

Option 3 – Partial Return: Two Semester

60% on Campus Fall/75% on Campus Spring

Between May 21 and May 31, 2020, MIT community members were invited to provide input into decisions about the 2020-2021 academic calendar via a Community Feedback Survey on the Team 2020 community engagement website (among other opportunities). We received roughly 900 complete and another 900 partial responses, including more than 27,000 comments in response to open-ended questions.

Team 2020 is deeply grateful for the expertise and efforts of Jonathan Schwarz, Andrew Bell, and Ayn Cavicchi from MIT's Office of Institutional Research. They created narrative summaries of the option-specific comments from undergraduates, graduate students, staff, and faculty which are presented below.

Undergraduates: 616 Respondents

Option 3/UG: Are there particular aspects of this option you find appealing or compelling?

As with all of the on-campus options, most students expressed a strong desire to return to campus. Option 3 had similar appeals to a split semester, though students preferred a *"full semester"* on campus as it would entail *"being on campus for a significant amount of time."* Students also shared that it provided greater *"stability"* – *"you are where you are for the whole semester. Plans can be built."*

Many respondents also shared that they found this option to be *"safer"* than the split semester, and would *"allow for some campus access while ensuring that public health guidelines can be followed."* Numerous students shared that they believed it would make *"social distancing easier."* One student stated succinctly that it *"seems to prioritize health above all."*

It was also widely seen by students as superior to a split semester because it requires *"less moving around"* and is *"more practical"* logistically.

Option 3/UG: Are there particular aspects of this option you find challenging?

Students presented several concerns regarding the uncertainty surrounding the future and how equity would be maintained if there was a significant change in the risks associated with COVID. One considerable concern among students was the perception that there would be an *"unfair balance if spring semester is either better or worse than fall."* Conversely, *"we cannot count on a second semester because there will be a second wave."* One student shared a concern many students had about equity succinctly: *"life would be pretty normal for the lucky half."*

However, the second-semester cohort was seen by many as being subject to a potential inequity with long-term effects. One student suggested, *"this option would need to provide a significant incentive to students who not be invited to campus and could have terrible consequences for their*

careers." Additionally, some students stated that this plan was unfair to those who could not choose to return due to personal circumstances, further exacerbating inequities in educational opportunity and experience:

There would be lots of inequities in the quality of learning that is taking place for students on campus versus those not on campus. If conditions improve by Spring 2021 and everyone is invited back, then the half who did the semester remotely would struggle just because they were not invited back and now have essentially gone through 1/8th (or more) of their time at MIT without the MIT experience.

Option 3/UG: How would you improve this option?

- **Finding a fair way to decide who returns**

Make the selection process random

Devise a way to fairly decide who is on campus

Divide the groups by social group, not by class year. I care most about getting to see my friends again.

1. Find a way to make this equitable. 2. Find a way to make online semester worth taking. Reduced tuition for online students?

- **Community**

Since the continuous chunk of time each undergrad spends off campus is longer than the previous option, students will feel more strongly the absence of the MIT community. Very extensive surveying of the community needs to be done in order to best choose who to bring back to campus and when, although there is no way to do it that would receive 100% approval.

- **Logistics**

Undergraduates will be forced into scheduling conflicts, depending on their density of lab classes for the upcoming year. Professors will also be under strain with potentially having to equitably teach a class that is half on campus and half off campus.

Graduate Students: 201 Respondents

Option 3/G: Are there particular aspects of this option you find appealing or compelling?

One aspect of Option 3 that graduate students found appealing was that “*undergraduate density will be reduced*”. As only half the undergraduate students would be on campus per semester, it seemed “*like a good option to prioritize the community health situation.*” As with a half-on/half-off semester, Option 3 reduces “*residents’ density and mobility*”, but was seen by some graduate students as “*easier to facilitate.*” Put succinctly:

It's a phased / ramp-up approach that allows some students the benefit of in-person learning in the fall and brings everyone back in the spring as conditions improve. Good balance of reasonable / fair, and straightforward to implement.

Another appealing aspect of Option 3 was that it “*allows students to take full classes that would work better either remote or in-person.*” It was also perceived as preserving some sense of normalcy - “*this maintains much of the current coursework schedule for students and instructors/faculty*”. However, some respondents were concerned that “*developing the curriculum to accommodate both remote and in-person setting will be difficult for faculty and instructors.*”

Option 3/G: Are there particular aspects of this option you find challenging?

A Major concern among graduate students was finding a way of “*picking students in a way that doesn't invite massive criticism.*” Graduate students explained that there could be:

Lots of (rightful) uproar from those who want to come but aren't given a semester, from those who don't want to come but are given a semester, if which semester is assigned, then those who are assigned the other semester, etc, and all the unfairnesses that go along with these sorts of things

Many of the graduate students were concerned about the fairness of this plan, stating that it “*seems very inequitable.*” One explained, “*some students are either getting an entire semester more on campus than others or else getting a semester that is more convenient on campus.*” Still others were concerned about unfairness associated with the uncertainty of a second wave of infection – “*what if COVID is beaten by January 1st... Do those in the fall who were in person have to go online now...do those that were forced to be online for the fall do they get a discount?*” Another respondent echoed this statement, “*I think this option would be awful for the students who don't get to be on campus, particularly if they are expected to pay the same tuition as those on campus.*” One respondent explained succinctly:

If conditions get worse during one semester or the other and there is a need to send all UGs home, the situation may not turn out as equitable as optimized in terms of students getting in-person experience for the classes that are most suited for it

Option 3/G: How would you improve this option?

- **Housing**

I would limit the undergraduates who do come back to campus to staying within campus boundaries and not interacting with the outside world. Make groceries available to students on campus via campus grocery stores like the one in Walker Memorial, and allow all students to dine on campus to limit the risk of eating outside of campus.

the people you bring back should be based on housing need. if you do that, it will address diversity, equity and inclusion. otherwise, you have failed to do that.

Some students would need housing for the entire year, come up with a way to support students living in apartments near campus so they can at least maintain a sense of MIT community.

- **Risk Mitigation**

For both this case and any cases where UGs are allowed to return to campus, PPE and instruction on social distancing AND PPE must be provided to every single undergraduate, and strict enforcement must be enacted

Even though people will be back on campus, I think class should still be taught remotely, as if you have 1 student in four classes of 10 each, then that's basically 40 students brought into contact with each other. Alternatively, assign static groups of people who are allowed to social distance together (for attending class, studying, etc.)

- **Education**

There are certain classes that are only offered in the spring or fall. In order to allow a similar quality of educational experience to both sets of students, these classes could instead be offered in both semesters where feasible.

Instead of an arbitrary "half," invite back only those undergraduates who NEED to be on campus. This means those in courses of study that require practicals like lab courses, and POTENTIALLY those that are ALREADY involved in ESSENTIAL research. In most cases, research resources should be left to the grad students who need them.

- **Remote**

I am concerned about the mental health risks for the remote students - this is not unique to this option, though. If we can help remote students find stable housing situations, that would be ideal.

I would assume that students are given the option of staying home or coming in person, rather than a lottery system. In this case, students with health conditions can remain safe. Also, I would encourage faculty/instructors/community to reach out to the remote students more and provide similar resources to make them feel included.

Consider allowing international students to study remotely during the Fall semester, so as not to cause a travel break for visas. Prioritize final-year undergraduates being on-campus in the Fall, as their need to be on campus maybe greater.

Staff Members: 133 Respondents

Option 3/S: What aspects of this option [Partial on Campus] do you find appealing or compelling?

This option received many **positive comments** with several staff finding it appealing for the “*simplicity*” and “*ease of communication*.” Other appealing aspects were the “*return of students*” in what is viewed as a “*fair and equitable*” way.

It would be minimally disruptive to curricula while still offering a significant number of students access to the physical campus in the fall. The relative simplicity of this solution means it will be easier to communicate the plans (and the rationale behind them) to the community

I find this to be the most reasonable and the clearest to operationalize on an administrative level. It also seems to be the most equitable and fair

Some shared their perception that preserving the **2-semester academic calendar** adds to the ease of implementation.

It maintains a classic MIT calendar and gives concrete answers to the students, allows for flexibility if the situation changes. It makes more sense to have two semesters with the same students present for a full semester

Many of the staff indicated this option would be a better one for faculty and instructors, thus delivery of **teaching would be less burdensome**.

Relatively easy for faculty to adjust to this plan. Maintains on-campus learning with potentially less strain on faculty, if you're able to have remote students taking remote-friendly classes and on-campus students taking practical/lab classes

Option 3/S: Are there particular aspects of this option [Partial on Campus] you find challenging?

The challenging aspects raised by Staff dealt primarily with the effects that would be felt by **students** (depending on how they are chosen) and on the **curriculum** and consequently **faculty**. Specifically, the process for determining the student cohorts allowed on campus each semester presents logistical issues involving **students' needs and expectations**. In addition, the expectation of students wanting to be on campus with their social groups could lead to **complex decisions** being made.

Determining who will be on campus and when will be complex. Students may struggle if their friends or support networks are assigned to the opposite session on campus

The issue of **safety** was frequently mentioned in the comments. We heard concerns about a **second wave** causing another **quarantine**, thus **shutting things down** again, and upending all the plans.

Deciding which groups are assigned to the fall vs the spring term, adjusting the class offerings, quarantine fatigue in particular for the spring term with end of school activities

Some staff thought subject offerings and **adjustments to curriculum** may be necessary in order to accommodate the different teaching/learning environments. In addition, there were some comments

cautioning there would be **increased complexity and workload** for faculty in order to accommodate the change.

Faculty and instructors will need to adapt to teach courses online and in-person and possibly have more courses for the same subject in one semester

Some courses that are usually only in one semester with a physical component may need to be taught during both, tough choices on who comes and who does not in fall

Option 3/S: How would you improve this option [Partial on Campus]?

Suggestions for improvement to this option were two-fold. First exercise caution by **maximizing transparency** in how students were chosen and prioritize those students with **greatest need**. Many staff speculated depending on which group students were placed in there could be many **disappointments**.

I would set clear guidelines on how MIT has chosen which students will be allowed on campus in the fall and communicate them clearly to community. To address diversity, equity, and inclusion, I would prioritize bringing those students who cannot be successful if they are not on campus. If numbers must be reduced in the spring as well, these students should be given priority in the spring as well (under the hope that the spring numbers would be higher, even if not at 100%)

The second suggestion was to provide students with a **reduction on their tuition** for online education as an **inducement** to students who do not exercise the option to return to campus.

Offer steep tuition discounts to students who 1) agree to study from off-campus or 2) take the fall semester off entirely (the discount would be for the semester when they return)

Faculty Members: 67 Respondents

Option 3/F: What aspects of this option [Partial on Campus] do you find appealing or compelling?

This option received many positive comments with many highlighting the appealing aspects. The word “**normal**” were used a number of times as faculty related this option as akin to a “*normal functioning campus.*” Others highlighted its “*fairly straight forward way to meet density guideline, while still offering a full in-person semester experience.*” Some mentioned the “**simplicity** of not having to move students in/out multiple times” and “*fewer logistical changes.*”

Appealing as well is the ability to have **both in-person and online education**. The lower workload was appealing to some, “*less planning of content within subjects.*” And for others the comments about “*ability to interact with students improves relationships.*” And online learning was mentioned as a good vehicle for those courses that appropriate for that environment. “*It is consistent with the principle that curriculum that can be taught remotely should be taught remotely.*”

One comment in particular sums up what many wrote. “*The **consistency** of a full semester on campus is appealing.*”

Option 3/F: Are there particular aspects of this option [Partial on Campus] you find challenging?

The comments on the challenges of this option saw words about equity frequently used. Many brought up issues of the perception of **fairness of choosing** students to return. Some introduced the challenge of mental health issues for some students due to who is chosen and when.

Feeling of haves/have-nots in terms of students that are allowed to be on campus. This would be especially challenging for first-year students and could add to mental health issues

Others added to the concerns about “**unfairness**” due to the timing of the “**second wave**” and whether one of the groups might be affected. “*This might become unfair if the second wave lasts only for one semester.*” And another stated, “*The possibility that there will be flare-ups in the fall makes this a challenge.*”

Many faculty indicated that having fewer people on campus **will not achieve the objective of creating a safer environment**. “*I this option is bad. I don't think having half of the students on campus would be safer than having all students back.*” Further the issue of compliance with guidelines to mitigate infection is seen as an obstacle for students by many faculty. Many expressed concern that students are not going to observe social distancing rules well enough. Also having fewer people in a classroom won't be effective against spread of infection. And some question how realistic it will be for the students to have a “*normal*” experience with so many restriction in place.

If there are many restrictions on campus, such as keeping distance at all times, controlled entrances, keeping an eye on people's movements, etc., then the MIT experience the students will be getting would possibly be worse than nothing

Option 3/F: How would you improve this option [Partial on Campus]?

Among the suggestions for improvement was a caution to **make the process of selection as transparent** as possible. *“I think we need to learn from the past spring. The process for selection must be transparent, and sensitive to circumstances of students.”*

Specific suggestion for improvements were to limit the return to first year and seniors.

I'd favor exploring a solution that brings all the first year class in, and thus disadvantages the other three classes. More radically: welcome 1Y and seniors, and leave sophomores and juniors at home at least until spring, if not through the entire year

This individual also bring up concerns of inequitable treatment and would suggest making exceptions for those in need.

That of course poses equity issues of its own, and does not take note of students in the two middle classes for whom remaining at home presents risk or hardship

Other Selected Comments on Option 3

The comments below are excerpts selected by Senior Associate Dean Kate Trimble and First-Year Experience Coordinator Kate Weishaar to present a range of diverse community viewpoints in the words of community members. The excerpts have not been altered or edited from the original submissions.

Appealing

- Means students who can't return to campus won't be isolated - half the population won't.
- As an undergraduate, it is easy to plan for if you know well in advance which semester you will be on campus.
- I like this option better than the previous - sort of like a semester 'abroad.'
- No. I do not like the idea of being away for a whole semester and having to take classes online as a freshmen who hasn't yet been oriented to MIT and its community.
- It would be nice for consistency over a longer time period, a whole semester, and nice for members of labs/project classes (but I don't think MITSO would go so well with only half its members, for example)
- If the half of the undergraduates returning campus will include upperclassmen and students taking lab classes, this is hugely beneficial in terms of educational quality.
- It is appealing that more on-campus activities might be able to continue (but if they were not I would find this option significantly less appealing)
- It depends who gets to come back. I think this option is appealing if freshmen, seniors, and maybe students deeply involved with UROPs and other activities that require campus. FSILGs would handle this situation well if freshmen and seniors get to go back to campus. This is because no freshmen live in these houses. Therefore, many fraternities and sororities could spread out their seniors in a safe way in their houses.

Challenging

- In some majors there are a lot of Fall or Spring only classes, I'm concerned about how those would be allocated (especially lab classes).
- It is not too unlikely that circumstances change significantly between fall and spring; This can lead to a fully in person or fully remote spring. Then, it would be unfair that some students had an in person fall semester while others didn't.
- First years will suffer disproportionately with this option, as removing the first semester of their MIT experience prevents them from developing a good support network whereas removing the second semester makes it hard for adjust to harder grading schemes, harder classes, or trying to encourage major exploration.
- An entire semester away from campus. I'm being selfish, but having access to the makerspaces is a big part of MIT for me.
- Idk if I'll be on campus with my friends. Also, might need to release the schedule for the year at the start of the year so students can plan which courses to take when on/off-campus

- What if an international student is supposed to be on campus over the fall semester but then has an internship over the summer and how they are supposed to apply for the permission?
- I would not like this because activities that start mid october and end march would be hard to enjoy fully (hockey)
- may provide perverse incentive to take more classes when in-person (increases stress). also bad for faculty, who would have to teach 2 separate cohorts of students at one time
- Honestly if I'm not on campus with my friends then I would rather not be on campus at all, so it'll be kinda a mixed bag for me
- the disparity in educational quality between students living on campus vs. remotely is challenging. furthermore, especially given the recent dramatic increase in on-campus housing prices, it feels like a waste of money to pay that much to live on campus when i could be getting the same quality of instruction at home
- price of tuition for those who aren't on campus (this might be tough for those who can't come back. if there's reduced tuition for those who stay at home, then there are people who may feel forced to stay home due to financial reasons)
- I have lab work to do both semesters and as a senior would not get the opportunity to finish/qualify for graduation.
- This one is rough on undergraduate students. Missing out on the spring, when things will likely be a lot better, would be really rough, especially if a vaccine becomes available and you're only not on campus because of "fairness." TAs may be extremely disadvantaged by this if their time "on campus" is not the same time as the class they want to TA. I also think that restructuring required classes to fit this would be really difficult -- the course 2 seniors that are assigned the spring on campus, for instance, would be locked out of 2.009. It also would be ideal for students with health conditions to be in the spring, but how do you find that information?
- International graduate students might not be eligible to obtain OPT since only one term is on campus.
- Cannot participate in research for too long.
- Part of what I teach would be really hard if people are wearing masks and keeping 6 feet away from each other. Some parts would be impossible
- Changes schedule so that one semester may be very lab heavy while one is very lecture heavy
- the horrible administration in charge of this country--who will either be re-elected or steal the election--will make options like this impossible for international student

Improvements

- Since the continuous chunk of time each undergrad spends off campus is longer than the previous option, students will feel more strongly the absence of the MIT community. Very extensive surveying of the community needs to be done in order to best choose who to bring back to campus and when, although there is no way to do it that would receive 100% approval.
- Divide the groups by social group, not by class year. I care most about getting to see my friends again.

- I like this option, I wonder if there would be a way to help those who have greater difficulties working remotely though (bc of financial or accessibility hardships etc) by maybe allowing them to stay on campus entirely if some others would be willing to work remotely the whole time (if it's not completely safe in the spring to bring everyone back)(I would volunteer to stay home to give those who need to be on campus priority)
- Again, I won't stay at home to do online while I continue to pay full MIT tuition of nearly \$80k a year. I'm already \$160k in student debt with 7% interest on my loan, and if I have to subsidize students on 100% MIT scholarship on campus while I do online, I won't come to MIT anymore.
- Prioritize students taking lab classes, but do not offer unnecessary lab courses, make department-wide guidelines about which students should take which courses, and instruct advisors not to approve students to take lab classes who do not need them. Otherwise everyone would take one.
- Allow athletes to be on campus for their sport season. I am a spring sport athlete who lost her season last year. I cannot bear to lose another one because I am not given priority housing for the spring if this option is picked.
- I think we need to learn from the past spring. The process for selection must be transparent, and sensitive to circumstances of students. At the same time, as instructors and advisors, we also learned just how difficult it is for students who are away from campus to find help and support and mentorship from peers-- help with psets, help navigating MIT, etc. They can't walk down the hall to find a course 2 major to ask about something, so they're out on their own. Students who have the privilege of returning to campus should also have the responsibility for helping to create peer networks to support those who are away. This requires some centralized effort (creating electronic lounges, boards, etc.) and a lot of individual effort remembering to keep remote students in the loop. Perhaps a certain percentage of on-campus students should apply specifically with a commitment to this, or perhaps it should be part of community expectations that all students on campus should do what they can to help support remote students. MIT failed miserably with this in the spring-- the results weren't catastrophic, with PE/NE, but students without deep on-line support networks really suffered, and at least among my advisees, this was strongly correlated with race and SES. Unrelatedly, one of the important lessons from Spring 2020 was that students did very well on projects and papers for classes, because they had some breaks to reflect. Remote classes are exhausting for all involved, and I think extra vacation days should be added to decompress, and to catch up.
- If this is done, I would suggest making freshman remote, solely because they usually only take GIRs, which are already mostly recorded on OCW and are large lecture classes that do not gain much by being in person.
- Undergrads will have a myriad of reasons, some of which may be very petty, to prefer attending in fall or spring. It's probably better to be draconian about this and assign students, rather than allow students have input on this.
- Don't bring first years; they are the least equipped to handle living alone, let alone in social isolation with the stress of a pandemic. Get upperclassmen on campus and get them graduated.
- Add options for in person courses over IAP for those who need to finish requirements that can only be done on campus
- Worse than a virtual semester would be coming back to campus without a community. Students should be able to form clusters of 8-10 ppl who will definitely be on campus at the same time as them (Harvard does this with housing, forming mutually exclusive blocking groups).
- Those online have PNR

- Offer steep tuition discounts to students who 1) agree to study from off-campus or 2) take the fall semester off entirely (the discount would be for the semester when they return). Offer in the fall extra HASS classes or other classes where remote learning is more congenial (I suggest HASS because books are the original distance learning, after all), so that people can make progress towards graduation while off-campus. Reduce the on-campus population that way.
- I think it would be difficult to complete all that would need to be done for this option to start in September. If this option is chosen at the end of June, I assume the cohorts for the fall would still need to be named, as would which classes might be offered live and which online, including, probably, housing decisions and options for the live cohort. I imagine that there would need to be an agreement phase of students accepting the on-campus offer, as well as an appeal phase for students assigned to off-campus. Only then could the on-campus students begin to make travel arrangements, etc. Consequently, I would combine this option with a delayed start; possibly, I would consider shortening both semesters by a week next year.
- Could we contemplate that undergraduate students may need to stay for a 5th year in order to spread out their required classes and allow for more time to complete curriculum in the optimal environment?
- Having some way for students that are not selected to come back to campus but yet don't feel comfortable living at home to get alternative housing (like maybe funding to rent an AirBnB outside of the Boston/Cambridge area for online classes) would be helpful.
- If it is possible to bring half of undergraduates back in the fall, it might be best to schedule as many project-based classes as we can in the fall in case things get worse in the spring.
- Subjects should be redesigned in such a way that prerequisites are minimized and multi-semester subjects should fit into one semester. Students should be allowed to participate remotely if necessary. If possible, activities and events should be hosted twice, once in each semester and a reduction in tuition may be based on the access students have in each semester.
- Again, bringing students back by major is probably the easiest academically (though how would that even work for stuff like course 6?), but would be painful socially. I prefer bringing back students by social groups where possible - my social group is mostly tied to my living group and extracurricular organizations. Having a survey where students can specify which connections they want to see on campus would help provide that feedback. PLEASE DO NOT BRING STUDENTS BACK BY CLASS YEAR. Freshman need access to upperclassman guidance and support during their time at MIT, and starting their college experience by isolating them from that community risks all sorts of problems.
- Allowing students to give input as to which semester they would prefer to be on campus crossed my mind as a way to improve this option. After further deliberation, however, I think it best that the Institute make this decision definitively after considering input from the charrettes. Allowing students to decide individually when to be on campus and hoping for an approximate 50-50 split would be chaotic and potentially problematic. Moreover, it would be easier to accept the decision knowing it was equitable for all, instead of some students being granted their #1 priority and others not.
- Everyone who is on campus would have a group of students who is not on campus so they can work together on assignments.
- Set 50% as the cap, then have return be voluntary. Institute some hierarchies: if more than 50% want to return, organize it by in-person courses, people who don't have homes, etc.
- I would limit the scope to first 3 years, and treat seniors as graduate students (they may be doing research, pursuing internships, taking advanced courses)

- Due to OPT eligibility issues (fully remote learning cannot be counted as OPT eligibility academic period; therefore, under fully remote, international students could not apply OPT), can you put international students as the first prioritized group to receive in-person on-campus learning?
- Maybe conduct a survey to see if students have to pick only one semester to go to campus which one they would rather? See if there can be an even split in responses or not and also see what reasons students are choosing the semester they would rather be on campus.
- Think about the students who are funded through TAs when considering this. Can those students be funded in a different way? Or be offered some sort of relief funding because their course was moved to a different semester?
- Meld it with the late-start option: Invite half of students to campus January-April and the other half May-August. In the fall, offer limited online instruction at reduced tuition, along with IAP-style remote events.
- Consider freshmen/ seniors and the benefits to FSILGs and dorms. FSILGs can effectively spread out seniors, and dorms can spread out freshmen (because sophomores and juniors are the other most widely represented classes who live in dorms, and they wouldn't be there).
- I am going to suggest my idea of an on-campus/off-campus buddy system.
- It seems likely that things will improve to the point that spring semester next year could accommodate all students? Then who gets to stay on campus for fall seems like a toss up in this scenario. There is no way to coordinate in person classes except by major. But what do you do for double majors? What about seniors? What about majors with significant amount of lab classes? What about large lab classes?
- I hate this option. I could barely handle a half of a semester at home this spring, and what got me through it was visiting my MIT friends in their hometowns and staying with them for a bit. If I had to take a full semester online, I wouldn't enroll in that semester.