

## **Dean for Graduate Students**

### **Graduate Students Office**

Reviewing the past year's work of the central administrative operations comprising the Graduate Students Office (GSO: the Office of the Dean for Graduate Students, the International Students Office, and the Graduate Student Council), some themes emerge that cut across the landscape of MIT's academic and administrative endeavors. Explored below, these three themes are diversity, graduate community, and collaboration.

### **Diversity**

The most salient of the three themes is the need for greater diversity in the graduate student population. GSO has focused its efforts on recruiting applicants from underserved and underrepresented groups, engaging departments and programs in targeted outreach, and developing programs to support students who matriculate.

Last year, we reported a remarkable faculty-driven resolution to encourage MIT to establish and move to achieve some lofty goals for faculty and graduate student diversity. External realities have only sharpened the timeliness of that resolution, making it even more imperative that the Institute achieve progress. On the national stage, graduate education has been shaken by the continued decline in applications from foreign nationals. From China alone, applications decreased by nearly 33 percent, the largest decrease; while applicants from Asian and European nations also showed a decline. The trend reflects the increasing strength of graduate institutions abroad, sharply increased competition for the most talented students, and more restrictive immigration policies and practices. We suspect that this trend is irreversible and that our peers abroad will seek to further expand their programs as well as try to retain their local intellectual assets. The implication for the US higher education enterprise is the necessity to dramatically increase the participation of US citizens in fields critical to national competitiveness, especially in the fields of science and technology. Critical to the success of the effort will be engaging more students from underrepresented and underserved communities.

### **New Assistant Dean**

With the national picture and the faculty resolution as backdrops, GSO moved forward with its projects to support the success of the new Converge Program and to refocus the summer internship program as a recruitment tool for MIT's graduate programs. This past September, Christopher M. Jones joined the office as the new assistant dean. As a graduate of a one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Morehouse College) and a recent alumnus of the Institute (joint MS degree in nuclear engineering and technology policy), Dean Jones brought youthful enthusiasm, fresh ideas, and a role model's cachet to the diversity agenda. Working with a faculty committee commissioned by Provost Robert Brown and chaired by Professor Paula Hammond of the Department of Chemical Engineering, Dean Jones implemented important changes in the MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP). His fellow committee members included Professor Paula Hammond (Chemical Engineering); Professor Steve Bell (Biology);

Professor Eric Hudson (Physics); Professor Tayo Akinwande (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science); Karl Reid (Office of the Dean for the School of Engineering); Janet Fischer (Office of the Provost); and Dean Ike Colbert (GSO). The committee's primary goal was to redesign the summer program as MIT's premiere recruitment tool for underrepresented minority students.

### ***MIT's Summer Research Program***

For most of its 19-year existence, MSRP has worked to increase the pool of minority students who pursue graduate degrees. It has been extremely successful in achieving that goal, with over 90 percent of program participants going on to graduate and professional schools. For most of its existence, MSRP has been centered within the School of Science, largely in accordance with generous, long-term funding from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and strong internal support from faculty in chemistry and the biological sciences.

In 2003, the Department of Biology hired Dr. Mandana Sassanfar to help sharpen its internship requirements and recruit exclusively for biology research labs. Dr. Sassanfar and her colleagues have developed an aggressive academic and research program specifically tuned to biology students. This subset of students maintained active participation in the larger structured agenda of MSRP.

Begun last year, the effort to renew MIT's participation in the National Science Foundation–sponsored Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate was successful. This consortium is led by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; its renewal guarantees five years of funding that will in part support summer research interns and expand MSRP into the School of Engineering. Thus, the 2005 MSRP program has doubled from an average of 25 students—mostly in science—to 57 confirmed participants in engineering and science areas. With the enhanced academic program components suggested by the faculty redesign committee, MSRP is now more closely aligned with the types of experiences that our students actually have. Moreover, greater faculty involvement in program design, intern selection, and matching with projects and with academic interactions should help to make the MSRP an effective recruitment program for the Institute's graduate programs and departments. One example of faculty involvement was a Wednesday lecture series at which the following faculty made presentations: Professor Paula Hammond (Chemical Engineering); Professor Cathy Drennan (Chemistry); Professor Tayo Akinwande (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science); Professor Martin Culpepper (Mechanical Engineering); Professor Robert Langer (Chemical and Biological Engineering); and Professor Elly Nedivi (Brain and Cognitive Sciences). Time will tell; judging from the significant faculty commitment to host and mentor interns in their labs, it seems clear that we are on a good path.

### ***Efforts to Increase Yield***

Not enough happened this past year that might have significantly impacted the yield from admitted students of color. The graduate preview weekend Converge was both new and relatively small (24 students in the pilot program), and initial results for admission were mixed. Of the 20 eligible to apply to MIT programs, 11 applied and five were admitted. Plans are under way to expand the program to as many as 40

participants for the coming year, and lessons gleaned from the pilot will inform the next program.

Plans will also need to be coordinated with departments and programs to take better advantage of preview weekends to be held next spring. Most departments encourage admitted students to come to the Institute to meet faculty and students and get an early introduction to the program. Our hope is to bring many of the underrepresented and underserved students on campus at about the same time, to build greater enthusiasm about MIT among admitted students and take advantage of economies of scale as we collectively welcome and orient them. GSO, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of Minority Education, together with academic departments, will define a set of welcoming activities that cut across current boundaries while engaging increased faculty outreach to convince admitted students to matriculate.

### **Graduate Community**

The second theme that characterizes GSO's work is that of building and strengthening the sense of community among graduate students.

The maturation of the graduate student life grant process continued to be a source of pride in the Graduate Students Office. Originally, the grant process was undertaken as an experiment to establish a framework around which to consider graduate student life. Today the process is more a proving ground for activities, programs, and events that support community building for graduate students.

In October, in the fourth round of request for proposals, the dean's selection panel reviewed another 28 grants and recommended that the dean fund 18 of those. Overall, between June 2002 and December 2004, the panel has reviewed 112 proposals and has awarded funding to 64 initiatives.

One concern that has arisen with regard to the grant process has been how to institutionalize those seminal ideas that stand the test of time and should be integrated into the fabric of graduate student life at the Institute. While the dean has identified a handful of projects for which he has budgeted annual funding, the need remains for a funding source to sustain these efforts on a more permanent basis.

This year, a team representing the Alumni Association and GSO worked hand-in-hand to develop a case statement for the new expendable Fund for Graduate Community. After securing the treasurer's approval for the fund, the team crafted a letter to present the case to all graduate alumni and request contributions to the fund. This letter, over the dean's signature, was posted in March; this appeal generated gifts totaling \$24K to multiple designations. Sixty-seven donors contributed more than \$10K to the Fund for Graduate Community. Currently, MIT's "giving" website identifies the fund as one of MIT's priorities for giving in support of student life and learning. Please see <http://giving.mit.edu/priorities/sll/graduatefund.html> for more information.

The chair and staff of the dean's selection panel—Barrie Gleason and Heather Fry—continued to refine the workflow that supports the funding process. This included

overseeing the “community building” website as well as managing the administrative infrastructure for gathering and evaluating grants; ensuring contacts between grant liaisons and authors; and collecting progress reports. Key changes going forward include increasing the panel from eight members to 10—five students and five administrators—and creating project teams (above and beyond the selection panel) that will explore issues around evaluation of this work and institutionalization.

### **Collaboration**

The third theme has been central to the way in which GSO has functioned over the past five years. By identifying shared business objectives across a wide variety of administrative offices, then agreeing upon priorities, responsibilities, and action plans, GSO has been able to leverage resources more effectively and build trusting relationships across organizational boundaries.

Together with the Office of Organization, employee development director Margaret Ann Gray, associate dean Blanche Staton, and director of communications Barrie Gleason planned and implemented a workshop for GSO’s c-network to mark the five-year point since the network’s inception. The purpose was to reflect on the principles of collaborative leadership and capture observations of a real-life model as it has evolved within GSO and with those administrative colleagues who share a commitment to enhancing the graduate experience. In an exercise billed as “a bridge to the past,” participants identified their collaborations with other organizations in the c-network. In “a bridge to the future,” participants contributed their ideas about future collaboration. In another echo of the past, the workshop was co-led by executive vice president John Curry and Margaret Ann Gray, who introduced this professional development program to MIT in 2000.

Two examples illustrate how collaboration within the 30-member network has contributed to the support of graduate student life. First, a series of meetings with staff from GSO and the Careers Office was held for the purpose of joint strategic planning. Based on these discussions, a smaller working group (Blanche Staton and Barrie Gleason in GSO and John Nonnamaker in the Careers Office) developed a set of shared business objectives for enhancing the graduate experience, prioritized objectives, identified next steps, and assigned responsibilities. These business recommendations were ultimately reflected as objectives in GSO’s strategic business plan.

Second, one of the grant proposals funded in the fourth round of the Graduate Student Life Grants was submitted by the Academics, Research, and Careers Committee of the Graduate Student Council. The purpose of the grant project—Focus Groups on Advisor-Advisee Relationships—was to develop well-informed and practical recommendations for improving those relationships at MIT through discussions involving graduate students, faculty members, and graduate administrators. This was another milestone effort to address a long-standing need for improving the quality of graduate advising. For further details, refer to the section on the Graduate Student Council below.

Students worked collaboratively with Institute research staff to design the 2004 Graduate Student Survey for obtaining data on the quality of graduate advising throughout MIT. Over 3,200 students completed the survey—a response rate greater than 50 percent!

The students prepared their analyses in a report with recommendations for change at the Institute, department, student/advisor, and peer levels. They conducted thoughtful and comprehensive presentations for academic and administrative staff, which were well received at every level of the Institute, culminating in a first-ever presentation by students at the May faculty meeting.

Maintaining momentum, additional collaborative efforts will include a retreat for graduate administrators in August 2005 to plan support for the graduate students and optimize recommendations to fit various departmental cultures, as well as departmental meetings in the fall to discuss survey data specific to unique areas.

### **Support and Development Programs and Events**

#### ***MentorNet***

At a time when the causes and effects of underrepresentation of women in science and engineering are a frequent subject of national debate in the news and the academy, organizations like MentorNet take center stage. MentorNet is an award-winning nonprofit global e-mentoring network that addresses the retention and success of those in engineering, science, and mathematics—particularly, but not exclusively, women and other underrepresented groups. With support from academia, professional societies, and industry, MentorNet has grown since 1997 from 430 student and mentor participants to over 4,000 in 2005, with more than 80 college and universities in partnership. More than 80 colleges and universities participate, and mentors represent approximately 800 companies. Just this year, the number of tenured faculty mentors has increased from 49 to 170, a phenomenon that will have an important impact on MentorNet's capacity to serve graduate students who aspire to careers in the academy.

Under the aegis of GSO, MIT has been a partner with MentorNet for four years, and many graduate women students have benefited from the one-on-one email-based mentoring relationships. Each year, there is considerable outreach to graduate women managed by associate dean Blanche Staton, MIT's campus representative to MentorNet. In AY2005, 47 MIT students were enrolled in the broader program and 28 were actively engaged in one-on-one mentoring. Of the 28, three were male. The largest number of students enrolled represented the areas of biological science and bioengineering, with 17 departments represented in total.

MIT students have been vocal about the value that the program has added with respect to the overall graduate experience and professional development. Support from mentors has ranged from help with resume writing to guidance through dissertation writing and from connections to internship opportunities to introductions to key industry executives.

As an active and valued partner with MentorNet, MIT's involvement and experience with the program has been showcased in the program's newsletter, and Dean Staton was invited to be a member of MentorNet's strategic planning team.

Looking forward, beginning in August 2005, there will be aggressive outreach to increase awareness of the value and accessibility of MentorNet's services to both graduate and undergraduate women. GSO believes that it is important to share the responsibility for providing opportunities for the development of our undergraduates, and whenever possible we will include that population as a beneficiary of services funded by GSO.

### ***Reception to Welcome New Graduate Women***

In September, in partnership with the Student Support Services, GSO hosted a reception to welcome entering graduate women. Approximately 70 new and continuing graduate women, faculty, and administrators gathered in the Chipman Room to get acquainted and network. Several administrative and student service offices sent representatives to promote early awareness of resources to support graduate women students.

### ***Celebrating Graduate Women at MIT***

The reception celebrating graduate women at MIT, to which all women graduate students and women faculty were invited, was the sixth annual event hosted by Dean Ike Colbert and Provost Bob Brown. Held in Walker Memorial, the reception attracted hundreds of graduate women and more faculty women than ever. The audience was delighted and inspired by welcoming remarks by the new "first lady and president," Susan Hockfield. This annual reception is one opportunity for graduate women to hold center stage, for them to mingle and make new acquaintances, and for graduate students and faculty women to relax in a setting outside of their labs and departments.

### ***Graduate Women's Group***

The bimonthly informal lunch gatherings of the Graduate Women's Group (GWG), led by associate dean Blanche Staton and Lynn Roberson, Student Support Services, continue to serve as a forum for exchanging ideas and building relationships and community across disciplines. The ever-increasing interest in the group, as evidenced by the growth from 150 women in 2002 to over 300 women today, keeps GSO mindful that women students value connections with other women students. This year's lunch gatherings included a discussion with women postdoctoral fellows, who shared stories about their professional and personal journeys. The graduate women who attended were clearly captivated and seized every opportunity to ask questions and seek advice.

For the second consecutive year, GSO and Career Services cosponsored a presentation by Dr. Valerie Young, whose work on the "imposter syndrome" is highly acclaimed. Addressing a full house of graduate students in Room 10-250, Dr. Young spoke about the tendency for very intelligent and capable individuals, especially women, to doubt themselves and their competence and discussed ways to recognize and overcome this phenomenon. Later GSO hosted a reception for graduate women to interact more intimately with Dr. Young and ask personal questions.

A recurring theme in many gatherings of graduate women is communication in difficult situations, particularly in interactions with research supervisors and male peers. To address this concern, GSO invited Suzan Wolpov, a Cambridge-based trainer in effective communication techniques, to work with GWG during the Independent Activities Period. In two workshops, Ms. Wolpov discussed various communication styles, components of effective communication, and negotiation and strategies for assertive and effective communication. Student evaluations of the workshop underscored the importance of strategies for managing conflict and improving the student/advisor relationship and requested that more workshops of this type be offered in the future.

### **Activities for Graduate Students of Color**

The most significant ongoing event for graduate students of color is the Power Lunch, a monthly forum that focuses on the personal and professional needs and development of graduate students of color. Students often remark that the forum is one thing that they can depend on to bring them together and one place where they always feel welcomed and supported.

During AY2005, an effort was made to acquaint students with more minority faculty and to give the faculty an opportunity to share their research as well as their stories about their life journey. The students heard from scholars such as Collin Stultz, MD, PhD, an assistant professor in Health Sciences and Technology; Dr. Jonathan Farley, a Martin Luther King visiting scholar in the Math Department; and Professor Erica James, an assistant professor in Anthropology.

In response to requests from black graduate women, off-campus gatherings for dinner and the theater were scheduled at various intervals during the academic year. For these young women, the chance to discuss their unique concerns where they feel safe and where there is a shared experience is priceless.

After considerable effort over a few years, GSO and two graduate students were successful in bringing together a group of Latino graduate students to begin building community among that population. GSO sponsored several events, with attendance ranging from 15 to 30 students.

GSO is committed to sustaining the momentum on this initiative and to a greater understanding of the needs and concerns of this and other targeted constituencies in order to have a positive impact on their graduate experience and quality of life.

### **Fellowships**

Over the course of the year, GSO met the needs of an increased number of graduate students holding fellowships, assisted graduate administrators, and effectively delivered services to graduate students on fellowships and grants. The two most important fellowships at MIT are the National Science Foundation (NSF) fellowship and the National Defense Science Engineering Graduate Fellowship (NDSEG). Overall, the numbers of students holding these fellowships were as follows:

	Current	Enrolled
NSF	309	177
NDESG	112	112

On April 6, 2005, Ms. Carmen Gordon, program manager at the Jacob K. Javits Fellowships Office, Washington, DC, visited MIT to learn how MIT administers the program and supports Javits fellows, as well as to understand how to help the program gather historical data.

On March 29, 2005, PricewaterhouseCooper initiated an audit to learn how selected NSF fellows in a graduate program have been supported by MIT. GSO met all criteria and complied with terms and conditions set forth during the audit.

On September 13, 2004, the fellowships administrator met with Frank Levy, chair of the PhD Committee in Course 11 (Urban Studies and Planning) on how to do a better job educating their PhD students on applying for external fellowships. A follow-up session with students and staff in the department clarified information resources for fellowship opportunities available at MIT and how to search them efficiently. As a result, the department hired a first-year doctoral student to develop a departmental website on fellowships, with appropriate links to other sites that describe fellowship opportunities.

Finally, at the annual Department of Energy (Krell Institute) Conference, Washington, DC, three MIT DOE fellows presented papers and four presented posters.

**Ike Colbert, Dean**

**Christopher Jones, Assistant Dean**

**Blanche Staton, Associate Dean**

**Barrie Gleason, Director of Communications**

**Brima A. Wurie, Fellowships Administrator**

*More information about the Graduate Students Office can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/gso/>. Graduate data are available in the “Grad Facts” section at <http://web.mit.edu/gso/reports/gradfacts.html>.*

## **International Students Office**

The mission of the International Students Office (ISO) is to provide services and support programs for international students. The office assists students in maintaining their legal status in the United States, provides support for their dependents, and promotes their integration into the MIT community at large. More broadly, ISO advocates for awareness in the community regarding issues salient to the international student population.

MIT has a substantial international student population, with representation from 108 countries. In AY2005, nearly 25 percent of MIT’s student population was international; at the graduate level, nearly 36 percent. The People’s Republic of China continues to be the

country with the largest number of students at MIT. These percentages have generally remained constant over the past five years.

In July 2004, international students across the United States were fully incorporated into the Department of Homeland Security's Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). MIT's ISO complied fully with federal reporting on every international student to confirm full-time registration, specify financial sources, update US addresses, log changes in academic level or program, and report medical leaves.

Providing new and enhanced welcoming services to international students in the context of the dynamic regulatory environment was the primary focus for ISO during the past year. Another area of focus was ongoing education for the MIT community about international student regulatory issues. With concerns about compliance in mind, Institute auditor Deborah L. Fisher commissioned an audit of all SEVIS functions in early September 2004. Though the findings report was overwhelmingly positive, MIT's auditors recommended a stricter interpretation of reporting mandates and a tightening of protocol and procedures with respect to SEVIS reporting functions. Collaborative efforts with the SAP Payroll Project staff, MIT Medical, Student Support Services, the Registrar's Office, Admissions Office, and the Office of Risk Management over the next year will ensure that well-defined institutional policies vis-à-vis SEVIS reporting are established. In addition, over the next two years, the ISO director will develop a comprehensive operational policy manual for the office's use.

ISO initiated new services and enhanced others; for example, the advisor-on-call day when students and staff can receive immigration and cross-cultural advice on a walk-in basis. ISO has also streamlined front-desk procedures so that students can apply for and receive travel signatures, certification letters, and invitation letters required by the State Department in a matter of days. In collaboration with the International Scholars Office, ISO purchased the user-friendly CINTAX software program to assist students with filing resident alien tax forms. In addition to orientation, the office offered open houses throughout the year during exam periods, holidays, the tax season, and graduation.

### **Admissions**

In the 2005 admissions season, international graduate applications to the Institute recovered from the previous year's decline, according to the Admissions Office. Fifty percent of graduate applications to MIT were international, compared to 47 percent in 2004. However, many departments noted precipitous drops in applications from India and China. ISO continues to monitor international admissions data to understand factors leading to an international student's decision not to come to the United States or to MIT. For example, improved educational systems and dynamic economies in China and India may help explain the drop in student applicants from those countries. The number of enrolled international students decreased slightly to 2,723 this year from last year's enrollment of 2,780.

Almost all 800 admitted international students arrived by registration day in September 2004. Earlier admissions decisions, more efficient immigration documentation processing by ISO, and streamlined Department of State visa applications procedures

were undoubtedly instrumental in bringing admitted students to MIT in a timely fashion. Student visa applicants, however, were subjected to a new \$100 SEVIS fee by the end of September 2004.

Graduate admits from the People's Republic of China and from countries that have been designated "state sponsors of terrorism" (Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and the Sudan) faced rigorous scrutiny at the US Embassy and consulates. Heavy lobbying on the part of organizations such as the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, the Association of International Educators, and the American Council of Education resulted in some visa relief for these nationals. Chinese student visa applicants are now able to secure one-year, multiple-entry visas rather than single-entry, six-month visas. Security clearances for nationals from countries such as Iran and Syria are now taking three to six weeks, in contrast with last year's three to six months.

Visiting students, who continue to be invited to the Institute in record numbers, must comply with SEVIS requirements. Because they arrive at any time throughout the year, bypassing the normal admissions process, the ISO has created special SEVIS reporting protocol and specialized programming for these individuals. In 2005, ISO launched a new section of its website for administrators who deal with visiting students and sponsored a workshop for faculty and administrators who bring visiting students to the campus.

The Cambridge-MIT Exchange, the MIT-Singapore Alliance, Sloan fellows, and Systems and Design Management all continued to expand their programs, specifically targeting foreign national participation. The ISO staff has become proficient in applying new legal admissions requirements to such specialized programs.

### **Advising**

Advising remains at the core of ISO's responsibility to international students. Thousands of students have received advice on immigration procedures and regulations for traveling, employment, and change of visa status. While seeking ISO expertise because regulations require it, students also come to ISO with underlying concerns about cultural adjustment and worries about political tensions back home. Beyond immigration advising, the ISO staff routinely provides information to international students about issues such as domestic violence and academic integrity.

### **Orientation**

All international students undergo a period of cultural adjustment. They and their dependents require information about their new surroundings, culture, and community. Through the extensive use of the web and email, incoming students are now able to address many of their practical concerns before they arrive in the United States. Once students are on campus, ISO provides individual and small-group orientation sessions daily from mid-August to mid-September. Building on collaborative efforts established last year with the Graduate Student Council (GSC), ISO continued to participate in several panels on Graduate Student Day and promoted GSC's Airport Shuttle Service and Graduate Student Mentor Program. In the spring of 2005, ISO participated in GSO's

Graduate Advising Project and sponsored the culminating event when the project's results were presented to the graduate student body.

ISO hosts Freshman International Orientation. In AY2005, supported by a bevy of upperclassman volunteers, ISO expanded the intensive two-day program to include informal social nights, midnight soccer games, and shopping and dining excursions off campus.

The International Freshman Mentor Program, currently in its seventh year, has become a mainstay of freshman orientation. This program matches incoming international freshmen with upperclassmen long before their arrival to the US. Strong bonds often develop between student and mentor, beginning with e-mail correspondence while the student is still at home, to airport pick-up, to many year long mentor-organized activities. The Mentor Program has been staffed and organized entirely by volunteer students (both domestic and international upperclassmen) and program founder Paulette Schwartz.

### **Host to International Students Program**

The Host to International Students Program (HISP) provides new students with supportive emotional and social ties to MIT community members and their families. This year, over 150 students and community members participated. HISP coordinator Janka Moss brought new families into the program, updated its database and infrastructure, and created new events for HISP participants.

### **Conclusion**

As the year drew to a close, the US government began rethinking its approach to international student exchange in the face of declining international student enrollment across the country. Officials solicited the opinions of premier academic institutions such as MIT. For example, in March 2005, the government's Council on Competitiveness requested recommendations for Congress as that body deliberated on policy for international academic exchange. In April 2005, the Government Accountability Office invited the director to present observations on the impact of post-9/11 regulations on international students in the United States.

In many academic disciplines, international students at MIT are widely recognized as future vital players on a world stage. ISO is poised to work in coordinated partnership with federal officials, as well as the MIT community, to preserve the Institute's reputation with foreign nationals as an attractive, dynamic, and open environment for academic study and collaboration.

**Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook**  
**Director**

*More information about the International Students Office can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/iso/www/>.*

## **Graduate Student Council**

This has been an outstanding year for the Graduate Student Council (GSC). Building on the strengths and accomplishments of recent years, we have made significant improvements in wide-ranging areas related to the graduate student experience. Strong relationships with administrators, faculty, staff, and students based on trust and collaboration have enabled these successes. The pillars of the council's work remain representation, transparency, and accountability. Internally, the council balanced the desire for speed and flexibility with the need for thoughtful decision making. This summary briefly outlines the past year's work, how this work has affected the graduate student experience, and GSC's role in that experience:

### **First-Year Experience: Orientation and Mentorship**

The 2004 Fall Graduate Orientation program was the biggest and most successful to date, with over 70 events planned over a one-month period, most within the first week of the arrival of new students. These events provided venues for social interaction and were critical in helping students during their first few weeks at the Institute. In addition, effort was put into simplifying the logistics and planning for future orientations.

GSC expanded its successful mentorship programs, in which senior graduate students volunteer to mentor incoming students to assist in their adjustment to MIT. The international student mentorship program benefited over 120 incoming graduates in its third year. In addition, a new program was established for mentoring students from underrepresented minority populations.

### **Graduate Academic Experience: Advising and Support**

A key issue for the council over the past year has been understanding the graduate academic experience. GSC worked with the Office of the Provost to survey the entire student body on a broad set of issues related to graduate advising and their experiences at MIT. An over 50 percent response rate ensured a rich and descriptive set of data on the topic. GSC also ran a set of focus groups, bringing together over 85 faculty, administrators, and students from 25 departments to discuss issues related to advising. Results from the survey and focus group discussions were presented in many forums, including a town hall meeting with over 200 attendees, a faculty meeting, a meeting of all department heads, a roundtable with graduate administrators, and various departmental meetings. Through these efforts, GSC was able to clarify the need for improved graduate advising and shared best practices across departments and schools. The case was also made for the need to support and encourage peer-to-peer mentorship and support programs at the local level. Now aware of the issues at hand, faculty members are well positioned to move to the next phase of implementation.

### **Diversity**

A long-standing objective of the council has been to help increase the diversity of the graduate population. Toward this end, a new program known as Converge was implemented this year, with GSC collaborating with the Black Graduate Students Association and members of the MIT administration. Converge served as a graduate preview weekend for well-qualified undergraduate members of underrepresented

minorities, with 24 potential MIT applicants participating in the program. The program received positive feedback; the Office of the Provost has agreed to coordinate it in the future.

GSC supported diversity beyond racial or ethnic lines by passing two resolutions. The first supported the creation of a full-time administrative position directed at providing support for members of the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgendered community, a position later approved and created. The second resolution urged MIT to include marital, partnered, and parental status as part of its nondiscrimination policy.

### **Careers and Professional Development**

The fall 2004 Career Fair, cosponsored by GSC, the Class of 2005, and the Society of Women Engineers, attracted over 200 employers (a 33 percent increase over the previous year) and 4,000 students and increased profits by over 50 percent year-to-year. The collaboration among all three partner groups was very strong, and a new model was put in place to include participation by MIT's Science, Engineering, and Business Club in the fair.

GSC also continued a number of seminar series directed toward career and professional development: the Academic Career Series, Professional Development Series, and Business and Technology Lecture Series.

### **Community**

The council has continued its efforts to build a sense of community among graduate students at MIT. The annual GSC Ski Trip was larger than ever, attracting over 450 students, owing largely to GSC's collaboration with the graduate student group Snowriders. GSC also continued its outreach to the off-campus student community. The Thirsty Ear pub was reopened this year, thanks to the previous year's efforts of the Ashdown House Executive Committee, GSC, the Pub Advisory Board, and the offices of deans Colbert and Benedict. GSC supported the pub through its reopening. GSC's own pub, the Muddy Charles, underwent significant renovations this year, making it a more attractive location for students.

An important factor in increasing the sense of community among the graduate population and graduate alumni was the success of the GradRat, the graduate ring. The GradRat underwent a substantial redesign in 2003, allowing students to customize rings by department; the new design has strengthened the connection that graduate alumni feel toward MIT.

### **Relationships with Student Groups**

GSC has worked over the course of this year to build stronger relationships with the many graduate student groups at MIT. By working with stakeholders, including MIT's 300-plus student groups, a comprehensive restructuring of the Association of Student Activities (ASA), a joint committee of GSC and the Undergraduate Association (UA), was developed and implemented. The ASA constitution was replaced with a more appropriate set of GSC/UA bylaws and ASA operating guidelines. This empowered the

ASA Executive Board to be more dynamic in changing its operating guidelines, while ensuring accountability within both GSC and UA. The changes also introduced a process to appeal ASA decisions within GSC and UA.

The GSC Funding Board distributed over \$100K to graduate student groups over the course of the year and improved services by creating online funding applications. Additionally, the council worked to foster collaborations with student groups throughout the year (e.g., the Ski Trip, Converge, and Career Fair). The council also worked with TechLink, a group cofounded by GSC and the Sloan senate, to help them become more independent and more flexible in their continued operations.

### **Communication with the Student Body**

The council addressed the need for clear and effective communication with students on a variety of fronts. The *Graduate Student News* was redesigned in terms of visual layout and content. The GSC website continued its expansion and now serves as an important reference for many graduate students. Another mechanism is GSC's announcement email list, which now serves over 3,500 students. Finally, GSC's physical presence on campus plays an important role in communication, in that many students come to the GSC office to ask questions, buy tickets to events, attend meetings, or seek assistance. Office renovations such as adding a large plaque over the front door, painting, and improved lighting have made the physical space more inviting to students.

### **Student Needs and Housing**

GSC built upon previous years' efforts by creating an accurate assessment of graduate student costs of living, in a format that can easily be updated from year to year, at <http://web.mit.edu/gsc/www/studentlife/costofliving/>. The analysis was presented to the Deans' Group of the Academic Council. A 3.5 percent stipend increase and a reduction in medical insurance rates for students with families were supported by the cost-of-living data.

As a part of its advocacy for graduate students with families, GSC gave a "family needs presentation" to a number of deans and administrators at MIT. This presentation outlined the Institute's progress in recent years, as well as needs for improvement. In conjunction with these efforts, the council advocated for child care needs through the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee. On a more tangible level, GSC has worked to begin the creation of a child care co-op system in Westgate, which will allow students to pay lower fees by working in the co-op.

With regard to housing, GSC began a process of engaging MIT's independent living group (ILG) community to assess the feasibility of housing graduate students in ILGs that are unable to recruit undergraduate members. GSC continued its long-standing advocacy for increased housing capacity for the graduate population, especially for graduate student families, as plans for new dorms are developed.

## Student Safety

A major reconstruction project on Massachusetts Avenue raised concerns about safety. The council passed a resolution, after carefully assessing the situation, declaring that the project would create unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Formal letters of concern were written to internal MIT administrators as well as over a dozen city and state officials. Meetings were held in response to these concerns, resulting in a redesign of the most problematic aspects of the project (e.g., number of lanes, parking for Saferide, crosswalk width, and lighting). The fact that the city and state were willing and able to reconsider the design of a project 15 years in the making because of GSC's efforts sent a strong message indicating the impact of effective student advocacy.

## Institute-Wide Efforts

This year, GSC engaged in two Institute-wide efforts. The first of these, "MIT Votes," encouraged participation in the 2004 national elections. This effort—a joint initiative of GSC, UA, MIT institutional offices, and various student groups—supported voter registration drives, debates, symposia, and other related events on campus to engage students in relevant national issues.

A second collaboration with UA was the Student Advisory Board (SAB) to MIT president Susan Hockfield. Cochaired by the GSC and UA presidents, the purpose of SAB was to introduce student perspectives of MIT to President Hockfield. The board held four lunches with her and presented a final report to the MIT community, which can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/committees/sab/>.

## GSC Infrastructure

The Graduate Student Council made changes to its own internal structure by passing a number of amendments to its constitution and bylaws. While some of these amendments simply clarified wording, others put into GSC's official documents various unofficial practices. Notable changes included defining and clarifying the role of the ASA, an election procedure for GSC representatives, voting rights of council members, and legislative processes for council meetings, as well as a change that moved the definition of housing representation from the constitution to the bylaws to better accommodate changes as new residences are constructed. A new numbering system was put in place to facilitate record keeping of GSC legislation, and all legislation was placed online at <http://web.mit.edu/gsc/www/meetings/legislation/>.

Finally, in order to help ensure continuity of GSC's efforts, the GSC archives were restructured to make them more secure and easier to navigate.

**Barun Singh**  
**President**

*More information about the Graduate Student Council can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/gsc/www/>.*