



Graduate Program in Science Writing
Student Handbook

2024

Go to class.

Do the work.

Ask for help.

The People

Graduate Program in Science Writing

Seth Mnookin, Professor and Director
14N-420 X 4-1868
smnookin@mit.edu

Alan Lightman, Professor of the Practice
14N-226 X3-2308
lightman@mit.edu

Chris Couch, Associate Director
14N-210 804-263-5050
couch@mit.edu

Tom Levenson, Professor
14N-229
levenson@mit.edu

Angela Saini, Lecturer
adsaini@mit.edu

Danna Solomon, Academic Administrator
14N-338 X2-5036
dsolomon@mit.edu

Students

Sarah Akaaboune
Anika Jane Beamer
Jess Chomik-Morales
Lyn Ocharoenchai
Pratik Pawar
Paula Rowinska
Mackenzie White
Celina Zhao

Comparative Media Studies/Writing Main Office

Seth Mnookin, Head
14E-303b

Sarah Smith, Administrative Officer
14E-303a X3-4741
se_smith@mit.edu

Jessica Tatlock, Senior Administrative
Assistant
14E-303 X5-5277
jtatlock@mit.edu

Michael Gravito, Systems Administrator
14N-230 X4-8972
mgravito@mit.edu

Other Important Contacts at MIT

Office of Graduate Education
3-107 X3-4860

OVC, Vice Chancellor Dan Hastings
7-133 X8-0809

Graduate Student Council (student gov't)
gsc.mit.edu

MIT Health
E23 X3-4481
health.mit.edu

Campus Police
301 Vassar Street, Building W89
X3-1212 or dial **100** from campus phones
<http://web.mit.edu/cp/www/>

MIT Graduate Student Union
As Fellows, GPSW students are not part of
the GSU bargaining unit but may join the
union voluntarily if desired.
mitgsu.org

Curriculum

Curriculum

Register for classes at registration.mit.edu. You must submit your registration by 5pm on Friday of the first week of classes.

Fall

21W.825 - Advanced Science Writing Seminar
21W.822 – Thesis Development and Workshop
21W.823 – Lab Experience for Science Writers
21W.THG - Graduate Thesis
One elective of at least 9 units

Spring

21W.826 – Advanced Science Writing Seminar
21W.824 – Making Documentary
21W.823 – Lab Experience for Science Writers
21W.THG – Graduate Thesis
One elective of at least 9 units

Summer

21W.892 – Science Writing Internship

Electives

Your **electives** can be any class at MIT or Harvard for which you have the appropriate prerequisites and approval from the GPSW. One elective **MUST** be at the [graduate level \(G\)](#) to satisfy the Institute minimum units for a Master's Degree. The GPSW requires grades of B or above in all classes to graduate.

One MIT unit is approximately equal to 14 hours of work per term. The [Subject Listing](#) displays units for each subject as a series of three numbers (e.g., 3-2-7). The numbers added together (3+2+7) equal the total credit for the subject (12). In order, the three numbers represent:

- units assigned for lectures and recitations
- units assigned to laboratory, design, or field work
- units for outside preparation

Some subject listings contain “units arranged” instead of a series of numbers. This indicates that you and your instructor have agreed upon the amount of work you will do and have adjusted the credit accordingly. A 12-unit class will typically require 13 hours in-class and out-of-class work per week.

Many students register for multiple electives before deciding in which they will remain. Students may add or drop electives at <http://studentformsandpetitions.mit.edu> until the Add Date, although we strongly recommend that students decide what classes they want to take as early in the semester as possible.

GPSW students may not use the [Graduate P/D/F status](#) for any required coursework. All required subjects must be taken for a letter grade if offered for a letter grade.

Lab Experience for Science Writers

To provide a direct view of how science unfolds on a daily basis, the GPSW requires each student to spend a total of 12 hours in two of MIT's hundreds of laboratories, then write a profile and an explainer or a news feature.

Thesis

A thesis is required of all Master's students at MIT. The thesis forms one of the cornerstones of the MIT Graduate Program in Science Writing and provides students with the opportunity to dive deep into a scientific area of interest. The thesis is a long-form narrative science writing piece of at least 6,000 words written for a general audience. It can be data-driven, investigative, historical, or even personal so long as it meaningfully bears on science, technology, engineering, or medicine. Students may complete a documentary or multimedia thesis project as long as the written length and original reporting requirements are met. Students take two semesters of thesis seminar (21W.ThG); in the fall, it is co-registered with 21W.822, Thesis Development and Workshop. The thesis has milestones that must be met throughout both semesters and is completed in the spring.

Thesis Presentation

All students must present their thesis orally. This presentation, referred to as "Thesis Day," occurs on the Friday of the last week of classes in May. In-person attendance is required. It typically involves presenting the topic, a brief discussion of the research that went into it, and a reading from the thesis followed by questions from the audience.

Internship

GPSW students are required to complete a full-time summer internship or obtain a full-time job in science journalism or communication following the regular academic year. They may also choose to complete a part-time internship as an elective in the spring semester. Students work with Chris Couch to secure writing-focused internships at print or online science publications, museums, laboratories or research institutions, investigative journalism organizations, digital production studios, educational outreach groups, or television or radio stations. If you secure an unpaid internship in the summer, you may be able to apply for funding through the [PKG Center](#).

If a student is in campus housing and secures an off-campus internship, you are allowed to break your lease early. It will require a confirmation email from the Academic Administrator. If you are in this situation, write to Danna as soon as possible to request the letter to Housing.

Key Dates

For a complete listing of dates deadlines, consult MIT's academic calendar at <https://registrar.mit.edu/calendar>.

Registration Day, Fall Term	September 3
First Day of Fall Classes	September 4
Registration Deadline	September 6
Fall Add Date	October 4
Fall Drop Date	November 20
Pre-registration for Spring Semester	December 2
Last Day of Fall Classes	December 11
IAP Begins	January 6
Registration Week Begins, Spring Term	January 27
First Day of Spring Classes	February 3
Registration Deadline	February 7
Spring Add Date	March 7
Spring Break	March 24-28
Spring Drop Date	April 22
Last Day of Spring Classes	May 13
Thesis Day!	May 16
Registration Opens, Summer Session	June 2
Summer Session Begins	June 9
Degree Application Deadline	June 13
Summer Session Ends	August 19
Graduation	October, TBD
MIT SHASS Advanced Degree Ceremony	May 27-29 TBD

Resources

Disability and Access Services

<https://studentlife.mit.edu/das>

Disability and Access Services (DAS) enables an accessible campus experience at MIT by:

- Ensuring access for qualified students with disabilities
- Consulting on digital accessibility, assistive technology, and user experience

For students seeking accommodations, we encourage you to contact us to discuss access, accommodations, and services which you may need. Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Amended Act of 2008, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, our objective is to ensure that our students receive equal access to all Institute programs, activities, and services. To that end, we seek to balance the student's right to access with our obligation to uphold the integrity of MIT's programs, activities, and services. All inquiries are welcome at das-student@mit.edu.

GPSW Student Lounge

Each student is issued a key to 14N-317. This is a student common space in which to work or relax between classes. It contains iMac computers, a printer, lockers, a seminar table and a couch. The key must be returned at the end of the summer semester.

GradSupport

<https://oge.mit.edu/student-support-development/gradsupport/>

Staff in the Office of Graduate Education provide advice and counsel on a variety of issues including faculty/student relationships, changing your advisor, conflict negotiation, funding, academic progress, interpersonal concerns, and a student's rights and responsibilities.

Institute Discrimination and Harrassment Response

<https://idhr.mit.edu/>

IDHR strives to reduce the prevalence and impact of discrimination and discriminatory harassment by providing for all MIT community members, including students, faculty, and staff:

- engaging **educational opportunities**,
- information about **resources**,
- **individualized supportive measures**, including academic, workplace, and housing modifications,
- tracking and reporting **patterns and trends**,
- and **complaint resolution pathways** that include **restorative and investigative** processes.

I9 and Payment

GPSW does not recommend working on campus more than 10 hours a week. However, if you have a campus job, in order to be paid at MIT you'll need to fill out an I9 form at the Atlas Service Center. You can start the process online (<http://hrweb.mit.edu/i-9>) and finish it when you get to campus. A passport is probably the easiest form of identification to bring. **YOU MAY NOT WORK IF YOU HAVE NOT SUBMITTED AN I9.** International students may work up to 20 hours per week on campus, although again – this heavy a workload is not recommended.

Kelly/Douglas Research Fellowships

The Kelly/Douglas fund (administered by the SHASS Dean's Office) provides funding up to \$500.00 per year toward research expenses, which is matched by the GPSW plus \$250. Although not officially a GPSW resource,

the majority of our students have taken advantage of this fund for thesis research. More information is available at <https://shass.mit.edu/undergraduate/scholarships/kelly-douglas/grants/application>.

Learning Modules

MIT uses the [Canvas](#) course management system. The syllabus and many of the readings for the fall Advanced Science Writing Seminar will be available at canvas.mit.edu.

MIT Activities Committee

<http://mitac.mit.edu>

MITAC negotiates discounted tickets for everything from movies to ski trips. Before you go to a concert, check there first to see if you can get it cheaper!

MIT Health

<https://health.mit.edu/>

Most services at MIT Medical are included with tuition. This includes:

- [Primary Care](#)
- [Urgent Care](#)
- [Student Mental Health and Counseling Services](#)
- Tests processed in MIT Health's onsite radiology and laboratory services
- Visits to most MIT Health specialists.

Note: Coverage for services at MIT Health is not considered an insurance policy.

[MIT SHIP](#) (or other comprehensive insurance) is required for most students.

MIT SHIP meets state and federal health insurance requirements, as well as the requirements for J-1 visa holders.

You can also join the [Community Wellness Newsletter](#) to find out about MIT Health's wellness opportunities, and in the Spring, you can consider joining the [GetFit](#) competition to gamify your fitness!

NASW Membership

GPSW underwrites a student membership in the National Association of Science Writers (NASW) for each of its graduate students. Join up at the student rate and send Danna your receipt for reimbursement. If you don't wish to take advantage of this, you should immediately take your temperature because you must be ill.

Student Mental Health and Counseling

<https://health.mit.edu/services/mental-health-counseling>

Student Mental Health and Counseling services are included in your Institute fees; you will have no copay, and your health insurance will not be billed. **Mental health clinicians are available 24 hours a day for urgent matters.**

Travel and Commuting

- The **MBTA** or "the T" is the Boston-area public transportation system. It can occasionally be annoying, but it can also get you where you need to go without a car. The MBTA consists of buses, subways, trolleys, and commuter trains. [MIT subsidizes monthly T passes](#) at a rate of 50% off what the general public pays. Go to atlas.mit.edu for more information.
- **Parking** - If you live in campus housing, parking is arranged through your dorm's parking coordinator. If you are staying off-campus, you may purchase a student commuter-parking permit for about about \$1,300/year. Parking on campus is very limited. Go to <http://commuting.mit.edu/> for more information.

- MIT also hosts many [Zipcars](#) on campus. Zipcar is a car-sharing organization for which MIT sponsors membership - you pay a small annual fee, plus the hourly cost of the car when you use it. If you wish to live without a car, but find yourself needing one every so often, Zipcar may be for you.
- MIT also subsidizes memberships to [Blue Bikes Bicycle Rental](#). More information is available at <http://web.mit.edu/facilities/transportation/>. The short story is that you can pay an annual fee of \$35 for a membership and then pay by the hour after that. A bicycle rented from a Blue Bikes station can be returned to any Blue Bikes station.
- Although it is rare, MIT has been known to cancel classes due to **snow** or inclement weather. If there are blizzard conditions outside your window, and you're wondering if you ought to get out of bed, you can call **(617) 253-SNOW** and be told by a friendly, recorded voice whether or not the Institute is "open and operating as usual." Do remember though, that during the Blizzard of '78, it took an order from the Governor of Massachusetts to cancel classes and close the school. Given how much is being taught online, this is even more unlikely.