HST MD Survival Guide
by Joseph Franses, Marie Hollenhorst, Jared Niska, and Tian Zhang
Academic Life

Curriculum

In HST, classes are in a semester format, organized by organ system, and more traditional (lecture style with occasional case-based learning/problem sets/tutorials) when compared to New Pathway (independent learning through tutorials/cases with some lectures). The result is an intense, in depth survey of human systems that incorporates the best of both worlds and will allow you to rub elbows with some of the shining stars of Boston’s medical Mecca. Additionally, you’ll share the classroom with PhD students from MIT who are pursuing medical science related research in the HST program.

The MD curriculum begins in the fall of the first year with an emphasis on training critical observational skills, with coursework in Anatomy, Pathology, Immunology, and Genetics. Students engage in a semester-long course of dissection and histology work, understanding the human body on both the macroscopic and the microscopic levels. In their second and third semesters, students engage in rigorous pathophysiology courses of the various organ systems (eg., Cardiovascular, Respiratory, Renal, Endocrine, Neuro, Reproductive, and Gastrointestinal Pathophysiology) to train their analytical skills. During their fourth semester, MD candidates take their Introduction to Clinical Medicine course, an intensive 12-week course teaching the clinical skills that they will need during their third-year clerkships.

Be prepared to spend some quality time with your fellow HST students as you work together on problems sets, in tutorials, and in the anatomy lab—our society goes through a lot together, and consequently tends to be a tight knit family of friends. Never fear, however, as the instructors and faculty members are – by far – the best that Harvard has to offer. Never will you have such a unique opportunity to interact with teachers who care so passionately about the classroom experience and medicine. The myths about lacking opportunities to interact with patients are only as real as you want to make them—opportunities for patient interaction arise through patient visits to the core classes, as well as Introduction to Patient Care and shadowing opportunities.

After second-year and Step 1 Board exams, HST MD students join their colleagues from the New Pathway program during their third-year rotations at the Harvard-affiliated hospitals. These year-long rotation programs based within one hospital system will allow students to completely familiarize themselves with a single hospital and will allow faculty members to follow students through the course of a year, as students mature and grow into their doctoring roles within the hospital. Students then take part in exciting elective rotations during their final year of medical school as they apply and interview for residencies, and enjoy the opportunities of doing electives at first-class medical institutions both within the US and abroad.

Research and Thesis Requirement

HST MD students are also required to engage in at least four months of research to produce a thesis by the first Monday in February of their final year at the medical school. At the beginning of second semester, MD candidates begin their work in a research lab of their choosing, to prepare for their thesis work. The HST MD curriculum is thus the only one in the country that designates time in the first and second years of medical school specifically for students to take part in the ongoing cutting-edge research
at Harvard Medical School, MIT, the main Harvard campus, or any of the Harvard-affiliated hospitals. These varied institutions thus provide MD candidates with the most opportunity and choice in finding a research lab best suited for their passions in scientific research. Students currently work in fields as widely varied as quantitative biology, tumor stem cells, tissue engineering, and neuroscience.

Many students choose to pursue their research interests beyond the minimal requirements by completing a five-year plan or pursuing an MD/PhD. HST encourages this through generous research stipends that couple with reduced tuition (only 10% of normal tuition after four years!) and additional funding from outside sources (such as the Doris Duke Foundation or Howard Hughes Medical Institute). Students in the five-year plan either intersperse the preclinical classes over three years to leave more time for research or take a year off to devote to research full-time.

Have more questions regarding research and how to go about finding a mentor? Talk with upperclassmen and get their impressions of each lab that they’ve worked in/interviewed with/rotated through. The impressions are the most insightful, since these upperclassmen have actually been through the labs that you’re interested in. Finally, don’t forget to involve your RA program advisor in this process; he/she will be the one who’s most plugged into the Harvard and MIT communities and can thus focus your search for a PI in the direction of your personality and interests.

**Advising**

Each medical student will need a mentor as a guide through medical school. To the envy of New Pathway students, HST students are connected with three mentors right when we matriculate. Who will you go to for help when times get tough and you need some sort of advice on your studies, your research, and even your personal life? Mentors are there as stability factors, columns to lean on for strength and endurance through medical school. With a choice of three personalized mentors already established for each student, HST MD candidates have a much higher chance of actually finding support and sympathy as they encounter the difficult times of medical school.

HST offers a variety of mentored support to MD students – your first advisor comes in the form of the Academic Advisor, who is in charge of approving your curriculum choices for each semester. In some cases, this advisor will become that beacon of light for you, assuring you during medical school crises that everything will be ok and that no, you did not fail that anatomy exam. They will meet with you for coffee and listen to every aspect of your life, to understand and to support your development through your medical school years. And if nothing else, you will be guaranteed at least one meeting at the beginning of each semester for your advisor to chat and to sign your registration card.

The second advisor that all MD students should be aware of is the Research Assistantship Program advisor – that is, a faculty member selected specifically for his know-how in the Harvard and MIT communities, who is instrumental in helping students find a research environment in which to pursue the Research Assistantship. Since research is an important and distinguishing aspect of the HST curriculum, this advisor plays a crucial role in helping the MD student identify the ultimate research mentor, a PI who will guide the student’s scientific and research development in the laboratory setting.
Thirdly, the research mentor that you’ve found after interviews galore, the one that you’ve decided should guide your scientific development – get to know them well!

This is the mentor who will oversee your longitudinal development in scientific rationalization and the maturation of your thoughts and ideas, as well as support you through the difficult times of finals each semester, when you really really can’t go into lab. Choose wisely and well!

A group of three personalized mentors is not nearly enough – our wonderful Associate Master of HST, Rick Mitchell, is the father-figure in the HST society area in the MEC. With office hours each week, Rick is happy to meet with anyone in any year of study to discuss academic, research, and even life issues. As the author of your Dean’s letter for residency applications, as well as the course director for the HST 030 course in Pathology, Rick is the advisor of advisors. Rick hosts several wine-and-cheese meetings in the fall to get to know all of the first-year students, a few at a time. Don’t miss this chance to talk with Rick and for him to get to know you!

Lastly – but definitely not least, Patty Cunningham in the MEC HST office is THE resource for anything logistical – or even just a hug. Patty has been with HST for 30 years, and she’s literally seen it all. Have a crisis with the HMS/MIT bureaucracy? Talk to Patty!

**MD/PhD Program**

The combined MD/PhD program begins the summer before the first year of medical school with a course and laboratory rotation. The course, entitled Molecular Biology of Human Disease, serves as an introduction to experimental approaches in medical research as well as an introduction to the school itself. The summer is a great time to bone with your fellow MD/PhD classmates as you begin to explore Boston and the world of biomedical research together. In the fall, you’ll join your MD and PhD classmates for preclinical medical school courses. During the second and third semesters, as well as during the intervening summer, students complete additional lab rotations and choose a PhD thesis lab. There are lots of resources to draw on when choosing a thesis lab. The administrative director, Amy Cohen, and Admissions Coordinator, Robin Lichtenstein, in the MD/PhD office can help you get in touch with older MD/PhD students in your research area, and the program director, Dr. Loren Walensky, can provide you with honest advice about labs at HMS and beyond. You can also contact one of the many MD/PhD advisors, your MD advisor, Rick Mitchell, or any of the HST advisors.

The summer after the preclinical medical courses is a busy one. After studying for and completing the USMLE step I exam, you may choose to participate in a one-month clinical rotation before beginning full-time graduate school in the fall of the third year. This rotation gives you the chance to apply to knowledge that you just gained in the first two years of medical school and to finally get a taste of what clinical medicine is like.

In the fall of third year, you’ll switch from physician in training to hardcore basic scientist as you enter your graduate school years. During these years, you will complete a graduate school program that is identical to that completed by “normal” PhD students. You will complete the same courses (unless you have fulfilled some of the graduate requirements with your MD coursework), take the same qualifying or oral exams, and
complete the same type of rigorous research that the other PhD students in your department do. Some MD/PhD students also choose to stay actively involved in clinical medicine during graduate school by attending Grand Rounds at any of the hospitals, participating in volunteer clinics, or by shadowing physicians.

After completing the PhD, you will return to medical school and complete the third and fourth years of the medical curriculum. Both degrees should be completed in seven or eight years.

With over a dozen potential PhD programs to choose from, as well as a rigorous MD curriculum grounded in the physical and molecular sciences, the Harvard/MIT HST MD/PhD program is much more than simply a long acronym.

Places to Study
As an HST student, you have an overwhelming variety of choices when it comes to finding a place to study. Below are listed some of the most popular study locations for HST MD students.

Vanderbilt Hall. There are small study rooms on each floor, as well as a library right off the main lobby. The lighting is less than ideal, but nothing can beat the convenience!

Countway Library. This is the HMS library. Check out the second floor reading room for comfy chairs and plenty of light, or the basement for minimal distractions. You can use the computers here for email checking or a quick wiki search, but keep in mind that anything you print will cost you 10 cents page.

MEC. The MEC is a popular place for people who like to study in groups, or just be close to other people who are studying. You can study in the HST lounge, the skills area (where you’ll have your microscope readily available for studying histology slides), the atrium, or invade an NP tutorial room.

Boston Public Library. The BPL offers free wireless internet, and a chance to escape the Harvard/MIT bubble and study with normal people. The main library is located in Copley Square, but there are lots of smaller libraries throughout Boston.  
http://www.bpl.org/

Cambridge. There are a number of excellent libraries to choose from at MIT and Harvard College. At MIT, try the reading room on the fifth floor of the student center. It is convenient, but be careful as it tends to get crowded during exam times.  
http://libraries.mit.edu/  
http://lib.harvard.edu/

Cafes. There are tons of study-friendly cafes around Boston. Trident Booksellers and Café at 338 Newbury Street is a cozy place to study and offers tasty food when you need a study break.  
Social Life

School-Sponsored Social Activities

The HMS calendar provides plenty of opportunities to break away from lab or studying and have a good time with your Harvard and MIT colleagues.

The fun begins during the first five weeks of fall semester when your schedule will be packed with LIFE events. These are social events led by friendly second years (both NP and HST) designed to promote bonding amongst the first year class and introduce you to Boston.

You’ll get a chance to get to know your HST classmates (MD and PhD) better at the **HST Retreat**, held during a weekend in early September. The retreat is held in Sandwich, MA on Cape Cod and is reminiscent of summer camp, complete with hiking, canoeing, s’more-making, and late-night tomfoolery.

The second year class gets to show off its comic talents again with the annual **Second Year Show**. This musical comedy allows the entire class to come together to make fun of HMS and the medical school experience in general.

In HST, you have not one but two opportunities each year to relive your high school prom. Don’t miss the chance to dance the night away with your medical school classmates at the annual **HMS Formal**. This dance brings together HMS/HSDM faculty and students from all years for a classy evening. Then, find another fancy outfit for the **HST Formal** which brings together HST faculty with students from the MD and PhD programs for an elegant evening.

**FABRIC** is an event that allows HMS students to show off their talents.

In the spring, HST goes head-to-head with the four NP societies in a competition known as **Society Olympics**. The societies compete in events that range from the strictly athletic (tug-of-war) to the creative (banner design competition), to the ridiculous (dance-off). The top society walks away not only with eternal bragging rights, but also with a pink flamingo.

Other Fun things to do in Boston

Students at HMS have diverse interests inside and outside the classroom. Here are some of the more popular activities around Boston.

**Movies**

- AMC Fenway 13, 201 Brookline Ave, Boston, MA (Landmark Center)
- AMC Loews Boston Common, 175 Tremont Street
- Coolidge Corner Theatre, 290 Harvard St, Brookline, MA
- Independent Films

**Sports/Exercise.** The Vanderbilt Hall work-out facilities are a good place to strike up a conversation or sweat out some stress.

**Game Night.** Game nights are held in the deanery and sometimes even hosted by an HMS-HSDM student in their apartment or home. Don’t forget to request student council funding if you’re organizing a game night for the whole class. They are always looking to improve student life.
**Museums**
Museum of Fine Arts, 465 Huntington Ave.
Museum of Science, Science Park, Boston, MA 02114

**Bars**
There are more bars in Boston than can be listed in this section, but here are some favorites:

*Near Longwood:*
- Mission Bar and Grill (Brigham Circle)
  - Good place to talk anytime
- Squealing Pig (Brigham Circle)
  - Good for happy hour
- An Tua Nua, 835 Beacon St., Boston, MA
  - Thursday nights

*Fenway:*
- Jillian’s, 145 Ipswich St., Boston, MA 02215
  - Adult playground (bowling, pool, ping pong, air hockey)
- Cask ‘n Flagon (Behind the Green Monster)
  - Sports bar
- Jake Ivory’s, 9 Lansdowne St., Boston, MA 02215
  - Piano Bar (dueling pianos)

*Back Bay:*
- Whiskey’s, 885 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116
  - Neighborhood bar
- Daisy Buchanan’s, 240 Newbury St., Boston, MA 02116
  - Loud music and dancing
- Vox, 755 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116
  - Lounge setting

*Downtown:*
- McFadden’s, 148 State St., Boston, MA 02109
  - Bar upstairs, dancing downstairs. Good surrounding bars
- Bell in Hand, 45 Union St., Boston, MA 02108
  - Karaoke Tuesdays, good music every night. Check out the surrounding bars as well
- News Restaurant and Lounge
  - Good after 2AM

**Clubs**
- Axis and Avalon, Lansdowne St. (near Fenway)
  - Trendy and playing top 40.
- Gypsy Bar, 116 Boylston St. Boston, MA 02116
  - High end
- Aria, 246 Tremont St., Boston, MA 02116
  - Fashionable
Mojitos, 48 Winter St. Boston, MA 02108  
-Latin
Venu, 100 Warrenton St., Boston, MA 02116  
-Great hip-hop. Show up early to get in.

**Good Eats**

*Near Longwood:*
  - Mission Bar and Grill (Brigham Circle)

*Fenway:*
  - Boston Beer Works, 112 Canal St., Boston, MA 02114  
    - American
  - El Pelo Taqueria, 92 Peterborough St.  
    - Mexican
  - Rod Dee, 94 Peterborough St.  
    - Thai
  - Brown Sugar Café, 129 Jersey St.  
    - Thai

*Back Bay/South End:*
  - Addis Red Sea, 544 Tremont St.  
    - Ethiopian
  - Flour Bakery and Café, 1595 Washington St.  
    - Sandwiches, Dessert
  - Finale, 1 Columbus Ave. (Park Plaza)  
    - Desserts

*Beacon Hill:*
  - Figs, 42 Charles St.  
    - Pizza and Italian
  - Paramount, 44 Charles St.  
    - Great breakfast

*North End:*
  - Galleria Umberto, 289 Hanover St.  
    - Italian

**Day Trips**

Depending on the time of year, there are several options for day trips in and around Boston. Here are some day places students have visited.

*Salem, MA.* Famous for witch trials in the 1800’s, it makes sense why this town would be an entertaining destination during the weeks leading up to Halloween. Rent a ZipCar, travel with a friend or take the commuter rail. It’s only 20 miles from Boston.

*Concord, MA.* The home of Thoreau, Alcott, Emerson, Walden Pond and the American Revolution, there is plenty to see and do here. 15 miles from Boston.

*Beaches.*
  - Singing Beach/Manchester-by-the-Sea
Great sand. Parking ½ mile from the beach. Walk-on fee of $5 on weekends. 20 minutes from Boston.
Nantasket Beach (Hull, MA)
   Good people watching beach. 30 minutes from Boston.
Crane Beach (Ipswich, MA)
   Four miles of sandy beach. There is a small day-use fee. 45 minutes from Boston.

**Weekend Trips**
There are numerous weekend destinations in the New England area. Some are seasonal, but most (like New York City) are fun to visit year-round. Here are some of the best.
**Portland, ME** (1.5 hours). The drive north is beautiful and the city has a European feel.
**New York City** (4 hours). Not much has to be said about the NYC. Nothing says friendship like asking to sleep on someone’s couch.

**Skiing.**
   - Killington, VT (3.5 hours)
   - Stowe, VT (4 hours)
   - Sugarloaf USA, ME (4.5 hours)
   - Sunday River, ME (3.5 hours)

**Transportation**
**M2.** The M2 is a free shuttle between the Longwood Medical Area and Harvard Square. It also travels past MIT on Massachusetts Avenue. The shuttle runs less frequently on Saturdays and is not in service on Sundays.  
[www.masco.org/transit/ptsM2.htm](http://www.masco.org/transit/ptsM2.htm)

**Bus and T.** The Green E Line and 39 bus run along Huntington Avenue. Take them inbound to Back Bay, downtown and for major transfers to Cambridge and other suburbs.  
[www.mbta.com/](http://www.mbta.com/)

**Commuter Rail.** If you’re looking to get out of the city, the MBTA commuter rail will take you almost anywhere in Boston and as far south as Providence, RI for less than $10.  
[www.mbta.com/](http://www.mbta.com/)

**Zipcar**
As an MIT student, you can sign up for Zipcar for only $25/year. This gives you the freedom to rent a car for as little as $6.50/hour or $60/day. Just remember to note your affiliation with MIT and you will only pay the $25 application fee (and save on the $50 annual fee).

**Guide to MIT**
While most HST MD students don’t spend that much time at MIT, we are technically MIT students and have access to all of the same perks and resources as other MIT students.

   **Getting there and back.** The easiest way to get to and from MIT is using the M2, which stops at Vanderbilt and in front of MIT’s main entrance at 77 Massachusetts Avenue.
MIT’s Saferide is a good option for getting back from MIT in the evenings. It runs 6pm to 2:30am Sunday through Wednesday and 6pm to 3:30am Thursday through Saturday, and the shuttles leave from the student center. You have to ask the driver of the shuttle labeled Boston East to take you to Vanderbilt Hall. Make sure to bring your MIT ID.

http://web.mit.edu/facilities/transportation/shuttles/safe_ride.html

**Athletics.** MIT has amazing athletic facilities that we can use for free. The Z center, located right near the MIT Student Center, has a wide array of athletic equipment and physical education classes. For people interested in swimming, there is an Alumni Pool and a pool located within the Z center.

http://web.mit.edu/zcenter/

The athletic department also offers a variety of recreational classes.

http://web.mit.edu/athletics/www/

Learn to sail and rent sailboats at MIT for free! All you need to do to get started is sign up for an introductory sailing course.

http://sailing.mit.edu/LearntoSail/

The MIT ballroom dance club has events and classes for dancers of all ability levels.

http://web.mit.edu/bdclub/

**Discounts.** As an MIT student, you can save money on tons of fun stuff. Some highlights include:

- *AMC/Loews movie tickets* ($6.50) - available for purchase in the lobby of the Stata Center

- *Museum of Science admission* ($6) - available for purchase in the lobby of the Stata Center

- *MFA* (free with MIT ID)

- *MIT Museum* (free with MIT ID)

- you can also bring a guest for free

- *Monthly bus passes* ($12)

- *Monthly T passes* ($22)

There are also discounts available for special events.

http://web.mit.edu/mitac/

http://web.mit.edu/arts/

http://web.mit.edu/facilities/transportation/tpass/

**On-Campus Dining.** Popular food choices for HST MD students include Anna’s Taqueria (located in the Student Center) and the food trucks at the corner of Main Street and Ames.

http://web.mit.edu/dining/locations/index.html

**On-Campus Pubs.** The Muddy Charles and The Thirsty Ear are perfect for unwinding post-exams.

http://web.mit.edu/muddy/

http://web.mit.edu/thirsty-ear/

**Graduate Resident Tutor.** HST students have the opportunity to serve as graduate-student RAs in the MIT undergraduate dorms. In exchange for around 10 hours per week of work, you get free housing and a small stipend.
**Student Loan Art Program.** Add some punch to those boring Vandy walls by borrowing a piece of original art from the MIT collection. The program holds a lottery each September, and you’ll have about a 1/3 chance of receiving something. [http://web.mit.edu/lvac/www/collections/slap/slap_genl.html](http://web.mit.edu/lvac/www/collections/slap/slap_genl.html)

**Lecture Series Committee.** For only $3, you can see recent blockbusters and classic films at MIT on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. Sometimes they even show movies that have not yet been released to theaters. Tickets can be purchased at the door. [http://lsc.mit.edu/index.shtml](http://lsc.mit.edu/index.shtml)

**MIT Outing Club.** A $10 membership fee lets you rent outdoor gear for bargain prices and use the club’s cabins in New Hampshire. The group also organizes several trips each year and serves as a forum for those interested in the outdoors to meet each other. [http://web.mit.edu/mitoc/www/](http://web.mit.edu/mitoc/www/)

**MIT Snowriders.** This group organizes bus trips to the mountains during the winter every Sunday, and also offers discounted lift tickets. [http://snowriders.mit.edu/](http://snowriders.mit.edu/)

**MIT COOPS.** There are two of these to satisfy your desire for all things MIT. The one in the student center sells mostly MIT paraphernalia, while the one in Kendall Square has a wider variety of wares including textbooks and normal books.

**Independent Activities Period.** MIT has a unique academic schedule that includes a special January term known as IAP. The month of IAP is a chance for MIT students to try out new things by enrolling in mini-courses on a variety of topics (or just take a month off for vacation!). Of course as HST MD students, you’ll have some required coursework during this term (and you may be wrapped up in your research), but remember to check out the opportunities available to you at MIT as well. [http://web.mit.edu/iap/](http://web.mit.edu/iap/)