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MIT's Missing Ticket to Diversity

I applaud the Institute's unmistakable confession, in the wake of Professor Sherley's 12-day protest about racism at MIT, of its constitutional responsibility for ensuring that "all members of its diverse community feel welcome and respected" and that "[MIT's] grievance processes are comprehensive, fair and timely" (C.-S. Poon, *The Tech*, Feb 27, 2007). At the same time, I am disheartened by the Institute's seeming about-face on this critical issue once out of the limelight, as reflected in MIT's subsequent off-the-record contention that the grievance process has worked well in Professor Sherley's case (M. DeGraff, *The Tech*, Feb 27, 2007). It is impossible to look the other way and insist that the grievance processes ain't broke after openly vowing to fix them, without offering a true and honest response to all of Professor Sherley's discrimination allegations as documented in the Chomsky et al. letter (*The Tech*, Feb 6, 2007). One simply can't have it both ways.

In 1994, the MIT Faculty Policy Committee's Subcommittee on Grievances asserted fatefully that "there are opportunities to improve MIT's grievance procedures, but there is no need for complete restructure or redesign as the basic mechanisms [ad hoc committee system] in place are well suited to the MIT culture and environment" (<http://web.mit.edu/annualreports/pres95/15.01.html>). And what about the "MIT culture and environment" back then? Not surprisingly, they were those that predated MIT's 1999 concession of gender bias against its tenured female professors. Such an antediluvian ad hoc grievance committee system, which is completely at the disposal of the Administration, is expedient to such discriminatory culture and environment as dictated by the tyranny of the majority, the powerful and the old-boy networked, the well-favored and the obsequious, at the expense of the oppressed. It conveniently serves to sustain a sub-meritocratic system that polarizes the mainstream and the minority, the insiders and the outs, the haves and the have-nots.

Ironically, the Institute has indeed in place a highly elaborate disciplinary system to adjudicate grievances and allegations of misconduct against MIT students. The Committee on Discipline, a Standing Committee of the Faculty, is comprised of a group of elected members of the faculty, academic deans, undergraduate and graduate student representatives, and *ex officio* members operating under a set of detailed rules and regulations with built-in checks and balances. There is no reason why the Institute should hold its own faculty and administrative members' accountability to a lesser standard.

The recent celebrated change at the helm of Harvard University giving them their first woman president should serve as a wake-up call to all of us that a true commitment to diversity calls for the Administration's willingness to uphold accountability at all levels of its governance, including the highest office. For after all, the buck stops there.

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