

Letter of Intent

HST PhD Candidates

- LOI-1:** Identify a Research Supervisor and Area of Research. (Co-Supervisor may be listed on “Tentative Reader (1)” line.)
- LOI-2:** Identify a Research Supervisor, at least 2 tentative readers and Area of Research. Note, one of your proposed readers should meet eligibility requirements to be chair of committee, see reverse of form for policy.

Name: _____

Signature/Date: _____

My signature above indicates that I understand the thesis committee policies on reverse of form, including eligibility requirements for thesis committee chair.

Research Supervisor: _____ **Tentative Reader (1):** _____

Primary Institution: _____ Primary Institution: _____

Area of Expertise: _____ Area of Expertise: _____

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Tentative Reader (2): _____ **Tentative Reader (optional):** _____

Primary Institution: _____ Primary Institution: _____

Area of Expertise: _____ Area of Expertise: _____

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Project Title: _____

General Area of Thesis Research (*max. 100 words.*) Description should be informative, for a lay audience and should not include jargon.

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The LOIs are understood to provide only a tentative thesis plan, and it is recognized that the research direction may change in the process of developing a formal thesis proposal. Students are strongly encouraged to identify tentative thesis committee members and begin meeting with them as early as possible. Following submission of LOI-2, students are required to hold at least one meeting per semester with their tentative thesis committee. The role of the tentative committee is to offer advice in formulating the research. In many cases, tentative committee members ultimately serve on the final thesis committee, although that is not required. The research topic and thesis committee are considered final after the thesis proposal has been approved.

The Thesis Committee - Roles and Responsibilities

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR - The research supervisor is responsible for overseeing the student's thesis project. The research supervisor is expected to:

- supervise the research and mentor the student;
- provide a supportive research environment, facilities, and financial support;
- assist the student to prepare for the oral qualifying exam;
- guide the student in selecting the other members of the thesis committee;
- help the student prepare for, and attend, meetings of the full thesis committee, to be held at least once per semester;
- help the student prepare for, and attend, the thesis defense;
- evaluate the final thesis document.

The research supervisor is chosen by the student and must be a faculty member of MIT* or Harvard University and needs no further approval. HICAP may approve other individuals as research supervisors on a student-by-student basis. Students are advised to request approval of non-faculty research supervisors as soon as possible.

THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR - Each HST PhD thesis committee is headed administratively by a chair, chosen by the student in consultation with the research supervisor. The thesis committee chair is expected to:

- provide advice and guidance concerning the thesis research;
- oversee meetings of the full thesis committee, to be held at least once per semester;
- preside at the thesis defense;
- review and evaluate the final thesis document.

The thesis committee chair must be well acquainted with the academic policies and procedures of the institution granting the student's degree and be familiar with the student's area of research. The research supervisor may not simultaneously serve as thesis committee chair.

For HST PhD students earning degrees through MIT, the thesis committee chair must be an MIT faculty member.* A select group of HST program faculty without primary appointments at MIT have been pre-approved by HICAP to chair PhD theses awarded by HST at MIT. Click [here](#) for a list of non-MIT HST program faculty approved to chair HST PhD theses at MIT.

READERS - In addition to the research supervisor and the thesis committee chair, the thesis committee must include one or more readers. Readers are expected to:

- provide advice and guidance concerning the thesis research;
- attend meetings of the full thesis committee, to be held at least once per semester;
- attend the thesis defense;
- review and evaluate the final thesis document.

Faculty members with relevant expertise from outside of Harvard/MIT may serve as readers, but they may only be counted toward the required three if approved by HICAP.

The members of the thesis committee should have complementary expertise that collectively covers the areas needed to advise a student's thesis research. The committee should also be diverse, so that members are able to offer different perspectives on the student's research. When forming a thesis committee, it is helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Do the individuals on the committee collectively have the appropriate expertise for the project?
2. Does the committee include at least one individual who can offer different perspectives on the student's research? The committee should include at least one person who is not closely affiliated with the student's primary lab. Frequent collaborators are acceptable in this capacity if their work exhibits intellectual independence from the research supervisor.
3. If the research has a near-term clinical application, does the committee include someone who can add a translational or clinical perspective?
4. Does the committee conform to HST policies in terms of number, academic appointments, and affiliations of the committee members, research supervisor, and thesis committee chair as described elsewhere on this page?

*MIT Senior Research Staff are considered equivalent to faculty members for the purposes of supervising research and chairing thesis committees. No additional approval is required.