



Christine Ortiz
Dean for Graduate Education
Morris Cohen Professor of Materials Science and
Engineering

Phone 617-253-1957
Fax 617-253-5620
Email cortiz@mit.edu
WWW: <http://web.mit.edu/odge>
Deans Facebook Page: <http://bit.ly/ChristineOrtiz>

To: Graduate Officers and Administrators
From: Christine Ortiz, Dean for Graduate Education
Date: October 4th, 2013
Subject: Misrepresentation of Information in Graduate Applications

Dear Graduate Officers and Administrators:

Following up on my previous email update regarding graduate admissions dated 09/18/13, I'd like to address this recommendation in the Committee on Graduate Admissions Annual Report: "*Users requested that an Institute-wide process be established for reporting receipt of fraudulent applications while keeping in compliance with FERPA guidelines.*" Additionally, the vulnerability of GradApply to misrepresentation (i.e. providing false/inaccurate information) in graduate applications was raised.

1. Letters of Recommendation: The current method of collecting letters of recommendation is no less vulnerable to misrepresentation than having the system send an email directly to the letter writer because the applicant ultimately supplies the email address. We are not aware of any system that has a methodology to automatically verify letters of recommendation. We strongly recommend that departments independently check letters of recommendation of admitted applicants and we refer you to GradApply's "Chair Help" page under "Recommendation Letters" for a more extensive discussion of this topic.
2. If you suspect or receive a tip from a third party on alleged application misrepresentation, please contact me directly. My office and our partner offices can provide you with advice, information, support, and referrals on the investigation and action process (for example, to the Office of General Counsel, Ombuds, Registrar, etc.). In order to have a consistent and thorough process, we ask that you coordinate any investigation through ODGE, rather than handling solely at the departmental level. This also allows for central record keeping in the event that an applicant applies multiple times or to multiple programs.

A few general notes on privacy and confidentiality during an alleged misrepresentation investigation: if the suspected student is already enrolled, their records fall under FERPA, meaning they generally should not be shared outside of MIT, although you can discuss them internally with those who need to assist you in an investigation following certain procedures (<http://web.mit.edu/registrar/general/csip/>). If the suspected student is already accepted to a graduate program, but not yet enrolled, their records likely do not fall under FERPA. However, there may be state and federal privacy laws which still govern certain personal information contained in their applications. We can advise further on this, as needed. In any event, regardless of whether or not the suspected student has enrolled yet, the specifics of an investigation should generally be kept confidential and only shared with others on a "need to know" basis.

If a person involved in such a case is in need of mental health counseling, help can be obtained by contacting:

MIT Mental Health and Counseling
Location: E23 - 3rd Floor

Schedule Appointments:
Hours: Monday–Thursday,
8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Phone: 617-253-2916

Emergencies:
Monday–Thursday,
8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.: 617-253-2916
Nights/weekends: 617-253-4481

Walk-in urgent hours: M–F, 2–4 p.m.

Dr Alan Siegel, Chief of Mental Health Services
Email: sieg@med.mit.edu

3. Some potential mechanisms to detect applicant misrepresentation:

- a) For international applications, have a faculty member from that country review the application, when and if possible.
- b) Conduct applicant interviews, when and if possible.
- c) Have official documents sent directly to your program from the granting institution. It may be more efficient to do this only for students accepted to your program.
- d) Independently check letters of recommendations of admitted applicants.

4. The ODGE is maintaining a list of individuals who have been found to misrepresent information on their applications and will send this to the GradApply team and the Sloan School of Management each admissions cycle to cross-check with all applicants. If any applicants who have misrepresented application information in the past are detected, all departments will be notified and provided with the applicant's name. Additionally, we have put a registration hold with the registrar on those persons who have misrepresented information on their applications in the past.

I realize this is a large and disappointing burden for faculty and staff to have to spend time dealing with, especially when it detracts from efforts in preparing for the next incoming cohort of new students, so please don't hesitate to ask if we can help or if you have any suggestions.

Sincerely,



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Science of Engineering