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Diversity Subcommittee

The Graduate Student Council in the fall of 2005 created a Task Force on Diversity which has conducted an overview of the past GSC and Institute-wide initiatives that have focused on increasing diversity at MIT. One of the goals of the Task Force is to explore the potential barriers that exist in diversity initiatives at MIT and in graduate school more broadly. The [Final Report of the Task Force on Diversity \(pdf\)](#) is available online.

What do the Numbers mean

In May 2003 , the MIT faculty passed a resolution calling for the administration to increase the number of underrepresented minority graduate students by a factor of three in the next decade. This begs the question – how have we done in the past five years? Table 1 provides data on the graduate student enrollment for the period 2001-2005.

Graduate	Fall 2001	Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005
International	2244	2283	2242	2178	2212
Black	126	101	113	118	114
Native American	11	8	16	20	17
Asian	591	654	655	686	707
Hispanic	119	127	153	171	176
White	2153	2293	2424	2358	2242
Unknown	740	673	625	653	672
Total Graduate	5984	6139	6228	6184	6140

Table 1. 5 years of MIT Graduate Student Enrollment (<http://web.mit.edu/ir/pop/students/enrollment.html>)

From the data, we can see the number of African Americans enrolled in graduate school at MIT has remained constant, actually decreasing from a high in 2001 of 124 to 114 in 2005. However, if we examine the overall percentage of African Americans in the graduate population at MIT, on average that has been 1.9% for the period 2001-2005.

For Hispanics , there has been slow but steady growth in enrollment numbers from 119 in 2001 to 176 in 2005. On average , the overall percentage of Hispanics in the graduate population at MIT has been 2.5% over the past five years, but it is has increased from 2.0% in 2001 to 2.9% in 2005.

For women, the number has fluctuated around 28-29% of the overall graduate student population for the past five years.

These numbers shed some light on the challenge facing the Institute if it is the meet its goal of increasing the level of graduate student diversity by three-fold in the next decade. MIT needs to continue its recruitment programs to assure that the goal set by the faculty is met. But even if this goal is met, will MIT be true to its definition of diversity?

What is Diversity?

Diversity not a state or goal, but an ongoing process, enabling a productive, vibrant, and creative environment at MIT. Pursuing diversity includes cultivating a tolerant and respectful community, recognizing and embracing the interdependence of individuals and groups, and actively challenging divisiveness and discrimination.

Why Build a Diverse Community?

“The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century.” ([MIT Mission Statement](#))

The above quote defines MIT's mission. Goals of the mission also include the commitment from MIT to “...providing its students with an education that combines rigorous academic study and the excitement of discovery with the support and intellectual stimulation of a diverse campus community.” Building a diverse community is an important part of MIT’s mission.

But diversity is more than a sub-goal – it is fundamental to MIT’s core mission. How? In its *Amici Curiae* in the Michigan case, MIT (speaking on behalf of a group of leading schools) provides a long argument for the importance of diversity in educating students in science and technology, beginning with a statement that, “diversity (broadly defined and including racial and ethnic diversity) is in fact absolutely essential to the advancement of science and engineering – in part for the same reasons that it is important for higher education generally, but also for a host of other reasons peculiarly related to these fields, and to their critical world role.”

MIT cannot accomplish its core mission without building a diverse community.

How to build a diverse community?

First, it is important to acknowledge some threats to and misunderstandings about diversity.

No group or community can be perfectly representative of its larger community or the world, and the achievement of such representativeness is an unreasonable goal. Building a diverse community cannot be based solely by focusing on numbers and representation.

Embedded in human communities at all levels are forms of discrimination. The discrimination may be interpersonal or structural, intentional or unintentional, internalized or institutionalized; but all with the effect of conferring unwarranted disadvantages to some, and unearned privileges to others. Building a diverse community does not include repeating the discrimination embedded in other communities.

In academia, as in many realms, progress and conflict can be inseparable. This fact does not mean all conflict is good or productive. Conflict that results in the degradation of people, as individuals or as groups, creates barriers to progress. Divisive and discriminatory actions or outcomes are examples of this kind of counter-productive conflict. Building a diverse community must include continual active confrontation of discrimination and degradation.

To build a diverse community, we must commit not merely to working towards the eradication of discrimination within our community, but also to the demonstration of its harm to society in wasted human potential.

To do this, the GSC Task Force on Diversity recommends that the MIT community:

- In recruiting, actively seek applications from traditionally neglected populations;
- In making admissions (and hiring) decisions, recognize the promise of high-potential as well as high-achievement;
- In training and educating, ensure that all members of the community have the resources and opportunity to succeed;
- In mentoring and advising, ensure that individualized needs are being met;
- In cultivating the campus climate, promote tolerance, foster open communication, critically reflect on community norms and practices, challenge discrimination, seize upon learning opportunities and teachable moments on diversity-related concerns, and celebrate diversity;
- In producing graduates, formalize the normally informal lessons of the discipline, advocate for our students in the job market, and possibly review norms of non-internal hiring;
- In reaching out beyond our community, promote research products that inform other communities how to pursue diversity, produce guidelines for the development of future MIT community members, and publicly share our successes and critique our shortcomings in our pursuit of diversity.

Celebrating diversity means recognizing that a campus and community that pursues diversity is vibrant and productive, with benefits accruing to all community members.

Links

- [College-Bound Students Often Skip Race Question \(Washington Post, June 1, 2003\)](#)
- [Thin Ice: "Stereotype Threat" and Black College Students \(The Atlantic Monthly, August 1999\)](#)
- [Information on Admissions Lawsuits at The University of Michigan](#)
- [Information on Focus Groups from the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice](#)
- [Information on Focus Groups from The University of Minnesota](#)

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