

Institute Community and Equity Officer

The [Institute Community and Equity Officer](#) (ICEO) serves as a thought leader and supporter of MIT's distributed efforts to enhance community, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The role provides a focal point for organizing MIT-wide activities and supports the implementation of best practices across the Institute.

FY2015 began with a somber set of events with the shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The resulting protests nationally spread quickly to college campuses through the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Just before freshman orientation, on August 29, the ICEO organized a community gathering "Transformative Conversations: Responding to Ferguson" with a keynote by former MIT Mel King Community Fellow Malia Lazu. The more than 100 community members attending the event included faculty, staff, current students, alumni, and the parents of an incoming freshman.

On December 10, following additional shootings of unarmed black men by police around the nation, more than 100 MIT community members including students, postdocs, staff, and faculty, participated in a silent protest outside the end-of-semester Winterfest activity. MIT president Rafael Reif greeted the protesters and acknowledged the pain expressed by the demonstrators. That evening, more than 400 MIT community members participated in a dialogue on race organized by the ICEO along with the Black Students' Union, Black Women's Alliance, and Black Graduate Student Association. Participants felt validated by the participation of a large, diverse group and by President Reif's acknowledgement of the impact societal issues had at MIT.

The annual Martin Luther King Celebration on February 5, 2015 followed a new course this year not only by moving from breakfast to lunch, but also by replacing the outside keynote speaker by MIT students (a choice forced by the heavy snowfall that month). The students powerfully described their sometimes fraught experiences navigating the topics of race and diversity at MIT.

On January 29 and February 12, 2015, MIT hosted the Institute Diversity Summit. The first day featured a keynote by the Institute Community and Equity Officer. The second day featured a keynote by Professor Renée Richardson Gosline and a panel discussion with the provost, chancellor, and executive vice president and treasurer. In addition, community members organized a series of parallel workshops both afternoons.

In February 2015, the ICEO publicly released a report and strategic plan as requested by MIT's provost in 2013. The 132-page [report](#) examines MIT's past and present understanding of diversity and inclusion through the lenses of community, culture, and values. It presents a mission statement:

To advance a respectful and caring community that embraces diversity and empowers everyone to learn and do their best at MIT.

Additionally, the ICEO report provides a set of 17 major recommendations and dozens of minor recommendations. Major themes in the report include the relevance of distinct cultures at MIT, the different and sometimes inequitable experiences of various groups at MIT, and the need to use data to inform decision making. The report's top three recommendations were:

- To write an MIT Compact—a brief statement of what we aspire to as a community and what we expect of one another as MIT community members
- To educate all community members about unconscious bias
- To develop a community and equity dashboard presenting demographic data and information on progress toward implementation of the report's goals

During a comment period following the release of the report, nearly 50 individuals and groups responded. They overwhelmingly affirmed the major recommendations, particularly the emphasis given to the top three. Faculty and student perspectives on the report were published in the March/April 2015 [Faculty Newsletter](#).

This year marked an increase in campus activism calling for MIT to advance equity and inclusion, much of it student-led. Working with the ICEO, graduate students organized A Community Dialogue on Mental Wellness at MIT, held April 15, 2015. This event brought more than 50 community members together to hear from MIT students and to help the community understand the pressure facing students and others. On April 23, undergraduate students organized a similar panel event, The MIT We Don't See: A conversation about MIT Culture. On April 24, the ICEO and staff from the Sloan School of Management hosted Stand Against Racism, an event organized nationally by the YWCA to raise awareness and empower action toward eliminating racism. On May 7, the Black Students' Union and the MIT Ombuds Office hosted a dialogue event with MIT and the Cambridge Police, with the goal of increasing understanding and decreasing the tensions and mistrust that result from stereotyping. In total, 63 events were featured during FY2015 in the ICEO events calendar, most of them organized by other offices.

During the academic year the ICEO relaunched the MIT diversity website diversity.mit.edu and launched the new websites mlkscholars.mit.edu and iceoblog.mit.edu.

In collaboration with staff in various staff- and student-serving offices, the ICEO represented MIT in the Leading for Change Higher Education Diversity Consortium. This is a voluntary collaboration of higher education institutions in Massachusetts and New England committed to identifying student and employee diversity best practices through uniform and transparent use of data, institutional benchmarks, and reflective practice.

This year MIT hosted seven Martin Luther King Visiting Professors and Scholars:

- Coco Fusco, hosted by the Comparative Media Studies/Writing Section
- Malika Jeffries-EL (Iowa State University), hosted by the Department of Chemistry

- Calestous Juma (Harvard University), hosted by the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
- James Mickens (Microsoft Research), hosted by the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- Hakeem Oluseyi (Florida Institute of Technology), hosted by the Department of Physics
- André Taylor (Yale University), hosted by the the Department of Mechanical Engineering
- Kimani Toussaint (University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign), hosted by the Department of Mechanical Engineering

Each visiting professor or scholar gave a public presentation and built a lively community around their presence on campus.

The Institute Community and Equity Officer participated in the following additional activities during FY2015:

- New faculty orientation
- Freshman diversity orientation
- First Generation Program for undergraduate students
- Alumni Leadership Conference
- Keynote speaker at MIT Lincoln Laboratory’s Martin Luther King Breakfast
- Workshop Challenging Technical Privilege: How Race and Gender Matter, co-organized with the Office of Minority Education
- Hosted the MIT-9 meeting of vice provosts for faculty development and diversity
- Spoke about diversity and inclusion at several universities and national conferences

Edmund Bertschinger
Institute Community and Equity Officer
Professor of Physics