

# MIT Faculty Newsletter

Vol. XX No. 5  
May / June 2008

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## Initiative on Faculty Race and Diversity: Research Team and Effort Launched

[Paula Hammond](#)

**The Initiative on Faculty Race and Diversity** has been very active over the past academic year. This effort seeks to investigate the experiences of minority faculty at MIT and identify issues inherent to MIT and to the academic community that impact faculty recruitment, development, and retention. It will generate a set of recommendations that address core issues dealing with equity and diversity amongst the faculty. This process will take place in stages, beginning with a planning stage, followed by an extensive qualitative and quantitative study of minority faculty in all five Schools, the development of recommendations and solutions, and the implementation of those recommendations. After creating the initial general outline last summer for the major undertaking of the research, the fall term was spent addressing the details of the study.

Discussions of the Initiative's efforts took place at an Institute faculty meeting and at several Minority Faculty Caucus meetings during this time, including discussion of the means and methods used to understand the minority faculty experience at MIT.

**An Advisory Board was selected consisting of a diverse group of professionals with a broad range of experiences in the management of diversity issues in academia, industry, and the public sector.**

The Board includes those who have conducted similar studies at other universities, prominent social and physical scientists and engineers with direct experience with these issues, and those with business experience who can help to inform on matters that have been of similar concern in industry.

A number of Board members have MIT backgrounds as alumni of the Institute, including two current Corporation members who will help to bring the issues and discussion brought out by the Initiative to the Corporation. On the other hand, several members have had no direct experience with MIT, and bring new perspectives from state and private universities and organizations in different regions of the country. This Board acts as an independent advisory body that both interacts directly with the Initiative team and is also able to communicate concerns or address issues directly with the Provost and President. The Advisory Board provides critical advice and insights to the Initiative team with regard to both the study and large-scale efforts of the Initiative.

Questions were developed, discussed, and added to the 2008 Faculty Quality of Life Survey that was administered to the general faculty in January through February. The survey response rate was high – 69% – and the response rate for African American and Hispanic faculty was high as well, at 80% and 61%, respectively. The Initiative research team is currently analyzing the results of the survey,,which will be a critical component of the Initiative's study.

A full research team has been assembled to address the quantitative and qualitative research. The team includes research analyst Dr. Mandy Smith, and two newly hired research fellows, Dr. Siomara Valladares and Dr. Carol Wright. Dr. Valladares and Dr. Wright have come to MIT after an extensive search process, to execute the qualitative aspects of the research effort. These two researchers bring past interview and qualitative research experience in the area of diversity and education at both public and private institutions. Biographies of each of the members of the research team can be found on the Initiative Website, [web.mit.edu/raceinitiative/](http://web.mit.edu/raceinitiative/). The research team has created the protocols necessary for in-depth interviews, and is currently undertaking the first pilots. Interviews of minority faculty will take place during the summer and fall terms.

Five minority faculty forums were held from February through April, with the fifth added to accommodate faculty who had expressed interest, but were unable to attend the other dates. These discussions were very fruitful and illuminating, helping to pinpoint key thematic points among junior and senior faculty, as well as formulating ideas on how to approach some of the barriers in the recruitment and retention of minority faculty. Notes from these forums are being compiled by the Initiative, and will be used to emphasize important areas to address in the recommendations and solutions phase of the study. Some of the ideas will be shared and discussed with the Associate Provosts for Faculty Equity, as well as deans and other administrators, as the Initiative prepares to examine the results from the study and seek solutions that can be implemented most readily. During this process, input will also be sought from the MIT community in faculty meetings, as well as from other caucus groups and administrators on campus during the upcoming academic year.

We welcome comments on any and all aspects of the Initiative.

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