

In attendance: Jennifer Liu, Will Steadman, Allan Miramonti, Tyshaun Wynter, Rachel Meyer, Daniel Hawkins, David Chang, Janet Li, Betsy Riley, Christine Chen, Amanda David, Tatiana Mamaliga, Alexandria Hall, Leonid Grinberg, Ben Shaibu, Patrick Hulin, Anika Gupta, Laura Royden, Jessica Yang

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

1. Open Forum

Allan: This is the first exec meeting in a while; last time, there was an institute holiday. I'll start with an open forum and we can end with one, too. Anyone have opinions?

Anika: Just an announcement that 39 boxes of sweatpants will be here in the office until Wednesday night.

David: You're telling us this so we don't take them, right?

Will: And if someone asks us, we can tell them.

Allan: I'll make a belated announcement. Tomorrow, there will be sweatpants for sale for \$5.

Christine: Fall Festival was sold out earlier this afternoon. If you didn't buy a ticket, too bad.

Allan: We sold out. That's impressive!

Christine: It was even more impressive because we had only sold 900 by Friday afternoon.

Besty: How many tickets total?

Christine: 1200.

David: Is that a standard thing each year? Do we typically sell out?

Christine: It's a matter of how quickly it sells out. Russell Peters sold out quickly. BJ Novak did not sell out until two days before. Last year wasn't even close. So this is really good.

David: So I can rank the awesomeness of each person based on the sales?

Betsy: Or perceived awesomeness.

Christine: I also don't have to do any more publicity until Friday.

Anika: The fact that it's conflicting with Spooky Skate: how does that work?

Christine: It sold out anyway.

Allan: Congratulations. Any more open forum stuff?

2. Deliverables

Allan: Ok so here's a topic from my whiteboard, which was not on the agenda. Deliverables. This is sort of unprepared for you guys, but whatever. Are any of your committees close to a deliverable now, something they could show off?

Rachel: What type of thing?

Allan: Close to getting something done?

Hawkins: Dropbox.

Anika: What is that? A UA dropbox?

Hawkins: That's what we're working on. You will all need to acquaint yourselves with dropbox because hopefully you'll be using it to share things with the UA in general.

Allan: That's good. Is Catherine here? She's close to getting a facelift for vote.mit.edu done. It's not mechanical; the system is still screwy, but it's prettier.

TyShaun: It's nothing over-the-top fancy; it's just much cleaner and more professional.

David: It looks like myspace, right?

Patrick: So it went from geocities to myspace.

Will: Web 1.5.

TyShaun: This weekend or next, she says she'll have it done.

Allan: TyShaun and I are creating a list of things we want to prioritize. We want to say the UA has done very distinct things, so we want to create a priority list. You'll be meeting with TyShaun, so you can tell him what has happened.

3. Advising

Allan: Moving on to advising, which came up on CJAC. It is something that is being worked on by UAAP, something that Sam Allen and Tim Grove (the chair of CUP) is concerned with, so it is something I'm concerned with.

Betsy: Why are they concerned?

Will: Because it sucked.

Betsy: Can you be more specific?

Allan: With looking at student satisfaction surveys, the percentage of freshmen and other upperclassmen who are concerned with advising is greater than for other things.

Betsy: Is that important though? I do remember saying I didn't like advising on the survey, because I'm not close to my advisors, but maybe I don't need that with faculty. Maybe the solution is killing it. Is it that students' needs are already being met by non-advising, or is it that the advising model itself is messy? I mean, I'm not actually advocating for advising to be killed. I'm assuming that advising is a good idea.

Jessica: Are we talking about freshman advising in particular?

Allan: Yes, for CJAC. It is pretty distinct from normal advising. Let's start with freshman advising for now.

Jessica: Speaking as a freshman—I'm the 2015 class president—I met with my advisor four times since I got here.

David: Wow, well done!

Jess: My advisor's pretty cool. I have talked with my advisor about everything from what I think of my roommates to what I want to be someday.

Betsy: What kind of advising do you do?

Jessica: Traditional.

Patrick: Where do you live?

Jessica: Baker.

Anika: And who's your advisor?

Jessica: Tony Eng.

David: Ah, so that's why.

Jessica: So apparently each advisor gets a certain budget to do stuff with. He's taken us out to fro-yo and dinner. We've gotten to meet the other traditional advisees and have decent conversations. What if there's more rigid suggestions for what advisors can do with freshmen? To do this by which day, do another thing by which day. Maybe they don't know what to do and get too busy to meet up with students.

Christine: Do you have associate advisors?

Jessica: I have two, and have not seen one of them. The other two advisees and I mostly talk to the advisor though. I think if there's a recommended thing that the advisors can do with the students, they'll actually see the students instead of just sign forms.

Christine: I think you can recommend all you want but only some will follow them.

Tatiana: Advising is very important, especially for freshmen who don't know what's going on, who are not used to the MIT workload, and they really need that support with classes. I'm confused with what you're trying to get out right now.

Allan: How you guys, student leaders, feel about student advising, and if the UA should broaden our engagement on the topic. CJAC is currently working on it so I'm working on it too, but not through the UA proper yet. This is mostly to gauge your opinion. If something's wrong, what is it?

Anika: I think it's luck of the draw with who you get.

David: It's also luck of the draw for you yourself. There are two aspects: form signing and then what you actually want, which is a relationship between you and a professor, and how you build that relationship. We use form-signing to force you now. Is that the wrong way? Should we use some other way to hook you to hanging out with your advisor? What works? What incentives work? There are faculty who aren't the best at approaching students and students who aren't good at approaching faculty. Like at Yale and other places, after class, students will go up to professors and ask questions. It might be something about MIT culture, but relationships between students and faculty are harder to come by.

Leonid: I'm playing the devil's advocate. Part of the problem can be that it's not clear what the goal is. Is it to be friends with your advisor or just to make sure that you're on track to graduate? Those are different goals and I think the system is much better at one than the other. We should figure out what we want first from advising. Like, my advisor signs my forms... but he's not someone I would want to come to for any other kind of advice.

Allan: So how you're describing that seems binary. But I don't think it's a binary thing. For instance, I'm personally fine with the form-signing relationship that I have. But there are freshmen who are more interested, maybe.

Betsy: Maybe the solution is to not fit every freshman into the same model. As a freshman, I found most advice through my living community and with alums. Things that they're interested in doing, I'm also interested in doing. There are things I can't talk to my math professor about. So maybe there could be group of faculty who you could go to about advice, and not even be assigned to one exactly, and they just want to chill with students. We could have them as a resource. But not necessarily force everyone into it.

Christine: Has anyone else done RBA?

TyShaun: Yeah.

Alex: Yep.

Christine: I like RBA but I was also in a seminar, so I saw my advisor at my seminar every week and knew how I could find them to talk to them. It's different in every dorm. There is more interaction in

RBA between advisors and advisees, because if advisors want to be involved, they do RBA and they're more involved in dorm life as well.

Tatiana: Is there a way to have a rating system where the freshmen rate their advisor several times throughout the semester?

Will: What would be the point of that?

Tatiana: So advisors could change their attitude.

Will: So is it meant for feedback for the advisor, or is it a central rating system for all students to see? Is the purpose for the advisor or for someone else to look at and see general satisfaction?

Tatiana: I think advisors usually want to interact with students, because that's why they do that. But maybe even just for personal evaluation.

Jenn: Hi, I'm Jenn, I'm the Vice Chair of Sustainability. I was wondering if it was possible if a professor wants to be an advisor, to establish how much time they want to dedicate to that, and then when students pick over the summer, they can select how much they expect from their advisor?

David: So like, here's a guy who's good at form signing, and someone who doesn't know classes as well... like Mario Kart where you choose your car for doing certain things.

Jenn: Also, I think associate advisors fill the role of what I expected from my advisor personally. They are upperclassmen with recent experience instead of 30 years ago and can give information about what classes to pick and how to go about being freshmen.

Anika: That's inconsistency, still. I didn't know my associate advisors.

Jenn: Maybe a stricter application process?

Christine: Not enough people want to do it.

Allan: Faculty also aren't really incentivized to do this. So it's hard to say who should do advising.

Will: My father is a freshman advisor. He runs a seminar and has difficulty getting students showing up to classes.

David: They're pass/fail!

Patrick: Actually, they're pass/no record.

Will: People will show up 10 minutes late. Or, he had a student who wanted to do an extracurricular that conflicts with the seminar for the whole semester, and asked if he could still get credit without going. My dad thought it was unreasonable. So, if people go just for form-signing, it's also hard for the advisor to build a relationship with that. I think students have the expectation of form-signing and will look elsewhere for other help.

Hawkins: I think the question of who should do advising is an interesting question. Maybe MIT faculty are not the best people to advise you in personal life or your career choice area. Maybe if you want to go into academia, it would be great.

David: Because every faculty made the same choice for career path.

Allan: My freshman advisor wasn't a faculty or teacher.

Rachel: A lot of people are like that, but only for freshman advising.

Allan: I guess we talked a lot about freshman advising.

Betsy: It would be interesting to see if students are ok with the amount of advice they're getting, not just from advising. If they're getting advice already from other sources, it might be fine.

Allan: Sounds like a fall survey question.

Anika: If they find that they get advice from upperclassmen, then the asking thing for 2014s could be an institute-wide thing.

David: How much traffic do you get on that?

Anika: Not sure, actually.

David: I got one question, which was cool.

Anika: It's pretty sparse; everyone may not know about it.

Allan: What is this again exactly?

David: It's like the alum connection. The 2014s set up a site for 2013s and 2012s to list themselves, and say, "I'm in this major and have done these extracurriculars." I actually use it to find people too, in what classes they're in and stuff.

Tatiana: Where is it?

Aniak: It's on the 2014 website. classof2014.mit.edu.

Tatiana: And only students have access?

Anika: Yeah, all students. It's certificate-based.

4. Affinity Groups

Allan: Ok, we're shifting gears now. Students tend to self-segregate themselves based on interests. So there's the UA crowd and whatnot. Certain people go to the UA; certain people go to The Tech. Certain people are attracted to certain areas. The UA doesn't really do much with this. The student groups contain people who are generally active and generally interested in things, and they may be a good resource to talk to. Especially on student life issues. If some facet of MIT is not working for them right now, that could be something that we should work out. For instance, SIPB, the Black Students' Union, SWE. I was curious to see if the body had any thoughts about that. It comes at the time when we're restructuring and can incorporate things. So it was suggested that I as president meet with them every few weeks and check in. But we are restructuring now so do we want a formal way to reach out to these people? Does this seem redundant to people, or is there actual value to be gained? How do we go about it if there's value to be gained?

Leonid: So some of the groups in theory have interacted with the UA before, like SIPB. Is there a historical precedent for how we want to reverse it?

Allan: We don't want SIPB to be a UA committee. They probably left because of size or something.

Leonid: So with interactions with groups, what are you worried about?

Allan: If SIPB was a UA committee... that's different. We want to see what their view is exactly, renovating wired connections in dorms or how their interaction with IS&T is... since it's a board of active minded students.

Anika: So I'm really involved with SWE. Anything we need, we know how to get. The focus should be more about groups that are just forming. If you want to focus on anything, like Finboard changes that are happening, those affect the groups that are newer. They are struggling more and will have more problems.

Will: But they could be a resource for the UA, like we could talk to SIPB because they have experience with technology.

Allan: Like if we were tackling women's issues, we would want SWE on board with what we do.

Will: Yes. Right now, it's just an informal approach, just talking to people.

Alan: So with the Technology Committee, that's what happened with SIPB, like, "Yo dog, you should be on the committee."

Tatiana: So do we want to establish recommendations with those groups or check in on them and see how they're doing? My concern would be they might feel that the UA is being too heavy handed over them.

Allan: It would be more about seeking their advice. I do see that it might be perceived strangely.

Tatiana: If we had events in common, once a month we could invite groups to have dinner with us, something like that... you're against parties, but...

Betsy: I'm a little apprehensive about creating more positions that will fizzle out. It doesn't make the UA look good. Like, when have we ever dealt with women's issues? It's probably fine dealing with it on a case-by-case basis. People are willing to give feedback ad-hoc.

Allan: I don't think I would want to create another position unless we got rid of certain positions; that's a different topic. You're right that we don't work on women's issues often. But it would be an organized group of students that are not UA students.

Will: They're interested in the group because they're interested in how MIT operates.

Allan: It's not us stagnating UA opinions, it's getting other, new opinions.

Betsy: It's like Congress or something.

Will: But instead of asking Senate what they're concerned about, it would be asking SWE or something.

Betsy: I still think it would be better to deal with it when it comes up

Allan: So if the UA president chose to go to groups informally... it would be making it so that the UA president has the prerogative

Betsy: Or yeah, the president could just email the head of SWE if there's an issue on women.

Anika: I think groups do that anyway.

Janet: I thought it was more about figuring out what the issue is itself. Like, before we even know something is an issue, and reach out to people to learn how they feel. It's about them bringing the issues to us.

Allan: The Chancellor also did a summit this year with the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, the Black Students Union, ROTC people. So there is a different take than just grabbing UA people and putting them in a room. And with SWE, it would be a specific case, and using them for the pulse of what's going on.

Will: Rachel, as ASA president, how do you feel?

Rachel: So there are three ways in which this already happens and exempts a formal structure. So related to their existence or needs as student groups, ASA or funding boards handle it, administratively and advocacy-wise. If it's when a particular group legitimately has the ability to represent an interest pool that's not already presented, we deal with it case-by-case. It's usually not though, and we could have a UA committee on the topic already or forum on the issue. Instead of going to a group that isn't representing the entire population, although it is doing a large part of it.

Allan: So for the first part, we definitely wouldn't want to encroach on that. You recognize the UA but the UA charges you.

Rachel: We allocate your existence.

Allan: We recognize your existence.

Tatiana: Can you clarify again?

Rachel: So I'll use an example of one of my groups. Like going to the Concert Band because those are people interested in music, that would be poor representation... like talking to them about practice groups. It would be the wrong answer because they're not representative of all people who use practice rooms. It would make much more sense to send out an email saying, "We're considering this and that about practice rooms; if you're interested, submit comments on this forum," or something. While groups may contain a large percent of a population related to an issue, it doesn't mean they represent the students as a whole.

Tatiana: So like, SWE wouldn't be knowledgeable about women's issues?

Rachel: I think they are, but they're not representative of women as a whole. It would be unfair to women not on it to only take their opinion. Establishing a formal structure where they're the only representatives on an issue would not be great.

Will: I think she's saying that just because there's a student group on a topic, we shouldn't assume they're the representative opinion of students on that topic. Like, SIPB is knowledgeable about technology, but for things like how Athena is, SIPB probably has a very different opinion than the rest of students.

Allan: So the point was for broad-based interests, not the Concert Band talking about practice rooms.

Rachel: I know, that was just an example. How is this different from just talking to students?

David: So I've been thinking about this with institute reps. They're usually interested, they apply, I think they're a good group to go to on a broader base because they're students who care. You're trying to use student groups as proxy for students who care. Maybe it would be easier to use institute reps first.

Tatiana: But aren't they also people siding with the UA?

Allan: Well I was thinking more with incidental cases, like if we were working on women's issues, they would be useful to talk to as an aside. So I think that gives me some direction.

We have 20 minutes left. Do we want to do advising or is there some other issue people want to bring up?

Janet: Restructuring?

5. Restructuring

Allan: Ah, right. The state of restructuring. We met with more stakeholders, I forget the timeline relative to the last Senate meeting. Generally the only people who have had concerns have concerns about us reaching out to the broader student base, which is something we're doing. My current plan in talking to people is a multi-faceted thing. I plan to strongly encourage Senators to do constituency events as one avenue. Another avenue that's not the main one is posting all the documentation on the website, sending an email to undergrads and introducing the topic and saying you can provide feedback to this website. Those are things we'll do no matter what. Third is focus groups, which is the big thrust. I'm figuring out how to coordinate this, but am looking at three or so 10-20 member groups of randomly chosen students. I'm going to IR, and then have Tom Kochan send out invitations to lure people as a noted professor. And the focus groups would spend an hour or hour and a half getting introduced to the UA's current structure, why we exist, getting into the proposal, and then getting feedback if the proposal would meet students' needs for their student government. In addition, maybe or maybe not for how useful it would be, we could have a small randomized survey. Like if it's your birthday, "Happy birthday! Here's a survey."

David: That's a terrible gift!

Allan: Hastings, John Reed (the chair of CJAC) are on board; I'm meeting with Grimson next Monday. Colombo's criticisms were what I mentioned. The housemasters share Dean Colombo's concerns about

student input. They were also concerned about overtaxing dorm presidents. Last Thursday, we presented to DormCon, and it was a successful meeting. I talked to The Tech last night; they gave valuable input. I'm probably forgetting a few groups. Hockfield will meet with us on this topic. It looks positive. So I'm continuing getting feedback, and next week we'll start drafting documents for the actual constitution or something.

Rachel: It will be a cartoon!

Allan: This is what's happening now. How do people feel now? I know last year there was a big push, and a lot of support from exec. Are people concerned or happy with the process?

Betsy: I'm so burned out from last semester. I'm happy but really burned out. I still support it but I have just talked a lot about restructuring.

Allan: I just haven't asked this body yet this year. I did last year, but there were very different people in the room. By mid November, the document should be done. I'm also working with DormCon, IFC, LGC, Panhel, and off campus: people that will make up the new council, to get the docs to where they should be. I'm meeting with the IFC right after this.

Will: I have a question. How will committees recruit new people? Currently Senators are the major recruitment source.

Allan: That's a good observation. If we replace the Senate with the Council, we don't have to focus on recruiting Senators.

Rachel: Instead of spending time recruiting for Senators, we could recruit for committee members.

Allan: It frees up resources.

Betsy: This may be more pertinent later, but with running dining, I'm tapping into already elected dining chairs from dorms and informally creating my committee out of those. These are people who already care about dining and representing students. So for alumni, too... and housing can use REX chairs... using existing positions to form committees.

Tatiana: I'm new to restructuring. Is there a description of all the new things that will be done?

Allan: It was sent to ua-senate.

Will: I can send it to you, too.

Allan: It does a pretty good job explaining everything.

Tatiana: And you're drafting constitutions for which bodies?

Allan: It's the UA constitution. You could argue that DormCon, IFC, and Panhel are under the UA, so we're not redoing their constitutions. But Senate, officers, committee chairs, and Exec are all under our constitution.

Tatiana: I have a proposition and am not sure if it's related to restructuring. But there's been an issue, at least on my committee, that we've been losing stuff that's been done in the past. So if there's a way to require all committees to give in all information they put into their projects in their position... I feel like in any official office, you are required to keep records. Like in lab and my UROP and stuff, I have a lab notebook. I'm required to have records of everything. So that's part of the lab. I feel like at least with my committee, that's been an issue.

Allan: That's a good point, transitioning. We would need a box to drop things in. Dropbox could be used as a means for an easy way for people to put files into the system, and then have them forever be a part of the UA's knowledge base.

Tatiana: I'm more concerned with actually requiring people to do that.

Allan: That's what we've struggled with for a long time. We've been trying to find ways to adopt this. There are a few things that have been suggested to me. You guys can comment on their validity. We could have a continuous document where every outgoing person leaves knowledge and passes it on... a rolling, living document. Another suggestion from a recent stakeholder was the idea of having most of the UA's elections per calendar year, and having IAP to transition people in. Because people are less hosed over IAP. You're not the only person with transitional issues. What would the body think of that? Elections in December?

Rachel: Committee chairs, or anything?

Will: You would lose interested freshmen.

Rachel: No, they would be committee chairs... could become other positions.

Tatiana: I do think people change their minds. If you lose people over the summer, if it takes two months to get people, then you only have a month left to do things.

Allan: So you think halfway through your term, half of the committee would leave?

Betsy: But you leave yourself, too.

Will: No, we're saying that over the summer, committee members might leave the committee.

Betsy: Oh, never mind. I got confused.

David: The benefit is that the old chair is around for three months to help the new chair.

Tatiana: But for committees, things will not get done, if no members are there.

Allan: I'm confused about why things won't get done.

Will: She's more worried about the committee members leaving, not the chairs.

David: So how about compared to your transition right now?

Betsy: The summer will be a huge sin; if the committee chair leaves, too, then the whole committee would die over the summer.

Alex: I'm also a committee chair. I would say that at the beginning of the year, I was not transitioned at all and my committee was really small. If we did January, even if I lost committee members over the summer, at least I would still know what I was doing, and be able to just focus on recruiting members and doing things versus having to do both things—transition and get people—at the same time right at the beginning.

Leonid: DormCon is trying to standardize all elections to happen over the calendar year and transition over IAP. In EC, a lot of these same things were brought up. I agree with Alex that transitions are more important than the retention of members.

Allan: So it's 7:56 so we're ending.

6. Open Forum

Alex: Quick announcement: I sent out a pretty detailed email with how exactly to do reimbursements. Please read it. It was very detailed and I don't think I left anything out. If you mess up, I won't forgive you.

Will: You should put it in the dropbox. If you have anything for Senate, email me.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 pm.