



GRADUATE STUDENT HOUSING WORKING GROUP: ANNUAL UPDATE 2020–2021

In response to recommendations set forth by the [Graduate Student Housing Working Group's Report to the Chancellor \(August 2018\)](#), Housing & Residential Services (HRS) has continued its work to improve MIT's graduate student residential experience. In Fall 2020, HRS transitioned from its work with the Graduate Housing Implementation Team to the Graduate Housing Working Group.

GRADUATE HOUSING WORKING GROUP (GHWG)

The Graduate Housing Working Group brings together stakeholders from across campus to ensure that the Institute is well-positioned to evaluate and respond effectively to the housing needs of MIT's graduate student community. The aim of the GHWG is to analyze and report on major forces impacting the supply and availability of graduate student housing in the Greater Cambridge area while also assessing demand for different types of on-campus housing options. In addition, the GHWG provides advice and insights about long term and strategic housing priorities, including major on-campus graduate housing projects such as the recently-opened Graduate Tower at Site 4 and the future West Campus graduate residence which is slated to open in Fall 2024.

Charter for AY 2020–2021

The GHWG will operate continuously, but for Fall 2020 had a focus on the most pressing current projects (with the following order not necessarily reflecting priority):

1. Examine ways to optimize occupancy and to identify and address the root causes of vacancies in the graduate housing system.
2. West Campus graduate housing project
 - Review the results of surveys and focus groups and any additional graduate student input.
 - Understand the ideal unit mix and allocation of common space achievable while retaining affordable rent.
 - Receive ongoing updates on the progress of the project and provide guidance.
3. Housing rate setting process and stipend setting process
 - The main goals are to ensure graduate students have the resources to afford living on or off campus, and for MIT to offer a quality housing system that is attractive to graduate students.
 - Consider the stipend process and design a rate-setting strategy that aligns with the Cost of Living analysis and stipends process and supports a quality, financially sustainable housing system that will attract and retain graduate students living on campus.
 - Recommend a path to ensure graduate students can cover their cost of living expenses, considering questions such as:
 - How should the types and amounts of subsidies for graduate students with dependent spouses/children be determined?
 - Can graduate students who live off campus meet their expenses?
 - What response is appropriate to the net loss in affordable family housing caused by the closure of Eastgate?

- Connect the timing of stipend and rate increases, coordinating with the Graduate Student Council's Housing & Community Affairs (HCA) Advocacy Subcommittee, and taking information from the Institute on the timeline on which it can pursue Graduate Student Council and working group recommendations.
 - Explore ways to optimize occupancy and look for root causes of vacancies, including those at Westgate. Investigate what drives demand, and the discrepancy between that and the effect documented in the 2018 report in which graduate students wanted to live on campus but couldn't.
4. Graduate Housing Priorities
 - Review progress of the Graduate Housing Implementation Team and the rest of MIT in implementing the recommendations of the 2014 and 2018 Graduate Student Housing Working Group Reports.
 - Make recommendations to address near term needs and prioritize next steps.
 - Receive updates from the Eastgate Transition Team and provide guidance on plans and progress related to the opening of Site 4 and the transition of the Eastgate community.
 5. Evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local housing market, and the impact of that on graduate students.
 - Since COVID-19 is unlikely to be the last crisis that MIT faces, what lessons should we take from it about the design/operation of graduate housing? Are there ways we can make MIT housing more resilient?
 - In view of the possibility of future pandemics, should we reconsider the extent of shared kitchens/bathrooms in graduate residences? Is there a way to design graduate housing to avoid having to evacuate in the event of an epidemic, or minimize the research and education disruption from that? What are the other large apartment buildings in the Boston area doing?
 - How long are the decreased rents caused by COVID-19 likely to last?
 - What effect will current Cambridge housing projects and policies have on affordability and availability for graduate students?

In review, the **August 2018 Graduate Student Housing Working Group key recommendations** were:

1. MIT should increase on-campus graduate housing capacity with an optimal mix of unit types aligning with the evolving needs of students and families over time. The Institute should assess the feasibility of doing so in a way that breaks even financially at 30 years with comprehensive stewardship.
2. The Institute should identify ways to operate our housing differently. Currently our revenue falls short of what is required for comprehensive stewardship. This leads to lower quality housing and creates an impediment to adding more housing.
3. The Institute should develop a process for evaluating the benefits and detriments of changes to our housing policies.
4. A detailed evaluation of graduate student housing should be conducted by a similar working group every three years, with a report to Academic Council and the MIT Faculty. This should also include a short yearly update to assess progress relative to the last detailed evaluation.

This report fulfills the annual reporting expectation in recommendation 4 and addresses progress by the Implementation Team on recommendations 2 and 3.

SUPPORTING GRADUATE COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

The Eastgate Transition Team continued to meet during AY 2019-2020. The group was established to plan for all the changes that resulted from the closure of Eastgate Apartments and the opening of the Graduate Tower at Site 4, and the transition team included residents of Eastgate, Graduate Student Council leadership, graduate students at large, Eastgate's head of house, a faculty representative, and staff from the Division of Student Life (DSL), including HRS. It worked collaboratively to develop plans that focused on the following key issues:

- Closure of Eastgate: Developing information about on- and off-campus housing options that can help to meet current Eastgate residents' needs; ensuring that residents are informed regarding their options and receive priority in on-campus processes; and planning for move-out logistics.
- Opening of the Graduate Tower: Developing new executive team membership, roles, and responsibilities; communicating information about apartment types, prices, and amenities; planning for common spaces in the Graduate Tower; and planning move-in logistics.
- Communication: Ensuring strong communication with residents and soliciting input from key constituents.

With Eastgate Apartments residence (E55) scheduled to close at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, HRS worked with the Eastgate Transition Team to provide targeted support to Eastgate residents in the Fall 2019 semester and into the Spring 2020 semester. Students were supported as they explored housing options in the Graduate Tower at Site 4 and in other on-campus graduate residences, and they were provided off-campus housing resources. HRS offered information sessions, office hours, and community-specific communications. Eastgate residents were given priority in graduate housing processes for Fall 2020, including priority in the selection of apartments in the new Graduate Tower at Site 4, which opened in Summer 2020.

Many Eastgate residents were interested in living in the Graduate Tower at Site 4. Construction tours of Site 4 were offered to Eastgate residents in the fall and winter, and Eastgate Transition Team members helped to develop furniture offerings for the building and residential guidelines, such as parameters for common space usage, in the new residence. They also established interim governance for the Site 4 community with MIT's Office of Graduate Residential Education.

Early in the Spring 2020 semester, MIT graduate students voiced concerns about the Graduate Tower at Site 4 housing rates. Rates were set in alignment with the Institute's strategy and with the Graduate Student Housing Working Group's 2018 report in mind; the goal was to offer below market rents that are aware of the surrounding market and support a comprehensive stewardship model of maintaining the building over time. HRS offered a 15% discount on Graduate Tower at Site 4 rates for Eastgate residents. In addition, HRS collaborated with the Office of the Vice Chancellor and Student Financial Services to develop transition subsidies to better meet the needs of Eastgate residents who were moving to the Graduate Tower at Site 4 and who demonstrated either low, medium, or high degrees of financial need. This model of support informed work throughout 2020-2021 to further enhance financial support for graduate students and those with partners and children in particular.

The MIT campus was shut down in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the City of Cambridge issued a construction moratorium halting construction. Eastgate Apartments remained open and the need for continued support for Eastgate residents continued. Residents stayed in their Eastgate units into Summer 2020, and Graduate Residential Education added a new temporary Assistant Director of Residence Education staff position to assist with graduate student support. After the construction

moratorium was lifted and the Graduate Tower at Site 4 was completed, residents were able to move to their new housing assignments between November 2020 and January 2021. The Institute provided all logistical relocation assistance, including personal packing options, through move management firm Relotek in order to ease the transition for residents and ensure that all Covid-19 policies and protocols were followed.

Eastgate and Graduate Tower at Site 4 Occupancy by Program

July 18, 2021

Program of Occupants	Eastgate Residents Fall 2020	Site 4 Spring 2021	Site 4 Fall 2021
Economics (14 D)	5 (3%)	5 (4%)	19 (4%)
Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (6 D, 6 P)	17 (9%)	23 (18%)	62 (13%)
Mechanical Engineering (2 D, 2 M)	10 (5%)	11 (9%)	25 (5%)
Media Arts and Sciences (MAS D)	8 (4%)	3 (2%)	7 (1%)
Other Programs (1 D, 1 M, 10 D, 11 D, 11 MCP, 16 D, 16 M, 17 D, 18 D, 20 D, 21 CMS, 22 D, 24 AD, 3 D, 4 ABM, 4 CD, 5 D, 7 D, 7 BMD, 9 CD, IDS DSE, OR D, SCM 2B)	66 (34%)	31 (24%)	149 (30%)
Physics (8 D)	8 (4%)	4 (3%)	10 (2%)
SLOAN - Management (15 M2, 15 M, 15 L2, 15 F5, 15 D, 15 A)	75 (38%)	47 (36%)	194 (40%)
System Design and Management (EM SD, EM ID)	8 (4%)	5 (4%)	25 (5%)
TOTAL	197	129	491

WEST CAMPUS GRADUATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

In December 2019, in a [letter](#) to the MIT graduate student community, Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart, Provost Martin Schmidt, and Executive Vice President and Treasurer Israel Ruiz announced that the graduate housing project that MIT committed to in the 2017 Volpe Agreement with the city would be located at the west end of campus on the site of the West Lot parking area and the MIT Police building (W89).

The West Campus graduate residence will offer a mix of unit types for graduate students, including those with families. An initial survey to MIT graduate students showed that there is demand for proposed efficiency units, one-bedroom and one-bathroom units, two-bedroom and one-bathroom units, and four-bedroom and two-bathroom units. Students also indicated that couples would prefer options for double-occupancy studios. The residence will be in close proximity to Fort Washington Park and the City of Cambridge's Grand Junction multi-use pathway, which is under development. It will also feature a central plaza for community use.

The West Campus Graduate Housing project will add more than 500 additional beds to the MIT graduate housing system, which (in addition to 200 converted graduate beds and 250 new beds from the Graduate Tower at Site 4) fulfills MIT's commitment to add 950 beds to the graduate student housing stock (per the [Volpe zoning petition](#) from Fall 2017).

MIT submitted plans for special permits to the City of Cambridge on schedule, by the December 31, 2020, deadline. The bed count in the filing was recorded as 676, which is more than the anticipated 500 beds. Construction is anticipated to begin in early 2022.

Cambridge and MIT Student Housing

Volpe Commitment: October 23, 2017

"MIT agrees that it shall create 950 new beds for graduate students (collectively, the "New GSH Beds"), pursuant to the schedule set forth in this letter. To that end, MIT agrees that it shall:

- Use diligent efforts to complete, on or before December 31, 2020, the construction of Building 4 of MIT's South of Main Street Project in Kendall Square (the construction of which broke ground on October 11, 2017), containing 450 graduate student beds, of which 250 beds will be net New GSH Beds;
- No later than December 31, 2020, apply for a discretionary permit (or a building permit if no discretionary permits are required) to create at least 500 New GSH Beds; and
- Use diligent efforts, on or before December 31, 2020, to either add, by conversion of existing beds and/or establishment of new beds, or apply for a discretionary permit (or building permit(s) and/or alteration permit(s), as the case may be, if no discretionary permit is required) for, or a combination thereof, a minimum of 200 New GSH Beds in existing buildings or otherwise located on MIT's campus or properties owned by MIT, which may include the recently converted 133 graduate student beds at 70 Amherst Street."

Commitment Summary

Source	Beds
Kendall Square Site 4	250
New	500
Converted or New	200
Total	950



MIT Fulfillment Plan

Source	Beds
Kendall Square Site 4	250
New West Graduate	650-700
Residences Converted	150
Total	1,050-1,100

MIT WEST CAMPUS GRADUATE DORMITORY PROJECT



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GRADUATE HOUSING RATES

In setting MIT's graduate housing rates, the Institute has been transitioning to pricing that is aware of the surrounding rental market, supports comprehensive stewardship of the facilities, and takes graduate student stipends into account.

The goals of this strategy are to provide rates that are below market, affordable, and ensure that MIT can operate a quality and financially sustainable housing system. An annual cycle of rate evaluation and recalibration has been implemented to achieve this new strategy. MIT continues to move lower-priced graduate housing units to target rate ranges, but with consideration for a long-term approach rather

than short-term. This plan also helps to moderate any significant changes in the area market. A key goal is to avoid sharp rate increases or decreases when possible. This year, HRS continued consultation with the GSC on anticipated housing rate changes in coordination with the annual graduate student stipend recommendation process. The effects of the pandemic on the rental market were significant as the Institute had to determine how best to respond to a drop in occupancy and rates as well as the anticipation of a rapid recovery once the pandemic ended.

The appraisal of MIT housing stock has dropped and is now close to market valuation. Current housing market conditions indicate that further significant market degradation due to pandemic-related vacancy is not anticipated, and recovery is forecast to begin midway through AY 2021-2022 (with potential for market recovery in 24-36 months). When assessing the current valuation:

- Approximately 60% of MIT graduate housing units are above or at market, and
- Approximately 40% of units are below market value.

In setting housing rates, MIT aims to be market-aware, and also aware of MIT graduate stipends. HRS announced in March 2021 that graduate housing rates will not increase for AY 2021-2022.

GRADUATE HOUSING MARKETING STRATEGY

HRS has focused efforts toward marketing MIT's graduate housing. Showcasing residences and their amenities will maximize occupancy in graduate residences, and thus lower vacancy rates. According to student survey data, HRS's marketing strategy for graduate housing should focus on the following areas:

- Highlighting the importance of community within MIT graduate housing
- Obtaining student testimonials about their on-campus housing experience
- Promoting renewable license agreement opportunities for residents
- Enhancing photo, video and virtual tour content of residential interiors

Housing & Residential Services has worked to improve its web presence and launched a new site at graduatehousing.mit.edu to showcase graduate housing options, features, and pricing in a modern, user-friendly interface. There have also been additions and improvements to the Division of Student Life website, at studentlife.mit.edu/housing, which provides detailed information on housing policies. HRS continues to update content, including images and virtual tours of residences, and also strategically links to residences' house-run platforms and web pages.

Strengthening engagement with campus partners has also been a priority for HRS. Cross-promoting housing options and benefits to students with academic departments can assist incoming graduate students and current graduate students living off-campus. Materials such as social media content, visuals for Infinite Displays across campus, and informational presentations for academic departments have been compiled and shared with campus partners.

A new graduate housing incentive program was developed for Fall 2021, with a \$250 referral credit. A current graduate resident can refer a new resident into on-campus graduate housing, and both participants will be eligible for the rental credits. There is no maximum rental award for referrers and as of June 7, 2021, there were 345 referrers and 337 referees participating in the incentive program.

GRADUATE HOUSING SURVEY DATA

In early 2020, Housing & Residential Services met with each of the graduate houses to discuss, among other topics, the Fall 2019 Graduate Housing Survey results in comparison to the Fall 2018 survey results. Statistically significant findings from the surveys include:

- Respondents reported a significant **increase** in satisfaction with the length of time between submitting their application for housing and receiving a building assignment.
 - 71% of respondents in 2018 vs. 78% of respondents in 2019 reported being satisfied or very satisfied.
 - Mean score change of 3.8 in 2018 vs. 4.0 in 2019.
- Respondents reported a significant **increase** in satisfaction with the application process to get on the waiting list for graduate housing.
 - 57% of respondents in 2018 vs. 70% of respondents in 2019 reported being satisfied or very satisfied.
 - Mean score change of 3.6 in 2018 vs. 3.8 in 2019.
- Respondents reported a significant **increase** in satisfaction with the time between applying to the waitlist for housing and receiving their housing assignment.
 - 62% of respondents in 2018 vs. 74% of respondents in 2019 reported being satisfied or very satisfied.
 - Mean score change of 3.6 in 2018 vs. 4.0 in 2019.
- Respondents reported a significant **increase** in satisfaction with the length of time between getting their building and room assignments.
 - 65% of respondents in 2018 vs. 78% of respondents in 2019 reported being satisfied or very satisfied.
 - Mean score change of 3.7 in 2018 vs. 4.1 in 2019.
- Respondents reported a significant **decrease** in agreement that there are events in their residence for the community they are interested in attending.
 - 76% of respondents in 2018 vs. 71% of respondents in 2019 agreed or strongly agreed.
 - Mean score change of 4.0 in 2018 vs. 3.8 in 2019.
- Respondents reported a significant **decrease** in agreement that there is a positive sense of community where they live.
 - 69% of respondents in 2018 vs. 65% of respondents in 2019 agreed or strongly agreed.
 - Mean score change of 3.8 in 2018 vs. 3.7 in 2019.

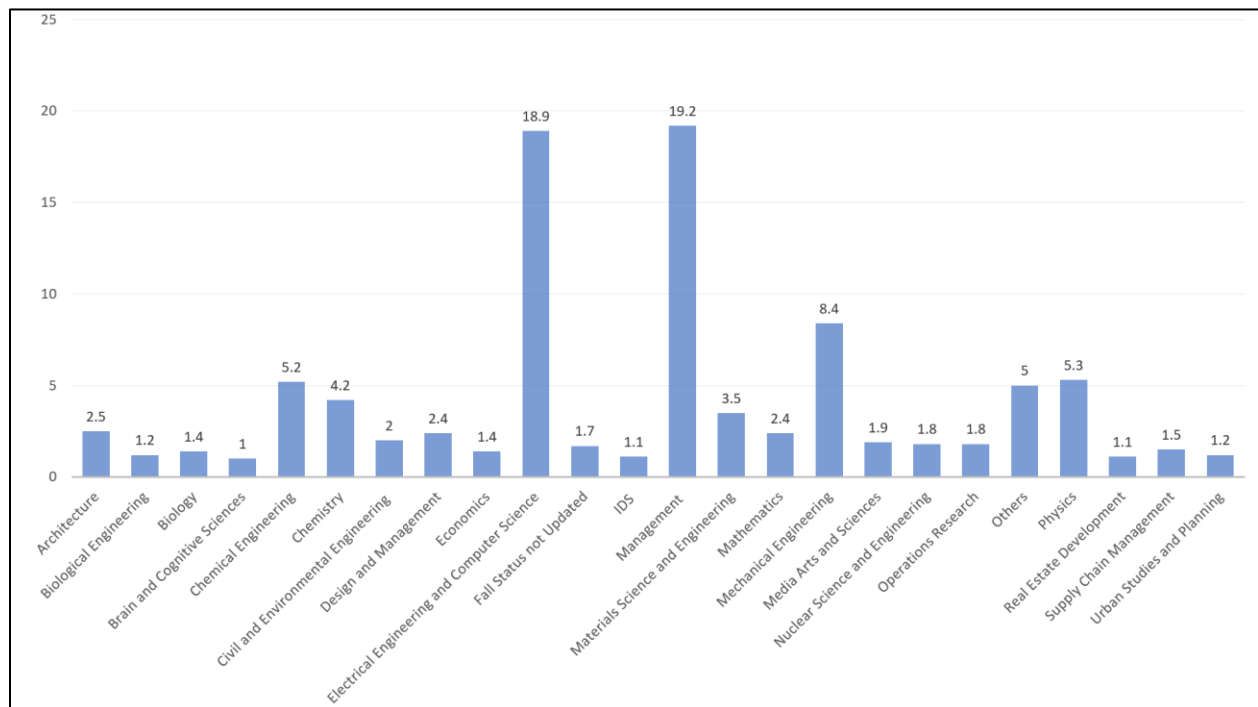
GRADUATE HOUSING OCCUPANCY DATA

As of July 18, 2021

Fall 2021 Assignments and Projections	
Renewed Assignments	761
Officer Assignments	82
Allocation Assignments	1,014
Visitor Waiting List Assignments	41
Grad Waiting List Assignments	229
<i>Projected Undergraduates in Graduate Housing</i>	<i>118</i>
TOTAL	2,245
% of Occ Design	83%

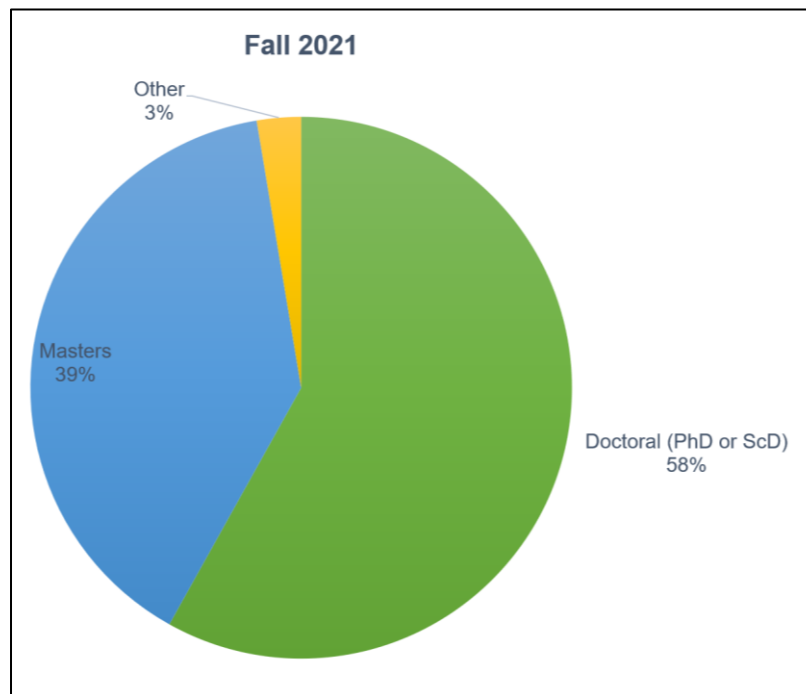
DEGREE COURSES OF RESIDENTS IN GRADUATE HOUSING

% of Graduate Population



PROGRAM TYPE OF RESIDENTS IN GRADUATE HOUSING

% of Graduate Population



RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, much of MIT shutdown in March 2020. While undergraduate students were required to depart campus, the Institute did not require that graduate students move off-campus. In a [letter to the community on March 10, 2020](#), President Reif noted, “Because most graduate students live in apartments – as opposed to dorm-style living with shared facilities – we are not requiring graduate students to move off campus. However, if your individual living circumstances present a higher risk, we may relocate you elsewhere on campus. Graduate Resident Advisors (GRAs) will not be asked to leave campus ... Graduate students who can work remotely and who can arrange another place to live away from campus are strongly encouraged to do so.”

With that encouragement from MIT, many graduate students made the decision to leave campus housing. Recommendations for storage and packing vendors were offered, with financial assistance available to those who needed it. Graduate students who remained on campus and who were living in densely-populated residences such as 70 Amherst or in three-bedroom units in Ashdown House were relocated. With frequent communications going to the entire campus during this stressful time, DSL developed a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and [Campus Guides](#).

Various [residential policies were adjusted](#) due to the pandemic, which affected building access, events and gatherings, residents’ ability to have guests, and more. Additionally, residential common spaces, kitchens, and residential amenities were closed for several months. After Housing & Residential Services and Graduate Residential Education offered a design workshop with graduate housing student leaders,

HRS developed guidance for the safe use of residential common spaces. Policy changes and updates were regularly communicated via email, and also posted to a [Housing Dashboard](#) and the [HRS website](#).

Physical changes were made to many residences, such as adjustments or removal of furniture in common spaces, and plexiglass barriers installed at front desks. Empty common areas were reconfigured as “Zoom Rooms” or quiet study spaces, which were requested as graduate students began working and taking classes from their residences, sometimes alongside partners and children.

By Summer 2020, the Institute began to announce decisions on what the Fall 2020 semester would look like amidst the ongoing pandemic, and Housing & Residential Services responded with flexibility and adjusted housing processes to respond to graduate student needs.

- Accommodations were made for students who needed housing extensions past July 31, 2020.
- Housing cancellation and termination fees were suspended for Covid-related issues for most of Spring 2020 and into Summer 2020.
- In lieu of usual sublicensing practices, graduate residents were permitted to [pause rent](#) for summer 2020 and the 2020-2021 fall/winter holidays, and Summer 2021.
- Rent responsibility, which typically would begin August 1, 2020, was delayed until September 1.
- The start of contracts and rent responsibility were adjusted for students experiencing arrival delays due to travel or visa restrictions.

As previously mentioned, with the Institute preparing to ramp-up to full campus operations in Fall 2021, Housing & Residential Services announced in March 2021 that graduate housing rates will not increase for the 2021-2022 academic year, and that sublicensing will remain on hold but residents can once again pause rent between June 1 and August 31, 2021.

ENHANCING GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT

During Spring 2021, the GHWG engaged in discussions with Chancellor Barnhart, Vice Chancellor Waitz, and Vice President and Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson regarding support for graduate students as MIT works to expand housing and make sure students have the resources they need to be successful. Multiple discussions were also held with Provost Schmidt and the school deans resulting in the following principles and new initiatives announced in the graduate student stipend letter for the AY 2021 - 2022:

Stipend Increase

MIT established the new ranges for the monthly stipends of full-time research and teaching assistants for the AY 2021-22. These ranges reflect a 3.25% increase, exceeding the GSC’s Stipend Working Group estimate of the change in cost-of-living by more than 1%. An increase above the cost-of-living adjustment responds to unique competitive pressures some graduate programs are experiencing this year, and similar increases in future years may not be appropriate when balancing many different considerations.

The -10% option was eliminated among the allowable stipend ranges that can be used at School/department discretion. Moreover, as shared above, MIT’s housing rates will not change for AY2022 and health insurance rates, see below, will go down.

MIT Health Plans

For those enrolled in MIT’s Student Extended Insurance Plan, the price will decrease by approximately \$180 for AY2022.

Support for Graduate Students in Need

In addition to improving the benefits provided to all students, programs will continue to be developed and designed to deliver targeted support to members of the graduate student community most in need.

For example, over the past year, in partnership with the Schools and departments, MIT has worked to reduce financial insecurity for those on 9-month appointments / non-resident status. \$289,000 was provided in the form of short-term emergency funding to cover pandemic-related expenses and losses.

In keeping with the commitment to graduate student families with children, the new Grant for Graduate Students with Children disbursed 96 awards of \$2,000 – \$4,000 this fall and spring. A [new Program Administrator for Graduate Student Families](#) was also hired.

Some additional details on funding programs are below:

- **Short-Term Emergency Funds.** There is an ongoing fund for students who are experiencing one-time, non-recurring financial emergencies, and the Graduate Student Short-Term Emergency Fund remains another available resource. [More information is available on the Office of Graduate Education website.](#)
- **Need-Blind Grants for Graduate Students with Children.** MIT is enhancing its commitment, as recommended by the GSC, to the need-blind [Grants for Graduate Students Children](#). The base-level of the awards will be increased to \$5,000. As a result, the award levels will move from \$2,000, \$3,000, \$4,000 for 1,2, and 3 or more dependent children to \$5,000, \$6,000, and \$7,000.
- **Doctoral Long-Term Financial Hardship Funding.** The School deans are keeping their commitments to putting policies and practices in place to address the long-term financial challenges that doctoral students who are not on full stipends may experience.

Note: Students in non-residency status are eligible for emergency hardship funding.

New and Expanded Efforts

Working in partnership with the GSC and others, MIT has identified new ways to provide support and resources to the graduate student community. Two new efforts include:

- **Yellow Ribbon Program.** Expanded participation in the [Yellow Ribbon Program](#) at the graduate level for student Veterans or designated transferees, who qualify under the Post-9/11 GI. MIT will contribute the following amounts of tuition funding for Yellow Ribbon recipients, which the VA will match as follows: \$15,000 for Masters programs in the School of Science, School of Engineering, School of Humanities, Arts and Sciences, School of Architecture and Planning, and the Schwarzman College of Computing; \$20,000 for Masters programs in Sloan, limited to 30 students; and unlimited funding for doctoral students in all schools.
- **Transitional support program for graduate students.** Holding true to MIT's deep commitment to supporting graduate students through the entirety of their academic development and degree, and in response to recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, MIT's NASEM Academic and Organizational Relationship (AOR) working group report, and concerns raised by the Graduate Student Council and the RISE campaign, MIT created a transitional support program for graduate students who wish to change research advisors or groups.