¹). In addition, women represented only 35% of MIT graduate students in 2019. In an effort to encourage applicants from traditionally underrepresented groups to apply to MIT and provide additional feedback to students who may benefit from it, **five graduate departments and the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) at MIT have instituted application assistance programs**. These programs seek to serve all students that are underrepresented at MIT, including but not limited to: URMs, women, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, students with disabilities, students who are the first in their families to attend college or graduate school, and applicants from graduate institutions that typically send many students to MIT.

Application assistance programs are unique in that they allow **current graduate students** to directly participate in improving the application experience for students from underrepresented groups and typically require relatively few departmental and institutional resources to reach a large number of applicants. Therefore, in an effort to increase the number of departments that offer application assistance programs, we have **compiled this document to survey the diverse structures of existing programs and provide a framework for future programs**.

Summary of Current Programs

To our knowledge, five graduate departments at MIT currently offer application assistance programs for underrepresented students. In addition, the Office for Graduate Education (OGE) administers an assistance program for alumni of their [MSRP](#) and [CONVERGE](#) programs. Below is a table detailing information about each department's program, with the exception of the [Media and Arts Sciences SOS program](#), since this is entirely operated by department administration and graduate students apply directly to research groups of interest, making the structure less applicable to other departments.

Program Name	BEAAP (Biological Engineering Application Assistance Program)	CAMP (Chemistry Application Mentor Program)	MAAP (MEMP Application Assistance Program)	PASS (Peer Application Support Service)	GAAP (Graduate Application Assistance Program)
School	Engineering	Science	Engineering	Architecture and Planning	All schools
Department	Biological Engineering	Chemistry	Health Sciences & Technology (HST)	Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP)	Office of Graduate Education (MSRP/CONVERGE alumni)
Department and Program Overview					
Administered by	Students	Students	Students	Students	Staff
Program type	PhD	PhD	PhD	Master's and PhD but primarily serve master's students (typically <5 PhD applicants)	Master's and PhD
Years in Place (cycles completed through 2018-2019)	3	1	2	>5	>5
Logistics for Program Establishment					
Security	Confidentiality stated to applicants,	Confidentiality stated to applicants,	Confidentiality stated to applicants,	Uses Google forms, confidentiality	Confidentiality stated to applicants

	surveys use Google forms	surveys hosted through department website	surveys use Google forms	not explicitly stated	and mentors, surveys use Google forms
Status with department administration and faculty	Program is listed on department website, department chair presents program expectations to volunteers at yearly trainings	Program is listed on department website, administration is involved and supportive	Program is not listed on department website, mixed support within department	Program is listed on department website, department chair presents program expectations at yearly trainings to volunteers, ~\$400 provided yearly in funding for in-person training events	The program is run by the Diversity Initiatives wing of the OGE with help from graduate community fellows and staff
Student leadership	BE Graduate Student Board supports the program. 3-4 student leaders run the program	Administrators in the department run the program with 1-2 students	HST MEMP Student Diversity Ambassadors run the program (currently 5 students)	Often only one leader, usually a first-year. Sits under Students of Color Committee (SCC), a DUSP student organization	Run by administration and the Graduate Community Fellow (OGE Diversity Initiatives Recruitment fellow)
Assistance Program Timeline	Mentees may sign up until December 1 but are encouraged to connect to BEAAP early, applications due December 15. Mentors sign up to volunteer in August/September. Mentor workshop occurs in October and then mentor-mentee matching begins.	Applications open in mid-september. Matching occurs in October. Mentors give feedback in early November	Applications open in September, matching on a rolling basis up until 1-2 weeks prior to deadline	Applications open in early October. Matching occurs in the beginning of November. Mentors give feedback in the beginning of December, which is not ideal because current students have finals.	Mentees sign up until the end of November, applications due in December.
Graduate Mentor Experience					

Approximate Volunteer: Applicant ratio	0.66	A little less than 1	~1	2	A little less than 1
Mean mentor year	Mean 3rd year	Mostly 1st or 2nd year students	Mostly 1st-3rd year students	Most 1st or 2nd year master's students.	Not available
Mentor recruitment timing	August	September/October	Oct/Nov on a rolling basis	October	Late November
Mentor recruitment mechanism(s)	Email with google forms application	Email with google forms application	Email with google form application. Of note: the department does not allow mentors to participate as student interviewers in the Spring admissions process.	Email with google forms application. First level of match is with program group (e.g. environmental planning) since these select separately.	Graduate diversity ambassador pool
Written mentor training	1-page 'cheat sheet'	Tips sent by email, and 1-page document	3-page overview sheet with tips and advice	1-page written document, program group-specific guidelines, and ongoing support offered as needed by coordinators	None
In-person mentor training	1-hour workshop in early October, including description of search process from department chair	Workshop in October	Workshop in October	Workshop in early November	None provided
Mentee Experience					
Graduate student cohort size	40 invited to interview, most accepted	40-50 in each class	15-25	~10 PhD students. 50-60 Master's students.	-
Mentees served (Fall 2019)	62	20	10-15	~100.	15

admission)					
Mentee recruitment mechanism(s)	Link on BE website (~80%), social media (Twitter, instagram), blog, podcast, conference (ABRCMS), current students reach out to admin/students at alma mater	Link on Chemistry website, reaching out at conferences	Not on website, word of mouth & mailing list of contacts made at conferences	On department website	Email alumni from CONVERGE and MSRP
Mentee selection	Not filtered for diversity, all applicants matched unless not applying for current year application cycle.	Not filtered for diversity, all applicants matched unless not applying for current year application cycle.	Not filtered for diversity, all applicants matched unless not applying for current year application cycle; cannot accept international students if not studying at domestic universities.	All interested mentees were matched	All interested mentees were matched
Mentee matching mechanism(s)	Qualitative based on similarities, no formal guidelines	Qualitative based on similarities, no formal guidelines	Qualitative based on similarities, no formal guidelines	Qualitative based on similarities as represented in intake forms	Qualitative based on similarities, no formal guidelines
Mentee Demographics	1/3 white, 1/3 Asian, ~15% hispanic, ~8% mixed and black. Nearly 60% non-US citizen	2/3 international	5/13 African American; 2/13 Latinx; 5/13 Asian; 1/13 White (2018)	~1/3 international. ~1/4 black, 1/4 asian, few latinX (but a good number from Latin America)	Not recorded
Applicants Invited to Interview	1 (but Harvard was undergraduate institution)	Not applicable - department does not interview	~1/year	No interviews	Unknown
Assistance Program Evaluation					
Evaluation Mechanisms	Survey of volunteers and applicants,	None so far	Survey of applicants	No written report, depends on PASS	Surveys of applicants and mentors after the

	written 20+ page report			leadership	program are carried out each year
Evaluation shared with	Students and faculty, but not every faculty member aware of program	N/A	No written report, data shared with department leadership	No written report, depends on PASS leadership	Internally within OGE

The table above highlights many aspects of each program, from which key strengths and areas for growth emerge:

Biological Engineering

Strengths: many graduate students are engaged, and the department is very supportive.

Areas for growth: Need to work on strategies for better advertising aside from the department website. Currently many of the URM applicants are still from top-tier universities and may not be the students who need the most help.

Chemistry

Strengths: The department administration is very involved and supportive.

Areas for growth: The department faculty are not as involved.

Health Sciences & Technology

Strengths: Students engaged with MIT legal to start the program despite initial uncertainty about the program by department administration. The administration has provided small funds for a diversity event at interview weekend.

Areas for growth: The administration and faculty are still uncertain about the program value, increased tracking of program outcomes could provide better justification.

DUSP

Strengths: Most diverse DUSP department in the country, and the administration is very supportive and proud to be a diverse program and offer an assistance program.

Areas for growth: Outcomes are not evaluated and student leadership is insufficient (this past year the program was run by 1 student). The department could consider providing more administrative help to allow the program to keep running as it is difficult to administer with predominantly master's students who have heavy courseloads.

OGE

Strengths: The program is already connected to applicants from underrepresented groups who may need assistance.

Areas for growth: Mentors from the same or similar departments are available for all applicants.

Although each program has a unique history and organization, many programs face a few common challenges:

1. Difficulty tracking applicant outcomes and measuring program impact
2. Consistent support from department faculty and administration
3. Establishing program continuity without overburdening students if the program is not run by department staff.

Application Assistance Program process: proposed model

1. Recruit Student Team

We suggest recruiting two to four students per department to direct an application assistance program, a minimum of six months (ideally 8-12 months) before the application deadline. If graduate student leadership group(s) are active in your department, adding application assistance program directors as positions on the student board can provide increased support and continuity for the program. In addition, you should reach out to department staff to see if they are willing to assist with any aspects of the assistance program.

2. Meet with Department Administration

Once you have assembled a committed team of at least two students to coordinate the program, we suggest meeting with department administration to suggest instituting an assistance program. The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee is happy to meet with you to discuss how best to prepare for this meeting.

Helpful resources to justify creation of an application assistance program within your department:

- This handbook. Let your department know that there are already six assistance programs at MIT, including two that are run by MIT administrators
- [Department Graduate Education Statistics](#)
 - Freely available online, these include statistics such as the ones shown for the current assistance programs in Appendix C
 - In particular, you may want to let your department know:
 - What is the current URM representation in your department compared to similar departments/schools?
- [Enrolled Graduate Student Survey](#)
 - Department-level data available upon request to gsc-diversity-dci@mit.edu.
 - Available questions of interest for diversity are listed in Appendix D

3. Meet with MIT Legal

Need to establish guidelines here. Should students be required to meet with legal and show materials? How long does the process take? m not sure of the details on

this If applicable: students on admissions committees should not be in contact with mentees. However, students on admissions committee may communicate with mentors about what good applications look like.

4. Establish Program Timeline

Suggested timeline

- 6-8 months before application deadline
 - Recruit student team, meet with department administration, address any concerns with GSC DEI team
 - What support can the department provide?
 - Allow the program's existence
 - Advertise the assistance program on the department website
 - Provide financial resources for graduate mentor training (e.g. food)
 - Provide staff time to support the program's continued existence
- 4-5 months before application deadline
 - Draft detailed program timeline
 - When will emails be sent, training(s) provided, follow-up surveys sent? Who will lead each component?
 - Plan recruitment strategy for mentees
 - Is the department willing to advertise the program on their website?
 - Can the department admin share with other administration?
 - Can you advertise on social media? Which platforms and groups will you target?
 - Plan recruitment strategy for mentors
 - When will you send initial emails for volunteers?
 - When will training(s) be held? Are department administration and/or faculty willing to provide insight into what the department is seeking at these trainings?
 - When will feedback be given to students?
 - Do any of these times conflict with key academic deadlines such as finals, qualifying exams, etc.?
- 3-4 months before application deadline
 - Send recruitment emails to mentees and mentors with links to surveys to aid matching (see #5 below for more detailed information about surveys)
 - Draft written handouts with information for mentors
- 2 months before application deadline
 - Schedule in-person mentor training, provide written mentor handout
 - Match the majority of mentees with mentors

- 1 month before application deadline
 - Ensure all mentees are matched, check in with mentors to see if they need assistance and have contacted their mentee at least once
- 1-2 months after application deadline
 - Send surveys to mentors to evaluate their experience
 - If applicable: offer assistance to mentees who have been invited to interview weekends
- 4 months after application deadline (preferably after mentees have committed to a graduate school)
 - Send survey to mentees to evaluate their experience and graduate school choice
- 4-5 months after application deadline
 - Share report with your department, solicit their feedback on the program and its impact on admissions

5. Establish Surveys to Match Students and Evaluate Outcomes

Data security issues

- No Level 4 Regulated Information or legally protected data elements should be collected from students (see definitions below)
 - <https://infoprotect.mit.edu/what-needs-protecting>

Qualtrics

As a survey platform, Qualtrics is more secure than Google forms, since MIT certificates required to access. In addition, Qualtrics allows for more fine-tuned survey design than Google forms. It is freely available to MIT students (although there are some limitations).

MIT students are allowed:

- 5 active surveys at a time
- 5,000 outgoing emails total
- 500 outgoing emails per week

This should be sufficient for typical application assistance programs. Quota can be increased upon request.

The GSC DEI team has created four Qualtrics survey templates to help you set up your own assistance program and increase the uniformity of data available from each department's program. Surveys should clearly state the confidentiality of the data and the fact that information shared will in no way affect an applicant's chances of admission.

The GSC DEI team has created four Qualtrics survey templates to help you set up your own assistance program:

- Application Assistance Mentee Information Template
- Application Assistance Mentor Information Template
- Application Assistance Mentee Evaluation Template
- Application Assistance Mentor Evaluation Template

Please request access by emailing
gsc-diversity-dci@mit.edu

You can also see appendix A for survey content.

Once surveys have been sent out to mentors and mentees, we suggest matching mentees and mentors based primarily on similar research interests and groups that they identify with. If you are unable to match all mentees, we suggest prioritizing mentees who 1) appear to have the most need for assistance while still having the potential to be a good fit for your department, 2) are from groups that are most underrepresented within your department, and 3) are most similar to available mentors.

6. Plan Mentor Training Session

While the mentor training session can be entirely student-run, we believe that the most effective training sessions include faculty and/or administrative participation. For instance, both DUSP and the Biological Engineering departments invite the department chair to be present for part of the training session to provide specific feedback about how admissions works in their departments and what the committee is specifically looking for.

See appendix B for our suggested written mentor training handout including confidentiality statement.

In particular, it is essential to remind mentors that they should:

- Maintain the confidentiality of all mentee information
- Not judge whether mentees are 'diverse'
- Remind mentees that they are not guaranteed admission
- Not convince the mentee to apply to MIT

7. Program Evaluation

The Biological Engineering department writes an annual report on the assistance program, which we believe is an invaluable tool for tracking quantitative and qualitative performance of the program and garnering increased support from fellow graduate students, as well as department leadership. We suggest you

create this report using student responses to program surveys (see Appendix A for suggested questions) and share it with:

- Department graduate leadership groups
- Department academic office
 - Also seek feedback from leadership on how the program went from their perspective
 - How do they believe the program can be improved?
 - Can they commit to increasing support for the program in the coming year? This could include:
 - Advertising the program on the department website
 - Providing funds for food at mentor trainings
 - Sharing more insights into what the admissions committee is looking for in prospective candidates
 - Sharing program reports more widely with faculty
 - Dedicating part of a department staff's time to the program
- With GSC DEI committee

Example Materials from Current Programs

Biological Engineering, DUSP, HST, and OGE have generously agreed to share example materials from the 2018-2019 application cycle [here](#). We ask that you keep these materials within the MIT community.

Extensions of Application Assistance Programs

Pre-application

- [GradCatalyst](#) provides webinars to help students earlier in their undergraduate careers plan their academic trajectories. Sessions are open to all students so promising undergraduates who could benefit from this program can be directed to this resource.

Post-application

- Mentoring invited underrepresented students
 - Mentor students about social norms and expectations for visit weekend
 - Provide a diversity-related event at department visit weekend
 - HST and several other departments already do this
 - Provide a list of institutional and departmental resources and groups that could be of interest to underrepresented students

- Mentoring underrepresented students who are admitted
 - Encourage department to offer scholarships for moving and improve transparency about timing of first paycheck
 - Provide workshop or mentoring for students on transitioning to graduate school
 - Specifically encourage underrepresented students to apply for fellowships

References

1. Estrada CBE Life Sci Educ 2016

Appendix A: Suggested Survey Questions

Application Assistance Mentee Information Template

[Application assistance program name] Thank you for your interest in the [Department name] [PhD/Master's] program! [Program name] is a [volunteer-based, student-run] program which provides assistance to applicants from communities historically underrepresented in higher education, including students from communities underrepresented in STEM, students with nontraditional academic backgrounds, and students from academic institutions which have not historically sent many students to MIT. Applicants are paired with a graduate students who can answer questions about [department name] and MIT, provide feedback on materials to create a stronger application, and guide applicants through the application process. [Program name] is supported by [insert name(s) here]. If you are currently considering applying to [Department name] and would like to participate in [program name], this form will help us match you with a current graduate student to guide you through the application process so that your strengths truly shine through. [Program name] will accept applications until [deadline] in order to provide assistance before [application deadline]. *Note: Although we strive to give you our best guidance from the perspective of current students, participation in [program name] will not affect how your application is reviewed by the admissions committee and is not a guarantee of admission. Information you provide to [program name] will not be shared with the admissions committee or any official MIT entity and will be de-identified in any reports to MIT administration. Your privacy is important to us. For further questions, please contact us at [email]@mit.edu.*

Email address

Please enter your legal name as it will appear in your application:

☐ First Name (1) _____

☐ Last Name (2) _____

Undergraduate Institution

Undergraduate Major

What is your year of birth?

☐ Year of Birth (1) _____

What is your gender?

☐ Female (1)

☐ Male (2)

☐ Non-binary/gender fluid (3)

Do you identify as transgender?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Prefer not to say (3)

What is your sexual orientation?

☐ Straight/Heterosexual (1)

☐ Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual (2)

☐ Bisexual (3)

☐ Asexual (4)

☐ Prefer to self-describe (5) _____

☐ Prefer not to say (6)

Please indicate your race or ethnic background:

☐ White (1)

☐ Hispanic or Latinx (2)

- ☐ Black or African American (3)
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African (8)
- ☐ Asian (9)
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (10)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (11)
- ☐ Other race, ethnicity, or origin (12)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (13)

What is the highest level of education any of your parent(s)\guardian(s) has received?

Check all that apply

- ☐ Less than high school (1)
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent (2)
- ☐ Some college (3)
- ☐ 2 year degree (4)
- ☐ 4 year degree (5)
- ☐ Professional degree (6)

☐

Doctorate (7)

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Do you have any longstanding physical or mental impairment(s)? Is there any way in which a long-standing physical or mental impairment has caused you to experience structural or personal barriers?

☐

Yes (1)

☐

No (3)

☐

Prefer not to say (4)

Are you a US citizen?

☐

Yes (1)

☐

No (2)

☐

Prefer not to say (3)

What city, state, or country do you identify most as having come from?

Describe your academic interests and previous research experiences.

In 1-2 paragraphs, let us know which general areas of research you are most interested in and briefly describe any previous research or professional experiences.

Describe why you are interested in participating in [assistance program name].

In 1-2 paragraphs, describe how you believe that we can help strengthen your application. Feel free to also describe how aspects of your personal experiences align with our commitment to achieving fairer representation of diverse communities within STEM.

Please leave any additional information that you would like us to know in the space provided below.

Thanks! You are done! Remember, no information from this application will be shared with the admissions committee, and will not change how your application is reviewed.

Please direct any questions to [email]@mit.edu . We wish you the best in your graduate admissions journey!

Application Assistance Mentor Information Template

[Application assistance program name] Thank you for your interest in volunteering for the [department name] application assistance program! [Program name] is a [volunteer-based, student-run] program which provides assistance to applicants from communities historically underrepresented in higher education, including students from communities underrepresented in STEM, students with nontraditional academic backgrounds, and students from academic institutions which have not historically sent many students to MIT. Applicants are paired with a graduate students who can answer questions about [department name] and MIT, provide feedback on materials to create a stronger application, and guide applicants through the application process. We are looking for graduate student volunteers to participate in the application assistance program for the current application cycle. Volunteers will be provided with a one-time training to equip you to better help applicants. We will then match you with [1-2] prospective applicants based on your survey responses below. We will accept mentor applications until [date] in order to provide assistance to applicants before the [application deadline]. *[If applicable for department] Note: Current students who volunteer as mentors may not serve as student interviewers during the same admissions cycle. For further questions, please contact us at [email]@mit.edu.*

Email address (MIT preferred)

Name:

☐ First Name (1) _____

☐ Last Name (2) _____

What year are you?

If you're applying during the summer, indicate your year this fall

- ☐ 1st (1)
- ☐ 2nd (2)
- ☐ 3rd (3)
- ☐ 4th (4)
- ☐ 5th (5)
- ☐ 6th (6)
- ☐ 7+ (7)

Can you attend the workshop at [workshop time]?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

How many applicants are you willing to mentor?

- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ Up to 2 (2)
- ☐ Up to 3 (3)

Which lab(s) are you in?

Or if you're still rotating, what fields are you interested in?

Undergraduate Institution

Undergraduate Major

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female (1)
- ☐ Male (2)
- ☐ Non-binary/gender fluid (3)

Do you identify as transgender?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (3)

What is your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Straight/Heterosexual (1)
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual (2)
- ☐ Bisexual (3)
- ☐ Asexual (4)
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe (5) _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say (6)

Please indicate your race or ethnic background:

- ☐ White (1)
- ☐ Hispanic or Latinx (2)
- ☐ Black or African American (3)
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African (8)
- ☐ Asian (9)
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (10)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (11)
- ☐ Other race, ethnicity, or origin (12)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (13)

What is the highest level of education any of your parent(s)\guardian(s) has received?

Check all that apply

- ☐ Less than high school (1)
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent (2)
- ☐ Some college (3)
- ☐ 2 year degree (4)
- ☐ 4 year degree (5)
- ☐ Professional degree (6)
- ☐ Doctorate (7)

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Do you have any longstanding physical or mental impairment(s)? Is there any way in which a long-standing physical or mental impairment has caused you to experience structural or personal barriers?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (4)

Are you a US citizen?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (3)

What city, state, or country do you identify most as having come from?

Anything else?

Let us know if there's additional information you'd like us to have that might be useful in the matching process.

Thanks so much for helping to increase the diversity of our community at MIT! You are done!

Please direct any further questions to [email]@mit.edu.

Application Assistance Mentee Evaluation Template

[Application assistance program name] Thank you for participating in the [program name] application assistance program! We would appreciate your feedback on your experience through this short survey so we can better assist future students.

For further questions, please contact us at [email]@mit.edu.

Email address

Please enter your legal name as it appears in your application

- ☐ First Name (1) _____
- ☐ Last Name (2) _____

How much guidance did your application assistance mentor provide?

- ☐ Not enough (1)
- ☐ Just enough (2)
- ☐ Too much (3)

What did your mentor support you with?

- ☐ Personal statement (1)
- ☐ CV/Resume (2)
- ☐ Choosing writers for letters of recommendation (3)
- ☐ Information about the department (e.g. research, professors) (4)
- ☐ Information about MIT in general (5)
- ☐ Application logistics (6)
- ☐ Other (7) _____

Did you apply to [department name]?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2) _____

Did you apply to other departments at MIT (please list)?

- ☐ Yes (1) _____
- ☐ No (2)

Regardless of whether you applied to MIT, participation in the application assistance program made your grad school application

- ☐ 0 (0) Much worse
- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ 2 (2)
- ☐ 3 (3)

- ☐ 4 (4)
- ☐ 5 (5)
- ☐ 6 (6)
- ☐ 7 (7)
- ☐ 8 (8)
- ☐ 9 (9)
- ☐ 10 (10) Much better

The existence of the application assistance program made you

- ☐ 0 (0) Less interested in applying
- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ 2 (2)
- ☐ 3 (3)
- ☐ 4 (4)
- ☐ 5 (5)
- ☐ 6 (6)
- ☐ 7 (7)
- ☐ 8 (8)
- ☐ 9 (9)
- ☐ 10 (10) More interested in applying

Comment on how the application assistance program affected your interest in, and eventual decision to apply to [department name].

Overall, how did the application assistance program exceed, match, or fall short of your expectations?

What were your top three graduate programs at the time you submitted your applications?

- ☐ 1st choice (1) _____
- ☐ 2nd choice (2) _____
- ☐ 3rd choice (3) _____

Were you admitted to any departments at MIT (please specify)?

- ☐ Yes (5) _____
- ☐ No, but was invited to interview (6)
- ☐ No (7)

Have you enrolled (or do you plan to enroll) in a PhD program this fall?

- ☐ Yes (enrolled) (19)
- ☐ Yes (plan to enroll) (20)
- ☐ No (21)

If yes, which program is your top choice?

If no, why not?

If you were admitted to a department at MIT, but chose not to attend, please describe why you made that decision

Please leave any additional comments or suggestions for next year in the space provided below.

Thank you again for helping to improve the application assistance program for future students!
Please direct any questions to [email]@mit.edu . We wish you the best in your graduate journey!

Application Assistance Mentor Evaluation Template

[Application assistance program name] Thank you for volunteering for the [department name] application assistance program! We would very much appreciate your feedback on your experience volunteering for the program so we can better serve applicants in the future. Please contact us at [email]@mit.edu with any questions

Email address (MIT preferred)

Name

☐ First Name (1) _____

☐ Last Name (2) _____

Did the [in-person workshop/training] set appropriate expectations and guidelines for you as a mentor?

☐ 0 (0) Not at all

☐ 1 (1)

☐ 2 (2)

☐ 3 (3)

☐ 4 (4)

☐ 5 (5)

☐ 6 (6)

☐ 7 (7)

☐ 8 (8)

☐ 9 (9)

☐ 10 (10) Set appropriate expectations

After the training, the support and communication I received from the application assistance team made me feel

☐ 0 (0) Not at all supported

☐ 1 (1)

☐ 2 (2)

☐ 3 (3)

☐ 4 (4)

☐ 5 (5)

☐ 6 (6)

☐ 7 (7)

☐ 8 (8)

☐ 9 (9)

☐ 10 (10) Totally supported

How many times did you communicate with your mentee?

- ☐ 1 time (1)
- ☐ 2 times (2)
- ☐ 3 times (3)
- ☐ 4 times (4)
- ☐ 5+ times (5)

What did you communicate with your mentee about?

- ☐ Personal statement (1)
- ☐ CV/Resume (2)
- ☐ Choosing writers for letters of recommendation (3)
- ☐ Application Logistics (4)
- ☐ Questions about graduate school in general (5)
- ☐ Questions about MIT (6)
- ☐ Questions about the department (7)
- ☐ Other (8) _____

Do you want to be involved as a mentor next year?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2) _____

☐ Maybe (3)

☐ Will have graduated (4)

Are you interested in helping to coordinate the application assistance program next year?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Will have graduated (3)

Please leave any additional information that you would like us to know about your experience as a mentor in the space provided below.

Thanks again for helping to improve the MIT community by supporting underrepresented applicants!

Please direct any further questions to [email]@mit.edu.

Appendix B: Application Mentor Handout Template

A template to provide to mentors, after they have applied to volunteer and subsequently been selected to be a mentor in the program.

Title: [Mentorship program name] Mentor Information

Section: Overview

On behalf of the [organizing student group], we are excited to announce the first year of the [mentorship program name]!

The goal of [mentorship program name] is to pair graduate students with applicants from

- groups underrepresented in [department],
- non-traditional academic backgrounds,
- institutions which have not historically sent many students to MIT,

and assist them through the application process to help them create stronger applications.

Thank you so much for your interest in mentoring for the [mentorship program name] and making [department] a more respectful, caring, and diverse community!

If you have any questions throughout the duration of [mentorship program name], contact:

programcoordinator@mit.edu

studentswhohelpedrunthis@mit.edu

Section: General Expectations for Mentors

Subsection: Timeline

As a mentor, you will primarily answer applicants' questions about [department] and provide feedback on their applications. Here are the basic commitments along with the timeline

DD/MM/YY: Attend a workshop on [department] admissions criteria and providing feedback on application materials (time)

MM-MM/YY: Receive mentee match(es). Reach out with introduction, email template provided

MM1-MM2/YY: Provide application mentorship through the application cycle, guidelines provided in the next section. Note that application deadline is MM2/YY

MM-MM/YY: Fill out post-program survey; remind mentees to fill out post-program survey

Subsection: Time expectation

Mentoring takes time. In order for you, the mentor, to plan for how many applicants you are able to partner with, below you will find estimates for how much time mentoring an applicant might take. These estimates are formed from similar mentorship programs across MIT, and will likely vary on a case by case basis.

From similar application assistance programs, such as the OGE's CONVERGE, we anticipate that mentoring an applicant on their application will take approximately 2-3 hours. Since every applicant's background and story is unique, how this time is divided will clearly vary.

In our past experience, one-on-one conversations via video chat or a phone call often have the most substantial impact in guiding the applicants. Generally, we don't want you to be spending an excessive amount of time copy editing, and would prefer you limit the time you spend reading and commenting to approximately an hour. Ultimately, we trust your judgement on how to best spend your time mentoring.

Section: Application Review Guidelines

After matching, applicants will be sent a confirmation email to participate and to send along a draft of their personal statement or resume (materials).

If students did not respond and confirm their participation in [mentorship program name] within 2 weeks, send one reminder email. Subsequently, mentors and mentees should communicate through email or audio/video, keeping in mind the time considerations above.

Subsection: Admissions process guidelines

While applicant success can be found through increased understanding of [department], and with your mentorship and guidance, here are some admissions process guidelines

- By sharing their application with you, applicants are entrusting you with their **confidential information**. Please be sure to **not share this information with others** unless there is a concern for the mentee's safety
- [MPN] is a student-run program, and student volunteers are not official representatives of the department. Participation in [MPN] is not considered by the Graduate Admissions Committee during application evaluation and as such, participants are not guaranteed admission
- Do not convince an applicant to apply
- Do not change their interests to match
- Do not judge whether they are diverse

Subsection: Qualifications to highlight in their applications

[Here provide a list of skills that the department looks for. Make sure you consult the department head or admissions committee for your department's specifics if possible. Below is an example]

- Solid scientific or engineering background, with an undergraduate major in an engineering discipline or in physical/quantitative science (for example, chemistry, physics, computer science, computational neuroscience).
- Primary metrics include course selection (advanced courses in concentration), grades, GRE scores;
- Demonstration of significant interest and ability in the biomedical area via one or more of the following: course selection, research topics, focus of entrepreneurial activities, letters of recommendation;
- Sustained commitment to and clear potential for research through personal statement, letters of recommendation, conference presentations, or publications
- Other valuable characteristics applicants should consider highlighting: consistency, leadership, or unique interests, ability to innovate, activities or experiences that required dedication and perseverance.

Subsection: [MPN] Application Materials

[Provide a copy of your department's application materials, so that mentors have the most current up to date graduate application.]

Other helpful advice

- Highlight any institutional limitations pertaining to research opportunities in the Statement of Objectives, and any actions taken to overcome those limitations and create opportunity for themselves
- Academic letters of recommendation can be useful in highlighting things transcripts cannot, for example, in the case of grades suffering during a specific timeframe because the student was going through a difficult personal situation.
- **This can vary greatly by department.** However, for many departments, research areas of interest need not be very specific. Applicants can optionally name professors they might want to work with, but it is not necessary. Applicants should not be encouraged to contact faculty members before the application submission.
- Leadership experiences and extracurriculars and other interests are definitely positive, but lack of these will not count against students, therefore applicants should be advised not to force in weak extracurriculars
- Well-narrated personal stories are advisable, as they help the applicant stand out. Applicants should balance the personal story within the story of research experiences
- Very technical descriptions of research should go in the CV. Descriptions of research in the Statement of Objectives should demonstrate the “story” aspect of the research and aspects of the research highlighting initiative/independence of the mentee as opposed to small scientific details. It is important to contextualize past research into the bigger picture and avoid field-specific jargon.

Section: Additional Mentor Resources and FAQs

- The EECS Communications Lab provides advice on developing a Graduate Personal Statement:
<http://mitcommlab.mit.edu/eecs/commkit/graduate-school-personal-statement/>
 - *Note that the recommendations here talk about reaching out to professors and naming them in the application, but that [department] may discourage applicants from reaching out to professors and does not require that applicants name professors in their application (see takeaways below).
- BE Mentor Resource Worksheet

Section: FAQ

- As you gain experience with specific issues within your department, you may want to add another section addressing common concerns for mentors and mentees



BEAAP Mentor Resource Worksheet

Our success is applicant success

- ✓ Improve understanding of our program
- ✓ Provide feedback on app. materials
- ✓ Guide applicants through the process

- ✗ Convincing an applicant to apply
- ✗ Changing their interests to match
- ✗ Judging whether they are *diverse*

Program is on a rolling basis



Applicants apply through the BE website link

Applicants are matched after they submit any app. material

Responsibility is handed off to the mentors and their mentees

Program finishes as application deadline is reached

Focus on experience, meaning, and match for application materials

Personal Narrative	> What drives you as a scientist?	Key Attributes Specific Concrete Quantified Tailored Memorable Relevant Genuine Perceptive
Experience	> How have your experiences shaped you as a scientist? > How will these impact you as a PhD researcher?	
Match	> How do you fit into the program?	
Future	> How do you see your career trajectory?	

FAQs

How are applicants filtered? If they apply and submit materials, they are matched. We do not filter for diversity, schools, grades, etc.

What if my mentee isn't sure about applying or isn't qualified? Offer honest help about addressing these concerns, both in deciding to apply and in strengthening their applications.

What if my mentee isn't responding? It happens. Just be accessible and let them prompt you. If you want another mentee, email beaap@mit.edu

Other questions? Email beaap@mit.edu and ask! Better to ask than assume.

Appendix C: Graduate Education Statistics for Current Programs

Program Name	BEAAP (Biological Engineering Application Assistance Program)	CAMP (Chemistry Application Mentor Program)	MAAP (MEMP Application Assistance Program)	PASS (Peer Application Support Service)	GAAP (Graduate Application Assistance Program)
<u>Department Graduate Education Statistics</u>					
Acceptance rate for department (Admitted/ Applied, 2018)	7%	18%	10%	11%	12% (all MIT)
Minority representation relative to corresponding school, matched degree program (2019) ^{1, 2}	16% International vs 47%, 12% URM vs 6%, 50% female vs 29%	35% International vs 36%, 7% URM vs 9%, 37% female vs 36%	18% International vs 47%, 6% URM vs 6%, 49% female vs 29%	Doctoral and master's candidates: 39% International vs 45%, 14% URM vs 12%, 53% female vs 48%	44% International, 7% URM, 33% female
Mean time to degree from first registration (vs department average)	Average 5.6, female 5.8, URM 6.2 , international 5.5	Average 5.3, female 5.3, URM 5.2, international 5.2	Average 6.4, female 6.3, URM 6.3, international 6.2	Doctoral time to degree: Average 6.6, female 6.7, URM 7.1 , international 6.1	Average 5.8, female 5.9, URM 6.2 , international 5.5
Doctoral attrition rate	International vs non-URM: 7.2% vs 11.9% URM vs non-URM: 25% vs 11.9% Female vs Male: 13.5% vs 11%	International vs non-URM: 13.9% vs 22.4% URM vs non-URM: 31% vs 22.4% Female vs Male: 25.7% vs 18.7%	International vs non-URM: 20.5% vs 18.2% URM vs non-URM: 19.2% vs 18.2% Female vs Male: 21.4% vs 20.9%	International vs non-URM: 14.3% vs 16.8% URM vs non-URM: 15.8% vs 16.8% Female vs Male: 14.1% vs 15.5%	International vs non-URM: 13.8% vs 18.2% URM vs non-URM: 21.7% vs 18.2% Female vs Male: 17.5% vs 16.2%

Appendix D: GradESS Questions of Interest

- How satisfied are you being a graduate student at MIT?
- Please indicate the extent to which your graduate education at MIT has contributed to your knowledge and skills in the following areas: working with people from diverse backgrounds
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 - My program helps me obtain the resources I need
 - The social climate of my program is positive
 - I feel part of the community at MIT
 - Administrators at MIT are genuinely concerned about my welfare
 - I have peers at MIT outside my program who are my personal friends
 - My program's procedures are fair and equitable to all
 - My program is responsive to student concerns
 - I have to work harder than some of my peers to be perceived as a legitimate scholar
 - I feel excluded from informal networks in my program
 - I have been subjected to inappropriate or disrespectful language while a graduate student at MIT
 - I have been harassed while a graduate student at MIT
- Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:
 - I feel welcomed by other graduate students in my department during social activities
 - I feel like I belong in the graduate student community of my department
 - My department needs to do more to create a diverse and inclusive environment
- Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:
 - Staff in my department treat me fairly
 - Faculty in my department treat me fairly
 - My advisor treats me fairly
- During the current academic year, how often, if ever, have you...
 - Felt out of place or that you just didn't fit in on campus?