

Program in Media Arts and Sciences

Graduate Program

A total of 164 students—89 master’s degree candidates and 75 doctoral candidates—were enrolled in the [Program in Media Arts and Sciences](#) (MAS) graduate program during academic year 2016. The MAS graduate student community included 51 women and 74 foreign students.

During the year, 51 advanced degrees were awarded (39 master’s degrees and 12 doctoral degrees). For fall 2015, MAS received 760 applications to the graduate program and offered admission to 51 students (including 17 women), an 8% admissions rate; 47 students (including 16 women) enrolled, a 92% yield.

In addition to supervising Media Arts and Sciences graduate students, MAS faculty and research staff collectively advised and supported more than 30 graduate students from other departments and programs, including Biological Engineering, Physics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, Civil and Environmental Engineering, the Engineering Systems Division, and Computation for Design and Optimization. The program also enrolled students from the Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology.

MAS offered 31 graduate courses during academic year 2016.

Diversity and Inclusion

MAS continues to make strides in improving its diversity efforts for the graduate program. Below are brief summaries of recruitment efforts and other strategies.

MAS Ambassadors

In fall 2015 we launched a new recruitment program called MAS Ambassadors, with the aim of leveraging the networks and connections of current MAS students. For example, students can “pitch” a recruitment idea to MAS and we then help them execute it. This model extends the program’s reach and allows current students to play a part in shaping future MAS cohorts by providing attendees with a firsthand account of the coursework, research, and culture of the Media Lab. In our first semester piloting this program, we sponsored seven trips.

MIT Summer Research Program

The MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP) brings undergraduate students from across the US to conduct research at MIT for nine weeks. Interns also learn about applying to, and succeeding in, graduate school. In the summer of 2015, six interns worked in four different research groups at the Media Lab. MAS continues to work to expand the Media Lab’s involvement in MSRP. In the summer of 2016 MAS will host nine interns, who plan to work in eight different research groups.

Open House Travel Grants

The Open House is a great way for prospective applicants to learn more about the Media Lab, meet faculty and graduate students, and determine if this is the best program for them. Travel grants were created last year to expand our reach and applicant pool, resulting in 183 applications and 20 grants. We will continue to offer grants for Open House attendees in future years.

Students Offering Support Program

In its second year, the Students Offering Support Program continues to be a useful resource for applicants, pairing them with current students who provide feedback on the applicants' statement of purpose or portfolio. This personal attention goes a long way toward demystifying the application process, clarifying what individual research groups are looking for, and strengthening applications. In academic year 2016, the program included:

- 19 graduate student volunteers
- 36 prospective students
- 30 students who applied
- 6 students (20%) who were admitted

Women's Lunches

These monthly lunches are a space for women students to connect and build community. Each session features a speaker who addresses some aspect of professional or personal development. Among the topics this year were:

- How to Succeed at the Media Lab Without Really Trying: Lessons from an Alum
- Creating Opportunities for Personal Effectiveness
- Optimizing Crit Day: Giving Feedback, Receiving It, and Communicating Effectively
- Effectively Using Social Media: Personal and Professional
- Standing Up Instead of Standing By
- The Circuitous Path: Approaching Experience as a Process and Embracing the Unexpected
- #LiberatedThreads: Doing Black Women's History and Surviving the Academy... in Style

Diversity Series

The MAS Diversity Series brings the Media Lab community together to develop skills and explore ideas of diversity and social justice through presentations and discussion. This year's talks included:

- Killing Me Softly: Micro-aggressions
- Implicit Bias Workshop
- Transforming the Language of Disability

Town Halls

MAS Town Hall meetings create a safe space for students to voice their concerns, share their ideas, and ask questions about things that are happening in and around the Media Lab and the academic program. We hosted two Town Halls over the past year: “All Things Space,” with Jessica Tsymbal, the Media Lab’s director of facilities; and “Hacking the Director’s Fellows Program,” with its coordinator, Claudia Robaina, and Lorrie LeJeune, assistant director of the Center for Civic Media.

Student Honors and Awards

Ai Hasagawa’s (Design Fiction) (Im)possible Baby project won an Excellence Award at the Japan Media Arts Festival.

Achuta Kadambi (Camera Culture) received a 2016 Lemelson-MIT Student Prize.

Laura Perovich (Object-Based Media) received a 2016 Schnitzer Prize in the Visual Arts.

Harbaljit Sohal (Synthetic Neurobiology) and Steven Keating (Mediated Matter) were both named to *Forbes Magazine’s* 2016 “30 Under 30” lists, in science and healthcare, respectively.

Undergraduate Program

The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) continued to represent the largest undergraduate presence in Media Arts and Sciences and the Media Lab. More than 200 undergraduates from across the Institute participated in a wide variety of UROP projects at the Media Lab, and many students pursued their undergraduate theses and advanced undergraduate projects under MAS faculty supervision. In addition, the MAS program offered five undergraduate subjects.

MAS has an alternative freshman-year program that is now in its 17th year. The students in the program participate in weekly Media Lab tutorial/laboratory sessions connected with two core freshman subjects. They also pursue Media Lab UROP projects and take two MAS undergraduate subjects on design and research, one of which satisfies part of the undergraduate Communication Requirement as well as the arts portion of the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Distribution Requirement. For AY2016, there were 56 applicants to the program, of whom 24 students were selected; 58% of the applicants were women and 42% were members of underrepresented minority groups.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty members and students in the Media Arts and Sciences program were greatly saddened by the loss of Professor Emeritus Marvin Minsky in January 2016 at the age of 88. He was considered the “father of artificial intelligence,” and was regarded as an inspirational thinker by the entire MIT community.

Edward Boyden received the 2016 BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award for his work on optogenetics tools. In a poignant passing of the baton, Marvin Minsky won this award in 2014.

Appointments

Kevin Esvelt was appointed assistant professor of Media Arts and Sciences. He heads the Media Lab’s Sculpting Evolution research group, focused on exploring evolutionary and ecological engineering.

Iyad Rahwan was appointed assistant professor of Media Arts and Sciences. He heads the Scalable Cooperation research group, focused on reimagining the way society organizes, cooperates, and governs itself.

Promotion

Professor Joseph Paradiso was promoted to full professor. He heads the Responsive Environments research group, focused on augmenting and mediating human experience, interaction, and perception with sensor networks.

Honors and Awards

Michael Bove (Object-Based Media) received the MIT Excellence in Mentoring Award. Professor Edward Boyden received a Breakthrough Prize for his pioneering work in optogenetics.

Professor Cynthia Breazeal was named one of the most powerful women engineers in 2016 by *Business Insider*.

Professor Hugh Herr received the Princess of Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research, and also received an honorary PhD from the University of Twente in The Netherlands for his contributions to science.

Professor Joseph Jacobson was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame for his work on developing e-ink.

Professor Tod Machover was named composer of the year by *Musical America*.

Professor Neri Oxman was awarded the 2016 Sean Collier Medal jointly with Professor Yoel Fink, director of MIT’s Research Laboratory of Electronics.

Professor Sandy Pentland's book *Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread* was named a Book of the Year by *China Business News*.

Professors Rosalind Picard and Cynthia Breazeal were featured on the Best Master's Degrees list of "30 Most Innovative Women Professors Alive Today."

Pattie Maes
Academic Head