

Resources for Handling Complaints Effectively

In addition to serving as researchers, educators, advisors, mentors and managers, MIT faculty and administrators serve as complaint handlers to students, staff, post docs, and others within the MIT community. With this responsibility comes the need to be aware of the host of resources within the Institute that are available to assist them. This handout offers supplemental information about resources that faculty, administrators, and others may want to add to their list of resources when complaints are brought to them.

I. MIT Community Standards of Behavior

Violations and perceived violations of community standards of behavior cause a great deal of pain and uncertainty and create risks to individuals and to the entire MIT community. They can take a considerable amount of time, with high emotional and financial costs for those involved. There is NO perfect way to deal with perceived violations AFTER the fact. The goal should be to try to promote prevention, or at least early intervention, by educating the MIT community about good practices and available resources for dealing with complaints before they are filed. Following is a list of possible resources:

- a. Active bystanders help to uphold community standards.
<http://studentlife.mit.edu/mediation/bystander>
- b. Local DLC Heads are seen as critical to whether people will act or come forward when they see unacceptable behavior.
- c. Faculty Internal Mediators (FIMs) and faculty who advise the graduate student Resources for Easing Friction & Stress (REFS) programs provide support to faculty and graduate students. Some DLCs have varying degrees of such programs. Other DLCs are establishing or considering establishing such programs.
- d. REFS programs have proven helpful to graduate students who are stressed by conflict or facing other dilemmas and want to discuss their issues with a peer. Chemistry, EECS, Physics, Biology, MechE, HST, Math, Nuclear Engineering, DUSP, and the Operations Research Center have REFS programs. Other DLCs are also establishing or considering establishing REFS programs. (Contact Libby Mahaffy, Assistant Director for Conflict Resolution, Office of Student Citizenship, for information on establishing REFS programs, 617-253-0242, <http://studentlife.mit.edu/mediation/resources>.)

II. MIT Faculty and Staff Can:

- a. Convince people that the DLC managers want to know about unacceptable behavior so it can be prevented or stopped.
- b. Ensure that policies and resources are well known and easy to access.
- c. Act to ensure that complainants and complaint handlers have a choice of options.
- d. Mitigate bad consequences if possible.
- e. Opt for good consequences when possible.
- f. Work to see that people will be appropriately supported.
- g. Work to see that people will be appropriately held accountable.
- h. Take timely action, be fair to all parties, and maintain privacy when possible.

III. Ways to Prevent Problems and Prepare to Address Complaints

- a. Participate in complaint handlers' training, e.g., Dealing with Conflict workshop, sexual & other harassment prevention training, supervisory training, active bystander training, mediation training (See <http://hrweb.mit.edu/learning-development/workshops> and <http://studentlife.mit.edu/mediation/resources>)
- b. Establish FIMS and REFS programs with a common charge and common training.
- c. Provide support within the DLC such as talking about the conflict management program(s).
- d. Share best practices with each other.
- e. Implement relevant 2004 and 2007 Graduate Student Council (GSC) survey recommendations, e.g., posting a list of resources on DLC bulletin boards; along with relevant recommendations from the 2010-2011 GSC advising survey. (See <http://gsc.mit.edu/programs-initiatives/advising>)

- f. Hyper-link documents & websites on ethics, research conduct, active bystanders, harassment, etc. for easy access when needed.
- g. Brainstorm options for dealing with problems with an Ombud or other appropriate resource contact.

IV. MIT Ombuds Office, <http://web.mit.edu/ombud>, 617-253-5921

- a. Neutral, confidential, informal, independent complaint handlers; design and conduct workshops on effective communication, dealing with conflict, harassment, discrimination, role of active bystanders.
- b. Listen to perceptions, concerns, allegations, etc. from faculty, staff of all kinds, students, post docs, alums, visitors to campus, contractors, prospective employees.
- c. Help brainstorm options, evaluate pros and cons of options.
- d. Train, facilitate, mediate, coach individuals and groups on how to achieve more constructive results.
- e. Identify policies, procedures, guidelines, past practices which may help in dealing with issues. Maintain a host of related resources and links on the Ombuds website.
- f. Do not conduct formal investigations, adjudicate, arbitrate, keep records, accept notice for MIT, or serve as witnesses or advocates in administrative or legal proceedings at the Institute or elsewhere.

V. Resource Documents for Handling Complaints

- a. Faculty and Administrative Managers

MIT Policies & Procedures (P&P) 7.3 – Responsibilities of Supervisors, <http://web.mit.edu/policies/7/7.3.html>

- b. MIT Policies, procedures, rules, guidelines, self-help resources, etc. available on the MIT web:

Academic Integrity at MIT, A Handbook for Students
<http://integrity.mit.edu>

Violence Prevention and Response (VPR)
http://medweb.mit.edu/wellness/programs/violence_prevention.html

Fostering Academic Integrity (Widnall Report)

http://orgchart.mit.edu/sites/default/files/reports/Widnall_Report.pdf

Guidelines for Raising Complaints about Harassment (9/21/10)

<http://web.mit.edu/communications/hg/>

MIT Mind + Hand + Book <http://web.mit.edu/mindandhandbook>

Values @ MIT Sloan (Sloan Professional Standards)

P&P 4.4 – Conflict of Interest

P&P 4.5 – Outside Professional Activities

P&P 9.1 – Personal Conduct & Responsibility Toward
Students & Employees

P&P 9.4 – Policy on Racist Behavior

P&P 9.5 – Policy on Harassment

P&P 9.6 – Complaint Resolution Policies and Grievance
Procedures

P&P 10.1 – Procedures for Dealing with Academic Misconduct in
Research & Scholarship

P&P 10.2 – Procedures for Dealing with Student Academic
Dishonesty

P&P 14.3 – Research on Human Subjects

P&P 14.4 – Office of Sponsored Programs

Rules & Regulations (R&R) of the Faculty – 1.73.5 The Committee
on Academic Performance

<http://web.mit.edu/faculty/governance/rules>

R&R of the Faculty – 1.73.7 The Committee on Discipline

R&R of the Faculty – 2.90 Discipline, 2.91 – Authority of
Instructor

- c. MIT Policies, procedures, rules, guidelines, etc. available on the
MIT Ombuds Office website, e.g.,

<http://web.mit.edu/ombud/about/MIT-Ombuds-Terms-of-Reference.pdf>

<http://web.mit.edu/ombud/self-help>:

MIT Policies & Procedures (<http://web.mit.edu/ombud/self-help/policies.html>)

Discuss or Surface a Concern, a self-help handout

“IsR³?” – a Problem-Solving Algorithm

When People See Unacceptable Behavior