

Baker Foundation Guidelines for Upperclass Advising

About the Baker Foundation Guidelines

The Baker Foundation is a student group focused on improving undergraduate life at MIT. These guidelines were created in 1996 in response to student comments on upperclass advising. The goal, which remains to this day, was to enable a clearer understanding of what is expected of upperclass advisors, students, and departments, and to improve students' relationships with their advisors.

Advisors should...

- Offer academic advice and guidance. This could include assistance in choosing classes, fulfilling degree requirements, deciding on research interests, finding faculty/staff for UROPs, theses, etc., and pointing students in the right direction to find out about administrative procedures.
- Get to know students and their record well enough so that they can provide informed assistance in case of academic difficulties (e.g., when students are discussed at CAP, when they are not performing well in classes, etc.) and give them friendly support.
- Offer assistance or direct students to the right place to determine post-MIT plans (e.g., choosing graduate schools and advice on jobs).
- Inform advisees of office hours and encourage them to drop by at that time or to schedule an appointment to meet at a later time. Let advisees know the best way and time to reach them.
- Take the initiative to meet with their advisees, particularly during their sophomore year, because oftentimes students who need the most help are afraid to ask.
- Maintain confidentiality of advisees' records.
- Create an environment in which students feel comfortable talking to them.
- Respect their advisees' decisions and support their goals, while challenging them to think through their plans.
- Be concerned with their advisees as people.
- Communicate their expectations of their advisees to their advisees.

Advisees should...

- Expect their advisors to be available at least by appointment during the regular academic term. Students should not necessarily expect to be able to drop into their advisors' offices to meet with them.
- Not expect their advisors to be close, personal friends.

- Expect their advisors to act as mentors and not just as paperwork signers.
- Take the initiative to meet with their advisors more than just on Registration Day.
- Be sure to meet with their advisors if they are having academic difficulties.
- Expect to assume a gradual increase in responsibility for maintaining their relationships with their advisors, as they progress through MIT.
- Believe that they are worthy of their advisors' time.
- Feel comfortable talking about non-academic issues.
- Take the initiative in developing good relationships with their advisors so that they will have someone to talk to about their problems and concerns and so that they will have someone to write a letter of recommendation for them when it comes time to applying for graduate/professional school.
- Know that they have the right to change their advisors if they feel that they are not getting adequate advice.
- Communicate their expectations of their advisors to their advisors.

Departments should...

- Make every effort to match interests (e.g. research, personality) of advisors and students.
- Make it clear to students that they have the right to change their advisors if they feel that they are not receiving good advice or they have trouble talking to their advisors.
- Inform advisors and students of all the resources available within the department and in the Institute (perhaps in the form of a guidebook).
- Have some type of orientation for incoming majors (towards the end of freshman year) and new advisors to familiarize them with the department and its procedures.
- Monitor student's fulfilling of degree requirements.
- Provide an effective support system to advisors and advisees in the form of an undergraduate office that is knowledgeable and helpful.