

# Emilie F. Slaby

## Statement for President of the MIT Graduate Student Council

It is a great honor for me to accept my nomination as Graduate Student Council President for the term 2005-2006.

I joined the Graduate Student Council in 2003 to gain a fuller understanding and appreciation in MIT at an Institute level, and specifically how graduate students as a community can contribute to shaping the Institute's direction. I first engaged in the GSC as the WHOI Joint Program representative, and helped bridge the geographical divide for students between the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and MIT. My subsequent roles on the Student Advisory Group to the Corporation Committee on the Presidency, the Student Advisory Board to MIT's 16<sup>th</sup> President, the Campus Dining Advisory Board, and finally as GSN Editor-in-Chief this past year have greatly enhanced my holistic understanding of MIT and how widespread are the concentrations of energy and excellence within this Institute, particularly at the graduate student level.

The opposite view of such pockets of excellence and energy is a type of isolating focus. There are many well-tuned pathways which funnel students towards individual, narrow expertise. Yet is apparent that no one owns the commons at MIT, and consequently it is difficult for students to form a sense of commons and where they fit into the mission of the Institute. By its definition, the Graduate Student Council should be just that vessel for all graduate students on campus. We advocate that we are the graduate student commons, but this perception is not as widespread as it should be among the student body, or at times even within this Council. Thus there is work to be done in making the Council more transparent and accountable to its constituencies. But to truly be known as the commons of graduate student existence at MIT, we must work on our connectivity.

The triumvirate of transparency, accountability, and connectivity have been invoked by many past leaders of the GSC, but they are no less critical in our current stage. These three concepts permeate the GSC from the level of the individual representative to the level of Council interactions with other constituencies on campus.

We are now presented with an Institute leader in President Susan Hockfield who is disquieted by a general lack of commons at the Institute, and moreover who is open to engaging counsel from her graduate students. Indeed, Hockfield stated in the December GSN, "graduate students often don't feel part of the core mission of their university, and that is a fantastic mistake. Graduate student education and research are at the heart of the university." In the past several years, the GSC has built up a network of strong relationships with the Administration and much of the faculty and staff. The infrastructure is in place for the GSC to now engage at a new level in Institute decision-making. This will not be simple or straightforward; it will require the GSC as an organization to bring itself up to the next level.

Before us lies a critical opportunity to participate in shaping and expanding a sense of Institute Commons at MIT. This will require us to engage not only with administrators, faculty, and staff but also post-docs and undergraduate students. In the following page, I summarize advocacy areas in which I feel that the GSC must be watchful and proactive in the coming year. Some of these items are internal to the Council, but many more of them deal with our connectivity across campus. By no means are these brief summaries the totality of what the GSC can accomplish in the next year, nor should it preclude further shaping by individuals or the Council as a whole. I encourage every member of the Graduate Student Council to discuss with me personally your concerns, your views, and your

situations. I feel consultation within the Council is invaluable important to the GSC moving forward together. I look forward to working with each of you over the coming year.

Sincerely,

Emilie F. Slaby

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## Themes, Advocacy, and the Coming Year of the GSC

### **Transparency:**

What hinders our transparency is the sharing and dissemination of information, and this hindrance is apparent at all levels of the Council's functioning. If I am elected, I will work with the team of officers to facilitate the open exchange of public information between all levels of the Council: officers, standing committee heads, representatives, and their constituencies. This open exchange will increase the empowerment of standing committees of the GSC to address advocacy items.

For example, next year I feel that the GSC must focus specifically on long term campus planning. It was demonstrated in the March GCM that we as graduate students not only have a stake in campus planning, we have a responsibility to address plans which affect our physical community. Plans are in motion for building the next campus dormitory, and Reconstruction of Massachusetts Avenue along the Cambridge corridor to campus is only one example of the changing face of our Institute. If I am elected, I will continue GSC's strong presence in the decision-making process for both internal decisions like the type of dorm to be built as well as critical external decisions involving MIT's campus. As campus planning is integral to the Housing and Community Affairs Committee, it will be vital that HCA rallies around this cause and engages students on all levels of this initiative.

### **Accountability:**

Representatives are the critical link by which the GSC is accountable to the graduate student body as a whole. They are valuable conduits of information between the general council and individual constituencies. If elected, I will work to have the entire Council hear the concerns and views of individual constituencies more frequently. I will also work to strengthen the return system by which Council discussions and decisions are conveyed to the interested students of each constituency.

Two examples of where increased accountability will really make a difference in GSC functioning are continuing the advising initiative from this year and diversity.

This year the GSC through its Town Hall Meeting was instrumental in heightening awareness of examples of best practices across campus. If I am elected, I will coordinate a push towards Institute-wide implementation of best practices like Peer-to-Peer Advising. Implementation will require a coalition of all necessary Institute resources – most crucially departmental representatives, the Academic, Research, and Careers Committee and the Graduate Students Office -- to bring these best practices from the Departmental level to the Institutional level.

A holistic definition of diversity on campus is constantly evolving in reaction to subtle pressures from within as certain ethnic groups organize and to public statements made by our peer Universities. If I am elected, I will help guide the GSC in deciding upon a conscious, deliberate, inclusive definition of Diversity which will involve a coordinated effort by all representatives, and will require that we use our representatives. I will also work to incorporate and celebrate threads of Diversity in all of our initiatives

from Orientation forward in the graduate student experience. Diversity awareness will be especially critical to the Orientation Committee as they will set the tone for incoming students with regards to how the GSC celebrates the diversity of all graduate students on campus.

**Connectivity:**

Connectivity is defined by the strength of our relationships both within the council and between the Council and other players on MIT's campus. If elected, I will encourage currently and historically under-represented groups on campus to fill their representative seats. Further, I will encourage new collaborations and exchange of information between the Undergraduate Association, the Postdocs, and the GSC. The Presidential Student Advisory Board is an excellent initial example of how well undergraduate and graduate students can collaborate towards the betterment of both groups and the entire institute. I look forward to strengthening and facilitating similar future unions in the coming year.

Additionally, we must focus deliberately on the theme of inclusion. For students to truly perceive the GSC as a graduate student commons, we must extend welcoming invitations to the graduate student community to encourage fuller participation of students in our efforts and of GSC support in theirs. If I am elected, I will encourage the GSC to network with other student organizations on campus on both social and academic/professional matters.

While inclusion is a common thread to all parts of the GSC, many times the Activities Committee and the Graduate Student News serve as our outside face shaping student perception of the GSC. As the Graduate Student News continues to expand its coverage of the greater graduate student body and the Activities Committee reaches out to develop new social networks between students, their attention to the theme of inclusion will be fundamental to their efforts and those of the Council as a whole.