

Are you considering switching advisors in the Joint Program?

Initial Discussions: Sometimes students have already discussed a potential advising change with their current advisor and sometimes they have not. Sometimes students have already identified a potential new advisor, and sometimes they have not. Any of these variations are ok...here is what to do if you would like to discuss a potential change or learn more about your options.

STEP 1

Meet with Education Coordinator (EC). The situation can generally be discussed in confidence: Discuss whether advising change makes sense and explore options for alternative advisors

If the student prefers, they may have this initial discussion with the JC Chair or Associate Dean

No formal decision about an advising switch is made at this stage. Depending on the situation, the EC may facilitate conversations with the current advisor, with a potential new advisor and/or with JP leadership (APO/MIT director) .

Consulting with APO/MIT: If it is confirmed that the student would like to switch advisors, the WHOI Dean and/or MIT Director must be consulted (by the student and/or the EC, with permission from the student). If the student would be switching institutions, both must be consulted.

STEP 2

- The student may be asked to have an additional meeting with the Dean, Associate Dean, or Director to discuss their interests and potential paths forward.
- JP leadership (Dean, Director, Assoc. Dean) and the EC will discuss possible paths forward. If a potential alternative advisor has been identified, feasibility will be assessed (e.g., available funding, willingness to raise funds, research match, available time and interest to advise).
- If a specific alternative advisor has not been identified, JP leadership will work with the EC and student to identify potential advisors.
- Switching advisors may require switching research directions.

Making it official: Once a potential advisor is identified, the student, former advisor and new advisor agree on details of the switch and make the change official. These conversations should be documented in writing and generally facilitated by a third party. This includes approval from the relevant JC. JP leadership (Dean, Assoc. Dean, MIT director, ECs) can facilitate these conversations.

STEP 3

With former advisor

- Timing of switch
- Expectations for finishing, documenting or writing up research completed or in progress
- Credit (authorship etc)
- Intellectual property moving forward

With new advisor

- Timing of switch, and any time needed to complete research in previous lab
- Expectations
- Scope of future research and anticipated timeline

With the JC

- Approval of change
- Impacts on timeline for graduation
- Whether a new thesis proposal and/or thesis proposal defense is needed
- Notification to JP

Who should I talk with if I'm unhappy with my current advising relationship? It is always best to address problems early if possible. Many relationships can be improved through direct conversation between the student and advisor. Beyond this, the student can obtain advice from another committee member, the Education Coordinator, the Associate Dean, or the Office of Graduate Education. Sometimes a student-advisor relationship can be improved by involving another committee member in regular meetings and communications or by adding a co-advisor.

If a student wants to change advisors or explore the possibility of changing advisors, they would generally have an initial discussion with their Education Coordinator. If the student prefers, having a conversation with their JC Chair or with the Associate Dean would also be appropriate starting points. The desire to potentially change advisors can be held in confidence at this point.

When should I approach a potential new advisor? It depends on the circumstances around the potential advising change, but in general, a student should not approach a faculty member about being a new advisor until after they have had a chance to discuss the situation with their Education Coordinator, JC Chair, or the Associate Dean.

What if I am interested in being advised by a faculty member who is not part of the JP? We still recommend that you discuss the situation with your Education Coordinator before engaging in any specific conversations with faculty members about a potential advising change. The Education Coordinator can often provide you with advice specific to your situation and can help you navigate whether this potential advising change would involve remaining in the JP or transferring into a different MIT graduate program.

To what extent will a conversation be private? Joint Program faculty, APO staff members, and OGE Staff are designated as Private Resources. This means that we are usually able to keep a conversation undisclosed, but, depending on the circumstances, [described here](#), information may need to be shared with other MIT or WHOI officials. Students may discuss concerns about confidentiality before sharing potentially sensitive information. Students are also encouraged to utilize confidential resources as appropriate. MIT: <https://idhr.mit.edu/reporting-options/confidential-resources>; WHOI (ombuds): <https://www.who.edu/who-we-are/about-us/people/ombuds/>

Where can I go for support? Switching advisors is often a stressful experience, and finalizing the process can take an extended period. Students are encouraged to seek support through the transition; we particularly encourage students to contact GradSupport (gradsupport@mit.edu, <https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/>).