Spring 2023 MSE Town Hall Summary
May 24, 2023
Authored by Material Science Student Association (MSSA)

Summer Coffee Hour: Approved. The department will provide coffee and cookies.

Bodeen Décor: Nondestructive décor approved – students should write a proposal for planned decorations and submit to the department/facilities.

PhD Defense Announcements: Approved. Will be added to graduation to-do checklist.

After-hours access to MSE conference room (Cook 2058): Wildcard reader has been installed and students should already have access. If the reader doesn’t respond to a student’s card, check wildcard expiration date and email matsci@northwestern.edu for help.

Department Leadership Changes: Starting Sept 2023, Prof. Mark Hersam is the new department chair, Prof. James Rondinelli is the associate chair, and Prof. Kathleen Stair is the assistant chair.

Faculty Hiring
- Tenure-track: 311 total applicants – 23% female, 8% under-represented groups. Two hires: David Barton (starting Jan 2024) and Jennifer Howley (starting Sept 2024)
- Instructional: 21 applicants. One hire: Raj Kuma (starting Nov 2023)

Admissions
- 45-47 incoming PhD students, 23 incoming Master’s students
- 37% of incoming PhD students are female, 13% are URM and URM+
- Larger than typical incoming PhD class (30-40 students), but 2015 matriculation was 52 students – this isn’t the first time the department has had to handle this situation.
- The department will ask professors to prioritize grad students over post-docs. They will strive to find students positions with strong department connections if they cannot find positions within the department.

Curriculum Review
- Two focuses: soft matter (404, 406) and professional development/skill-building
- Proposals that will be voted on by the committee:
  - Split 404 into two half-credit courses:
    - First half, 404-1: defects in crystalline materials, taught by Prof. Haile
    - Second half, 404-2: core topics in soft matter, taught by Prof. Olvera
  - Allow students to choose either 406 (crystalline materials) or 432 (soft materials) for a mechanics of materials course.
  - Add a required skill-building seminar for second-year students.
- Accepted changes are to be implemented in AY23-24.
- Of Fall 2023 cohort, 35% are in soft materials

Discussion
- Students would like more department-level presentation opportunities. The department and MSSA will investigate possible ways to provide presentation opportunities.