

## TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING, rev. 2/2023

### Special information for advisors of first-year students:

**8.398: All first-years should register for 6 units of 8.398.** Registration in 8.398 in both fall and spring terms is a requirement for all first-year PhD students.

**8.392: All RAs must enroll in 12 units of 8.392.** Students on fellowship should be encouraged to enroll in 8.392, and told that the work to identify a supervisor counts as research activity in the first term. Please be sure to talk with your students about their progress in identifying an advisor; if they seem very uncertain about this, please flag the situation for the Academic Programs Office.

**Written Exam results:** These will be sent to you and your advisee by email either late on Friday, February 3, or on Monday, February 6. If a student failed EM, be sure to encourage him or her to take 8.311 this spring.

**First-term enrollment:** Except for students who have already passed all the Core Requirements through passing each of the four WE, an ideal second term might consist of:

- One Specialty or Breadth subject from the lists on [this page](#)
- One Written-Exam-related 12-unit subject (or, if not needed, a Specialty or Breadth subject)
- 12 units of 8.392
- 6 units of 8.398

A student who has passed all four sections of the Written Exam should consider two subjects that will fulfill an academic requirement (specialty or breadth).

### Information on specialty and breadth subject selection and timing for continuing students:

**Second- and third-year students:** be sure second- and third-year students are making steady progress on completing both their breadth and specialty requirements. If third-years are still missing one or more of these subjects, they should take at least one this spring; if missing more than one, there should be a plan created for specifically when these requirements will be completed.

**Fourth-year and beyond:** Fourth-year students and above should have completed both specialty and breadth requirements. Any missing requirements should be fulfilled immediately if at all possible. Do not allow students to postpone these into the second half of their PhD.

**Requests for substitutions:** You and your students will find detailed Information about requesting substitutions for specialty or breadth subjects [here](#), but in brief:

- **Specialty subjects:** Approval comes from the Division Head; the student should obtain the academic advisor's permission in writing, and then forward the request to the Division Head. This process holds even for Harvard subjects that have been routinely substituted for MIT subjects.

- **Breadth subjects:** Approval comes from the Graduate Requirements Coordinator (Mehran Kardar); the student should obtain the academic advisor's permission in writing, and then forward the request to Prof. Kardar. ***No approval for a substitution will be given until one of the pre-approved breadth subjects has been completed successfully; please be sure your students plan ahead, and take at least one breadth subject from the approved list.*** Note: the pre-approved subjects provide broad overviews of the fields we teach; subjects intended for specialists are generally not appropriate as breadth subjects.

### Oral Exam information:

**Timing:** Students are officially required to make their first attempt at the Oral Exam by the first term of their third year. Postponements are possible by special arrangement with the Associate Department Head, and should be requested by the academic advisor. Two attempts at the Oral Exam are allowed. If a second attempt is required, it is taken in the term immediately following the first attempt.

**Signing up:** Any student definitely planning to take an Oral Exam in spring 2023 should use the [Exam Application](#) to register, ideally by February 17. Scheduling of Oral Exams is at the discretion of the Exam Committee in each area; in general, Oral Exams are given no earlier than mid-way through a term, and are most often administered in the final month of the term.

**Exam Committees:** All students who are required or eligible to take an Oral Exam in the coming term will be sent information about the Exam Committee in their research area by the Academic Programs Office, approximately by February 17.

### Thesis Committee information:

**Timing:** In the term immediately following passing the Oral Exam, a student should:

- enroll in 8.THG, Thesis Research (and no longer enroll in 8.391/8.392, Pre-Thesis Research)
- take steps to put together the Thesis Committee

***The official deadline to construct the Thesis Committee, assuming the student is following a standard timeline, is the first term of the fourth year.*** If your advisee has completed the Oral Exam and has not yet formed a committee, please urge them to do so as soon as possible. No student should be forming a committee the term before they plan to defend!

A great deal of information about the process of forming the Thesis Committee is available at <https://physics.mit.edu/academic-programs/graduate-students/doctoral-guidelines/>; click on the heading for "Thesis."

**Meetings:** After the committee is initially formed, the student should arrange a first meeting, and send a 1-2 page thesis proposal to the members in advance. At the first meeting, the student should present ideas on the topic and the proposed methodology, and hear suggestions from the committee members.

After the first meeting, ***meetings should be held at least once annually*** until the student is preparing for the thesis defense; meetings can be more frequent if mutually agreed to. Students should send a note to the Academic Programs Office to document the date and attendees at each committee meeting.