Spring 2020 Academic Continuity FAQs

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1. Classes

Spring 2020 classes

Will any classes continue to meet in person?
No. All in-person class meetings were suspended beginning at 8 AM on Friday, March 13. All academic exercises (class, recitations, labs, etc.) were canceled from 8 AM on Friday, March 13 through Friday, March 20, 2020. Spring Break followed from March 23 through March 27. Classes resumed online on Monday, March 30, 2020.

When will my classes meet?
Online classes may be delivered in one of the following ways:

- Synchronously: Instructors may hold classes at their regularly scheduled time (Eastern Daylight Time zone EDT) under the normal schedule of classes, and with the same start and end times.
- Asynchronously: Instructors may record lectures so that students may watch them on their own schedule. In this case, the duration of any recorded lectures must not be longer than that of the normally scheduled lecture.

It is possible that a mix of the two delivery methods may be needed.

What if I am registered for a lab or performance subject and we can no longer meet in person?
The Teaching + Learning Lab and the Office of Open Learning are working closely with instructors to find the most appropriate ways to provide instruction that covers all subjects’ material. For more information, please see https://teachremote.mit.edu.

How do I access online material?
Your instructor will provide updates to you on how the remainder of the class will be conducted. The Institute is providing support for instructors to enable online instruction.

Who do I contact if I have questions about my subjects?
If you have questions about a specific subject, please contact the instructor directly. If you do not receive a response, you may wish to contact your program’s undergraduate administrator or undergraduate officer, graduate administrator, or graduate officer.
Troubleshooting and technical support

Who do I contact for help with the transition to online learning?
For general support — including helpful tips on preparation, participation, and wellness while learning remotely — visit http://learnremote.mit.edu.

What if I do not have easy and reliable access to the Internet or appropriate computing (hardware or software) resources to support online learning?
MIT is working to ensure all students can continue their academic programs while away from campus. Please contact ed-continuity@mit.edu to request any necessary resources and specify your needs.

Who do I contact if I have technical difficulties accessing my classes?
For technical issues, reach out to IS&T for 24/7 support.
2. Assignments & exams

Changes to assignments and exams

Will the assignments for my subject change?
Instructors will have the opportunity to revise their syllabi for the term. Assignments may change, but additional assignments must not be added. Revised syllabi, including a schedule for assignments and any changes to grading criteria, should be provided to students in the week of March 30, but no later than 5 PM EDT on Friday, April 3. Any changes to assignments after April 3 will need to be approved in advance by the Chair of the Faculty (facultychair-reply@mit.edu).

For subjects in which there is no final exam, all final assignments during the last week of classes will be due by 10 PM EDT on Tuesday, May 12.

In recognition that most instructors have not previously taught online, students are asked to be flexible. If, however, students feel a subject’s assignments have increased or changed without adequate advance notice, they should contact the Chair of the Faculty at exam-termregs@mit.edu.

Am I still responsible for completing assignments and exams?
Yes. You will be expected to fulfill all assignments.

I am taking/teaching an undergraduate communication-intensive subject. How does this disruption affect the communication assignments?
Given the current circumstances and the shortened term, the curriculum of each communication intensive subject (CI-H, CI-HW, and CI-M) must be reduced by at least one week. It may be necessary for instructors to revise the assignments in such a way that the subjects might not meet the CI criteria in the same way they did when planned and approved. This reduction is likely to interfere with deadlines, and it will not be reasonable to require the same number of assignments in a shorter period of time.

Instructors are asked to determine what is feasible and effective in thoughtfully fulfilling the objectives of the Communication Requirement in the remaining weeks of the term. Emphasizing quality over quantity will be most valuable. Instructors are urged to be flexible about both the quantity and the modality of what students produce.

For more information, please see the guidance from the Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement (SOCR) and direct questions about individual subjects to commreq@mit.edu.

How will my thesis defense be completed?
Thesis defenses may be conducted remotely if necessary. All existing published deadlines for these submissions continue to apply.

How will final exams be given?
Final exams will be done remotely. They will be one to three hours in length and will held during the regularly scheduled exam time EDT, no matter what time zone a student may be in. Conflict exams will be coordinated by the Registrar’s Office as usual. For those students with a conflict exam, notification of the rescheduled exam time will be sent shortly after Drop Date (April 21). The final exam schedule can be found at https://finalexams.mit.edu/#/Finals.

Finals can be either closed book or open book – however, information regarding whether a final will be closed or open book must be provided to students by Drop Date (April 21).
**Academic integrity**

**How will academic integrity be maintained during this disruption?**
All students are expected to adhere to the handbook for academic integrity at MIT.

**How do I report a violation of the new term regulations?**
This is a challenging time for both instructors and students to adjust to teaching online. Communication, flexibility, and understanding are strongly encouraged. That said, all instructors are expected to adhere to the published Emergency Academic Regulations.

Students who have a concern about assignments changing without adequate notice or an increase in a subject’s requirements should contact the Chair of the Faculty at exam-termregs@mit.edu.
3. Grading

Alternate grades

How will spring term subjects be graded?
In view of the global pandemic, its effect on our students, instructors, and all the members of our community who support our educational programs, and after extensive consultation and deliberation, it has been decided that the "Alternate Grades" (PE, NE, and IE) defined in Section 2.64 of Rules and Regulations of the Faculty must be used for all undergraduate and graduate full-term and second-half term (H4) subjects this semester.

Can I give some students in my class regular grades and others alternate grades?
No. All full-term and H4 classes must be graded as outlined above. H3 classes can be graded either using regular grades or alternate grades, but not a mix of both.

Will the alternate grades satisfy academic requirements?
Yes. Subjects in which a student receives a grade of PE will count for all Institute, major, and minor requirements.

Will alternate grades satisfy the Communication Requirement?
Students should be reassured that PE grades will satisfy all Institute requirements, including GIRs, the Communication Requirement, and departmental requirements.

Will the alternate grades be included in GPA calculation?
No. None of the alternate grades will be used in GPA calculation.

Will the alternate grades be visible on the official transcript?
Grades of PE and IE will display on the official transcript. NE grades will not. In addition, the following statement will be on every student's transcript:

Can I change a PE grade to a regular letter grade once the disruption is over?
No. The Faculty Officers have determined that, except for H3 classes, only the alternate grades can be used this semester and no petitions will be considered which seek to change a PE to a regular grade.

I registered for a subject as Junior-Senior P/D/F or P/NR under the CUP Experimental Grading Policy. Will the alternate grading apply to those subjects too?
Yes. Alternate grades will be used in these cases too. Students receiving PE grades in such a subject will now receive credit towards General Institute Requirements, major, or minor requirements where they might not have previously (for example, in the case of junior/senior P/D/F). These designations will count towards your limit for the chosen grading option.

Will cross-registered subjects at Harvard be graded using the alternate grades?
Yes. Students cross-registered at Harvard will receive the alternate grades of PE, NE, and IE.

Incompletes & thesis grades
Does an IE for a graduating student have to be resolved prior to graduation?

No. The usual rules around the completion of Incomplete grades by undergraduates have been suspended so that IE grades do not need to be resolved prior to graduation.

How should a previous term’s IE grade be resolved?

As under normal circumstances, the student has the opportunity to complete the outstanding work in consultation with the instructor by a deadline (to be determined) set by the Chair of the Faculty.

Any work completing an IE grade given this semester should be given a PE or NE grade, and the student’s grade will be changed to show IE/PE or IE/NE.

May I give all of the students in my class a grade of IE?

This is strongly discouraged to avoid situations in which a student has multiple Incompletes pending at the end of the semester, and in view of the uncertainty around how the pandemic will affect future semesters.

If a student completes the outstanding work for an Incomplete or an O from a prior semester, should I use the alternate grading?

For students who received an I or an OX in a previous semester and are completing those subjects this semester, instructors should make their very best efforts to assign a letter grade, with an aim to err on the generous side (e.g., if a student is borderline C/B, they would be given a B).

Under rare circumstances, alternate grades may be given. Exception requests may be sent to the Chair of the Faculty at facultychair-reply@mit.edu.

Can I still give an O grade during this term?

Yes. The O grade is still an option.

Can a student retake my subject if he or she receives an NE grade?

Yes. A student may retake a subject for credit in which they have previously received an NE grade.

How will Master’s-level and SB theses be graded this spring?

Non-PhD students who complete their theses in the spring will receive alternate grades of PE or NE. For these students, thesis registration in prior terms will also reflect these final alternate grades (J/PE or J/NE).

Can I still use J or U grades for thesis?

Yes. J and U grades are still available for thesis work this semester.

Providing feedback to students

Can I give students letter grades as feedback on assignments and examinations?

Yes, although you are not required to do so. Qualitative feedback or qualitative translation of numerical scores may be good alternatives. In any case, instructors should provide feedback to students in whatever form is most pedagogically helpful in their subject, taking into account the circumstances of this semester. That feedback should be sensitive to the fact that students will be impacted differently in their opportunity to demonstrate performance this spring.

Can I indicate a letter grade for a student as part of a letter of recommendation?

No. Consistent with the mandatory requirement for alternate grades, specific letter grades should not be indicated in a letter of recommendation. However, instructors may craft letters that provide an evaluation...
of a student’s level of achievement in words, without referring to a letter grade, and which reference the challenging circumstances a student may have overcome or experienced this semester.

**How will grades be reported at the end of the semester?**

Faculty will be presented with a drop-down menu of grades according to whether their subject is full term, H4, or H3 or whether the subject is designated to use J, U, or T grades.

For most full term and H4 subjects, faculty will select from PE, IE, NE, or O. For a small subset of subjects (e.g., thesis, independent research, etc.), the additional grades of J, U, or T will also be available.

For H3 subjects, instructors must choose between standard grades and alternate grades for the entire class. The system will not allow instructors to mix the grade types for different students in a class.
4. Academic progress

Academic progress & dropping subjects

Will this disruption affect my academic progress?
The Institute has taken these steps with the goal of preserving the standards and integrity of MIT while enabling students to continue to make progress in their degree programs.

All undergraduate and graduate full-term and second-half term (H4) subjects this semester will be graded with "Alternate Grades" (PE, NE, and IE) as defined in Section 2.64 of Rules and Regulations of the Faculty. Subjects in which a student receives a grade of PE will count for all Institute, major, and minor requirements.

Can I still drop subjects?
Students will be able to drop full-term subjects until Drop Date, Tuesday, April 21, and H4 (second-half term) subjects until Tuesday, April 28.

Undergraduates who are no longer enrolled full-time due to dropped classes will have their tuition pro-rated based on the number of units for which they are enrolled plus a pro-rated charge for the dropped classes based on the last day of attendance. For information about financial aid, view the Financial Aid FAQs.

Students in their final term who have fulfilled their degree requirements without the subjects in which they are enrolled this term and who wish to drop these subjects but remain on the May degree list should contact Student Support Services to become a non-registered degree candidate.
5. Academic support

**Academic support for students**

What if I fall ill during the term?
Students may still request excused absences during this period. Undergraduates should contact Student Support Services. Graduate students should contact Graduate Personal Support.

Can I petition for an exception?
For more information regarding petitions, please contact the appropriate committee:

*Undergraduate students:*
- Petitions for General Institute Requirements
- Petitions to the Committee on Academic Performance for late changes to registration

*Graduate students:*
- Petitions to make academic record changes

**Academic support for instructors**

Where do I go for help with teaching online?
A new site, teachremote.mit.edu, has been created by to help instructors quickly move from in-person teaching to online instruction. Instructors may also email teachremote@mit.edu.

How do I get guidance on whether my syllabus meets the revised term regulations?
Instructors may wish to contact their academic unit’s head, education officer, undergraduate officer, or graduate officer. Questions may also be referred to the Chair of the Faculty at exam-termregs@mit.edu.
6. Commencement & diplomas

May 2020 Commencement

Will Commencement ceremonies be canceled?
MIT’s virtual Commencement ceremony will take place on Friday, May 29. Learn more by visiting the Commencement website.

Diploma distribution

When will diplomas be distributed?
While we can assure you that graduating students will receive a traditional, paper diploma, we are not yet certain of the timeframe for distribution. MIT’s process to produce and package diplomas requires in-office work across multiple offices that cannot be undertaken until it is determined to be safe to return to campus.

To ensure that we are prepared to distribute your paper MIT diploma when the time comes, please complete the following steps:

- Go to the degree application in WebSIS.
- Confirm that your mailing address is up-to-date.
- Indicate whether you would like to receive your diploma when the in-person ceremony is held (date TBD) or have it mailed to you (when it is safe to do so).

Digital diplomas will be issued for the virtual Commencement ceremony on May 29 and on the first of the month thereafter.

What is the most immediate way to prove that I have graduated?
We strongly encourage students to opt in to our digital diploma program. Alternately, our office can supply official degree certifications. Email records@mit.edu to request one.

How can other institutions or potential employers verify my digital diploma?
Please direct them to our Digital Diploma Verification webpage for instructions.