“Forum on American Progress”

— A Proposal to Establish a New Organization on Campus —

Prepared for the Executive Board of MIT’s Association of Student Activities

June 15, 2005
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We wish to thank the members of the Executive Board of MIT’s Association of Student Activities for taking the time to review this document, and greatly look forward to the opportunity to further discuss with them its contents.
**Group Name:** Forum on American Progress (hereafter abbreviated FAP)

**President’s Name:** Ali Wyne

**President’s Athena Username:** awyne

**Treasurer’s Name:** Zach LaBry

**Treasurer’s Athena Username:** zlabry

**Initial Membership**

Listed below, in alphabetical order, are the names of the initial members of FAP, with each of their Athena usernames listed in parentheses:

1. Payal Agrawal (payal_a)
2. Melis Anahtar (mna)
3. Hans Anderson (hea)
4. JingPing Chen (jpchen)
5. Matthew Ciborowski (cibbo)
6. Andrew Clare (acclare)
7. Raphael Farzan-Kashani (raphael)
8. Andrew Glazer (aglazer)
9. Perry Hung (iperry)
10. Sharlina Hussain (sharlina)
11. Mariam Kandil (mkandil)
12. Zachary LaBry (zlabry)
13. Ruth Miller (ruthm07)
14. Bethany Patten (bethanyp)
15. Dennis Perepelitsa (dvp)
16. Rishi Puram (rispuram)
17. Jugal Shah (jugals)
18. Raffaela Wakeman (raffaela)
19. Ali Wyne (awyne)
20. Matthew Zitzmann (mattz)
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Why are you, the founders, starting the group?

There are two compelling reasons for founding a chapter of FAP at MIT: (1) there is insufficient discussion of threats to and ways of sustaining the United States’ leadership in the 21st century; and (2) students attending institutions of higher learning, who represent this nation’s future leaders, can ill afford to ignore the dynamic and urgent challenges which confront, and will continue to confront this country.¹ The lack of political involvement here at MIT is of most immediate concern:

1. Insufficient Discussion of American Leadership in the 21st Century: As the 21st century unfolds, and poses unprecedented threats to the United States’ leadership, this nation’s leaders will be increasingly unable to tap the reservoir of historical narrative to find insight and guidance on sound global governance. While many public officials and individuals in the intellectual establishment continue to view global politics through traditional, realist frameworks, many of which formed the bulwark of geopolitical analysis during the Cold War, it is evident that these paradigms are becoming increasingly anachronistic. Indeed, many of the threats which confront this country are, quite simply, unlike any with which this nation’s leadership has ever dealt. The prospect of global warming; the rapid spread of infectious diseases; the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction; the emergence of newer, more destructive global criminal networks and terrorist organizations; the rise of a multiplicity of nascent powers, ostensibly China and India; and the advent of “virtual” transnational power structures (primarily those created by the twin revolutions in information and communications) all pose significant threats to the viability and continuation of American leadership.

There can be no question that the ability of military preponderance to effect meaningful change in the behavior of other nations and peoples is increasingly being rendered obsolete. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., the former Dean of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, asserts that “The United States may be more powerful than any other polity since the Roman Empire, but like Rome, America is neither invincible nor invulnerable.”² Furthermore, there is a growing body of literature, now starting to appear in mainstream journals of politics and international relations, which also asserts that the United States’ power is declining in such critical arenas as economic clout and technological prowess.³ Clearly, the evolving nature of power is such that those

¹ Ali Wyne’s sister, Zaahira Wyne, founded the first chapter of FAP at the University of Virginia (hereafter referred to as U.Va), where she is currently in her junior year. As such, when we mention FAP in subsequent paragraphs, we are referring to the branch which we intend to found, not the one which is already in existence (Although Zaahira’s organization is actually entitled “Students United for Progressive Change,” its purpose is effectively the same as that of FAP.).


³ Because of the limitations of space, it would be impossible to even begin to attempt to cite all of the literature to which we refer here. However, we would be more than happy to provide references to a representative sampling of articles, books, and other documents which corroborate our central contentions.
individuals with a direct stake or interest in seeing the United States remain a preeminent power in the world must initiate vigorous discussion on the aforementioned topics. More specifically, as it concerns us, students at MIT must contribute to this debate.

(2) The Critical Role of Students: Students who attend MIT are undoubtedly among the brightest, most capable, and most promising young men and women in the world. They represent the tradition of intellectual prowess which has established this country as a model of achievement and success for over two hundred years. In the forthcoming decades, they will emerge as this nation’s most critical thinkers. What is alarming, however, is that, having spent close to one year at MIT, it is evident to us that many, if not the majority of students here are politically inactive. It is unfortunate that, oftentimes, the availability of free food decides whether or not students attend events of a political nature. Admittedly, students here are primarily interested in exploring the interrelation of science and technology. However, awareness of current events and evolving challenges which face this country is of vital importance. An organization like FAP is necessary to invigorate political awareness and activism on campus.

How does FAP actually intend to generate greater political awareness and excitement? At the very least, we endeavor to pique student interest in political affairs by bringing renowned lecturers to MIT (please refer to p. 12 for more details). Our greatest challenge as an organization will be to convince students that they have a vital stake in sustaining American leadership. Even though achieving this objective will require considerable patience and ingenuity, we possess both, and will do everything in our power to ensure that student apathy soon becomes a memory of the past. Such ambition is not the hallmark of misplaced idealism; it is the precursor to needed change.

How is this group unique? Could the ASA find similarities with other groups? If so, why should this group obtain recognition? What are the differences?

FAP is different from other groups of a political nature, here on campus, for four important reasons: (1) the breadth of its focus, (2) the inclusive nature of its recruitment process, (3) its commitment to nurturing long-term analysis, and (4) its dedication to offering specific policy prescriptions:

(1) Breadth of Focus: There are currently thirteen student organizations here at MIT which are classified as “political groups,” the vast majority of which, based on our examination of the content found on their webpages, focus either on one issue or on a very narrow set of issues. For example, on its website, the MIT Objectivist Club states that its purpose is to “study and promote objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand.” The MIT Student Association for Freedom of Expression (hereafter referred to as SAFE) articulates its commitment to “[organizing] support for freedom of speech and other forms of freedom of expression,” and, finally, Pro-Choice and Pro-Life, respectively, assert that their

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4 This quote is taken from the MIT Objectivist Club’s homepage, located at [http://web.mit.edu/objectivism/www/](http://web.mit.edu/objectivism/www/).
5 This quote is taken from SAFE’s homepage, which is located at [http://web.mit.edu/safe/www/](http://web.mit.edu/safe/www/).
purposes are to “provide an alternate voice to the anti-abortionists at MIT” and to foster “educational support for the pro-life position.”

Of course, none of this explicit identification is intended to be disapproving or unconstructive. Indeed, the members of each of the aforementioned groups are to be commended for so passionately committing themselves to a specific cause. Rather, our purpose here is to distinguish the scope of these groups’ objectives with that of our proposed organization’s. The subject of American leadership is broad enough to foster discussion on an incredibly rich array of important subjects, and is specific enough to ensure that the organization’s agenda does not, in forthcoming months and years, become nebulous. For this same reason – namely, that the subject of American leadership entails such a wide range of issues – FAP will not only attract students and scholars of political science: it will also attract students and scholars of history, business, and economics.

(2) Inclusive Recruitment Process: Another key difference between FAP and existing political organizations is that there is no set of beliefs which one has to possess in order to contribute as one of its members, be actively involved in its activities, or attend the events which it sponsors. The issue which FAP intends to address – that of the United States’ leadership – is of vital interest to individuals of all political persuasions. As such, FAP’s approach is highly inclusive: FAP does not seek to attract any particular individual or set of individuals, but rather endeavors to recruit the participation and promote the involvement of as wide a cross-section of the MIT community as possible.

(3) Long-Term Analysis: We are firmly of the belief that analysis which is confined to the short-term is insufficient, especially when one considers how rapidly and fundamentally the geopolitical landscape is changing. FAP, while certainly interested in discussing the present, is far more interested in analyzing what future decades, and, more broadly, the 21st century will entail for the United States’ leadership.

(4) Commitment to Offering Specific Policy Prescriptions: As the current state of political discourse makes clear, it is much easier to complain about a problem’s existence than it is to offer steps towards its resolution. As such, while we intend to rigorously and examine what the most pressing threats are to the United States’ ability to exercise its leadership, we also, more importantly, endeavor to address how the United States can suitably handle them. In so doing, we seek to advance the level of debate which currently exists on MIT’s campus. The duality of our approach – namely, identifying problems and proposing solutions – is unique to FAP.

There are two groups which the ASA could potentially view as similar to FAP: (1) the MIT Greens and (2) the MIT Social Justice Cooperative (hereafter referred to as SJC). Below, we briefly explain why such perceptions could develop, and discuss crucial differences between FAP and each of these groups:

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6 These quotes are taken, respectively, from the homepages of Pro-Choice and Pro-Life, located at, respectively, http://web.mit.edu/pro-choice/www/ and http://web.mit.edu/Pro-Life/www/.
(1) **The MIT Greens**: The MIT Greens are “concerned with effecting positive change in the world around us through politics as well as direct popular action,”7 and in this broad sense, the MIT Greens and FAP are indeed very similar. However, upon examining their ten key values, it is apparent that their emphasis is on the proper treatment of the environment. Though praiseworthy, their focus is far narrower than that of FAP; after all, analyzing the United States’ role in responsibly sustaining the global environment is but one of the issues which we intend to address.

(2) **SJC**: SJC states its intention to achieve three objectives: (1) “to increase awareness in the MIT community about critical social issues,” (2) “to provide a respectful forum for healthy discussion on peace-related topics,” and (3) “to organize nonviolent action for positive social transformation.”8 Certainly, these directives are commendable, and entail a wide range of critical issues. However, as they and the name of the group both suggest, SJC is primarily concerned with issues of peace and justice. While discussions of such issues are of vital importance, there is little overlap between SJC’s and FAP’s stated purposes. Furthermore, it is apparent that in order to be a member of SJC, or feel comfortable attending its events, one has to have a certain set of core beliefs. Specifically, SJC’s members are exceedingly critical of American engagement in the world, and express their criticism in terms which strain the boundary between principled and unprincipled opposition. A cursory examination of SJC’s main webpage, http://web.mit.edu/justice/www/index.html, should explain this contention. While we believe that frank and vigorous criticism of the United States’ foreign policies is healthy and imperative for the proper functioning of this nation’s democracy, we do not think that invariably and intractably virulent criticism is. Rather, we maintain that the surest way for this nation’s leadership to formulate and implement prudent foreign policies is to listen to the widest range of insights.

FAP should be awarded recognition not only because of the uniqueness of its purpose, but also because of the timeliness and importance of the issues which it is addressing; it seeks to promote discussion of issues which has, unfortunately, been sorely deficient on campus. The time to nurture vigorous and sustained dialogue is now; to defer it to the future would be highly imprudent and irresponsible.

**Why does the group need ASA recognition? What resources do you expect to use?**

FAP needs ASA recognition because it is crucial to the continued success of our organization. Below, we list some of the resources which we expect to use, and explain why we will need them:

(1) **ASA Resources**: If our recruiting efforts are to succeed, and if, more broadly, FAP is to emerge as a reputable, mainstream organization here on campus, we must be widely recognized. It is therefore imperative that our organization’s name be entered into the activities database and the student activities directory. Furthermore, we will need to

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7 This quote is taken from the MIT Greens’ homepage, located at http://web.mit.edu/~greens/www/home.shtml.
8 These quotes are taken from SJC’s Constitution, located at http://web.mit.edu/justice/www/Constitution.html.
participate in the Activities Midway, so that we can make incoming students aware of our organization and its accomplishments.

(2) **Funding Boards**: FAP will have to be able to apply for funding from the Undergraduate Association Financial Board (hereafter abbreviated FinBoard) and the Large Event Fund (hereafter abbreviated LEF), for three reasons:

i. Many of the individuals whom we have arranged to have lecture at MIT (please see p. 11 for detailed information) charge very substantial honorariums (For example, Alan Dershowitz, one of the speakers whom we have lined up, charges an honorarium of $10,000.). Furthermore, we will also have to cover the travel, housing, and publicity costs of speakers who do not reside in Massachusetts. Bringing these distinguished scholars and public figures to campus – for the purpose of fostering thought-provoking, wide-ranging, and critical discussion and debate of some of the key issues of our time – requires that FAP be granted access to the principal funding sources on campus.

ii. As part of its educational initiatives, FAP will (a) prepare and issue to the MIT community briefs which address topics related to American leadership during the 21st century, and (b) disseminate transcripts of speakers’ lectures. As such, we will need funding to print and copy substantial amounts of literature.

iii. It is imperative for individuals and organizations with similar objectives to network and form symbiotic relationships. Every year, FAP will try to send one or more student representatives to the annual “Generation FAIR Conference,” held at American University in Georgetown, Virginia. The conference brings together conscientious undergraduate students to discuss ways of making America’s global engagement more prudent. We will need funding to cover this student’s / these students’ registration fee(s), travel and housing costs.

(3) **Student Life Program (hereafter abbreviated SLP) Resources**: FAP will need to have the ability to register its events, and will, especially in its nascent stages, need assistance in coordinating these events. Furthermore, in order to make FAP as efficient and effective an organization as possible, we will avail ourselves of the officer training which SLP provides.

(4) **Campus Activities Complex (hereafter abbreviated CAC) / Registrar’s Office Resources**: FAP will need to have the ability to reserve CAC space for events which it holds. More specifically, we will need to be able to reserve prominent spaces on campus when we arrange for distinguished, world-renowned authorities to lecture at MIT. In the event that we are unable to reserve these spaces, we will have to be able to reserve rooms in the Main Campus. FAP will also require access to event operational support, in order to ensure that our events run as smoothly as possible. We will regularly require audio-visual equipment to record lectures and make them available via the World Wide Web.

As the above list makes evident, FAP will require the vast majority of resources to which ASA-recognized organizations have access. Our goals are ambitious, and without access to the critical resources mentioned above, it is doubtful that any of them can be achieved.
How do you plan to fund the group?

Our strategy for funding is dual: namely, while we will, in large part, rely on tested and proven ways of securing funding, we will also, to a considerable degree, employ innovative tactics:

(1) Tested and Proven Ways of Securing Funding:

- We will set up booths in Lobby 10, and will, in addition to telling interested students about FAP, sell food items – such as Krispy Kreme doughnuts, cookies, and danishes – at a small price.
- We will regularly apply for funding from Finboard, LEF, and SLP, among other central funding sources available at MIT. Furthermore, we will apply for grants from MIT’s Departments of Political Science and Economics, and MIT’s Sloan School of Management.

(2) Innovative Tactics:

- At the end of every semester, we will prepare a small booklet which contains the full transcripts of the lectures delivered by all of the individuals who lecture at our events. We will make this booklet available to the MIT community at a small price (in addition, we may try to provide incentives for politically oriented organizations – in academia, industry, and government – to place advertisements in our booklet).
- We will attempt to have some of our more distinguished guests of honor deliver their lectures at formal, catered dinners, for which all interested members of the MIT community would have to pay a fee upfront in order to attend.
- FAP will apply for grants from established think tanks and organizations which fund political activism at colleges and universities. For example, we will apply for a grant from the Center for American Progress – a nonpartisan institute devoted to promoting sustainable, more prudent American engagement in the world – which supplies funding to organizations which are committed to fostering political discourse on campus. FAP will also submit an application for a Davis-Putter Scholarship in January 2006.

What types of events or meetings will the group have? Give specific examples.

We have, and will maintain a flexible, dynamic mindset as we continue to progress: as such, it is likely that the range and nature of the events which we host during the course of the forthcoming years will continually evolve. Tentatively, however, we are planning on regularly hosting the following two events: (1) lectures and (2) teach-ins:

(1) Lectures: As we have mentioned above, and as we explain in greater detail below, FAP will host some of the world’s most distinguished authorities on a wide array of subjects relating to the United States’ exercise of leadership in the world. These

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9 We invite the Executive Board to visit the following link for more information: http://www.campusprogress.org/about.

10 We invite the Executive Board to visit the following link for more information: http://www.davisputter.org/.
lectures will constitute an integral component of our broader educational initiative here at MIT.

(2) **Teach-ins:** We recognize that some of the world’s most established authorities on the subjects whose discussion we seek to promote are right here, at MIT. It is only appropriate, then, that FAP host events which foster greater interaction between MIT faculty and other community groups on campus, especially students. We have heard of far too many instances in which students feel themselves detached from their professors and advisors, and, therefore, recognize the importance of strengthening the links between these groups. Teach-ins allow students and faculty to interact in a way which is simply not possible in the classroom, where, quite often, students have little choice but to be passive learners (especially in introductory courses, where it is not uncommon for three or four hundred students to be enrolled). By extension, teach-ins allow students and faculty to discuss critical subjects at a level of depth which a traditional lecture format might not permit.

In the long-term, we seek to (1) hold a retreat for FAP’s members and (2) host an undergraduate conference on American leadership in the 21st century:

(1) **Retreat:** To renew their energy, clarify their focus, and establish future objectives, organizations must be able to think creatively, in a serene, inspiring environment which is detached from their immediate surroundings. The initial members of FAP are some of MIT’s most brilliant, creative, and ambitious individuals, and, as such, FAP’s reach is limited only by the extent of our collective imagination. A retreat will help FAP’s members to define the organization’s long-term vision.

(2) **Undergraduate Conference:** As we have stated or alluded to on several occasions, it is unacceptable that this generation’s most promising students – who will, one day, become great leaders – display apathy towards the issues which they will ultimately be forced to confront, if this nation is to retain its ability to exercise global leadership for the duration of the 21st century. We look forward to convening a gathering of students from around the United States who share our concerns and our passion for devising effective solutions. We are unable to furnish more details at this point, because, as we noted, we intend to host this conference at some point in the distant future.

Ensuring that the four aforementioned events proceed successfully will consume a substantial amount of the organization’s time. However, FAP will also, in conjunction with actively preparing for each of the events, pursue a host of other, smaller projects. One of the most important of these will be producing a document which articulates FAP’s vision for a better society – a type of “manifesto” – similar to the Port Huron Statement.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) In 1962, led by Tom Hayden, Students for a Democratic Society (hereafter abbreviated SDS) drafted a document entitled *The Port Huron Statement*, in which they penned these words: “We are the people of this generation...looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.” In this by now classic document, the members of SDS expressed their concerns over two of the prevailing issues of their time: discrimination against African-American citizens, and the spiraling arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. We invite the Executive Board
Who is the intended audience of the group?

The intended audience of FAP comprises all interested students, faculty, and other members of the MIT community. The reason that our intended audience is so broad is that the most fruitful dialogue on issues of a political nature (and issues of any nature, for that matter) results when different community groups can contribute unique insights to and learn from one another. We are firmly of the belief that an organization which derives strength from the entire community, not just a particular subset of it, will ultimately benefit the entire community, not just a particular subset of it.

How do you plan to recruit new members?

For reasons upon which we elaborate in our response to the subsequent question, we believe that it is healthy to have in between 15 and 30 active student members. Our initial membership consists of 19 students – representing three class years, 15 different majors, and ten different residence halls – all of whom are enthusiastic and committed to making FAP a viable organization on campus.

That being said, however, we realize that new students contribute immensely to an organization’s vibrancy and legitimacy. If FAP is awarded recognition, we plan to compose a flyer or pamphlet which will be included, along with flyers for other student groups, in the acceptance package that is sent to all students who have gained admission to MIT. We will, furthermore, proactively promote FAP in central locations on campus, especially the Student Center and the Infinite Corridor. Finally, we will communicate, via e-mail, with the Class of 2009, and, in so doing, likely attract a considerable number of students.

How large do you expect the organization become? Why?

We expect that, once it has achieved maturity, FAP will contain between 15 and 30 active student members. The reason that we anticipate this range is that there is considerable student apathy here at MIT (and, for that matter, at the vast majority of colleges and universities across the United States) with regards to issues of a political nature. An organization with the express purpose of discussing threats to and ways of sustaining American leadership in the 21st century will, in all probability, tend to attract students who are more politically inclined than their peers. However, we do not view having a small to medium number of student members as a disadvantage, but rather, view it as a tremendous advantage. Namely, the leadership of an organization might find it difficult to efficiently achieve its objectives and coordinate its activities if the organization possesses too many members; by the same measure, an organization must have enough members to assure the proper fulfillment of basic responsibilities (such as overseeing the organization’s finances and ventures in public relations). With 15 to 30 members, we will have precisely the number of students needed to achieve this balance.

to visit the following link to review the full text of this inspirational statement:
http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html.
What has already been accomplished?

It is with great pleasure that we share with you FAP’s accomplishments to date. At U.Va (as we mentioned in footnote one, Ali Wyne’s sister, Zaahira Wyne, established the first chapter of FAP at U.Va), FAP has

1. established itself as the first student organization nationwide which explicitly focuses on promoting a responsible course of American foreign policy within the broader context of sustaining America’s global leadership during the 21st century;
2. brought together over 150 students, faculty, and members of the U.Va community who are concerned about the current direction of American foreign policy and committed to effecting constructive change;
3. organized a successful concert fundraiser for human rights;
4. participated in a videoconference discussion of American foreign policy with college students in Kuwait; and
5. arranged for distinguished speakers from the Federal Executive Institute, the University of Virginia, Columbia University, and Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government to speak on numerous critical issues, ranging from the prevention of genocide and the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court to multiracial politics and the role of broadcast and print media in the aftermath of the United States’ invasion of Iraq.

The chapter of FAP which exists at U.Va has been immensely productive, and we have no reason to doubt that a similar chapter at MIT would be equally successful. Thus far, we have had two principal categories of success: (1) those which involve garnering the support of faculty members, and (2) those which involve arranging for distinguished scholars to speak at MIT:

1. Faculty Support: Stephen van Evera, Professor of Political Science here at MIT, has agreed to serve as a faculty advisor to our organization. We have also received the enthusiastic support of Professors Joshua Cohen and Charles Stewart III (who is head of MIT’s Political Science Department), both of whom are also professors of political science here at MIT.12

2. Distinguished Scholars: We have successfully arranged for Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor of Linguistics here at MIT, to speak on the foreign policies which the United States has implemented since the commencement of its global war on terrorism. Furthermore, we have successfully arranged for Alan Dershowitz, the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and author of the widely regarded book, *The Case for Israel*, to speak on the United States’ role in mediating a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We are confident that we will be able to arrange for Joseph S. Nye, Jr., the Sultan of Oman Professor of International Relations at Harvard University, to speak at MIT on the role of “soft power” in shaping the United States’ foreign policies.

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12 We would be more than happy to supply the Executive Board with copies of our correspondence with these three professors.
Finally, we are in the process of arranging for Joseph Stiglitz, Executive Director of the Initiative for Policy Dialogue at Columbia University, and recipient of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics, to speak at MIT on the United States’ role in promoting the economic livelihood of the developing world.