

Paul R. Monasterio
Statement of Purpose for the Graduate Student Council Presidency

I am honored and excited to accept the nomination for the position of president of the MIT Graduate Student Council for 2009-2010. During the past two years I have been actively involved in serving the graduate community, and through my interactions with students, administrators, GSC members and officers I have developed a clear perspective of the multi-faceted role of the GSC and of the institutional infrastructure of MIT. Given my experiences, I am confident that I can successfully lead the Council in the upcoming year and fundamentally strengthen the nature of our initiatives and advocacy efforts.

As Chair for the Academics, Research, and Careers (ARC) Committee during this past year, I have developed a strong understanding of the academic and professional concerns of MIT graduate students, especially under the current economic climate. Within ARC, I was able to develop a cohesive strategy by leveraging our existing projects, such as the Career Fair and Academic Career Series, and combining them with new professionally-oriented events and interdisciplinary resources to improve the opportunities for graduate students and enhance the academic aspect of life at MIT. Our new initiatives such as the Professional Development Panels, Interdisciplinary Lecture Calendar, and Lab Open House have laid a strong foundation for enhancing collaboration between departments and improving the career prospects of graduate students. In addition, our ongoing investigation of graduate mentorship and our advocacy efforts with the staff at the Office for Student Services have created a platform for dramatically improving the essential academic aspect of graduate student lives at MIT. More so, through our Diversity Subcommittee and my former role as President of the Venezuelan Students Association at MIT, I gained an informed perspective on the challenges related to promoting diversity, and contributed to the development of initiatives across the Institute which are fomenting inclusion and the creation of a diverse community.

For the past two years I have served as President of Tang Hall, Chair of the Task Force on Graduate Housing and Residential Life, and as a member of the Housing and Community Affairs Committee. These positions have given me first-hand experience in all aspects of the residential, social, and communal needs of graduate students, as well as the mechanisms and personal connections necessary to effect positive and meaningful change. I have strong relationships with key administrators such as the Dean for Student Life, Chris Colombo, the Dean for Graduate Education, Prof. Steve Lerman, and the staff at the Housing Office and Career Development Center. I plan to continue leveraging those ties to strengthen the GSC's advocacy efforts. In short, I deeply understand and excel at the objective, data-driven approach to advocacy that is at the cornerstone of the GSC, and I possess the skills and connections to engage students and administrators in constructive and focused dialogue when making difficult decisions.

I have also participated in a variety of activities ranging from Intramural Soccer to the MIT Lindy Hop Society to the recently formed Consulting Club at MIT. These have given me a strong understanding of the culture of the Institute and, combined with my varied leadership roles in graduate housing, academic, career, social, and cultural groups, have provided me with a unique set of skills to successfully implement my vision for the GSC.

My vision comprises a variety of specific short- and long-term goals which together follow under the broad umbrella of *laying bridges and strengthening our connections*.

First, the GSC needs to better connect to its main constituency: the graduate student body. I plan to implement a coherent strategy to increase feedback from students and raise awareness of the activities and advocacy efforts of the GSC. In particular, I will enhance communication with students through a more dynamic and cohesive Graduate Student News, a more informative and participative website, and the use of social events as platforms for networking and recruitment. Additionally, GSC representatives will play an essential role in bridging the gap between the GSC and students by sharing particular concerns and issues of their constituencies during the GCM, and regularly interacting with the Officers and Standing Committees to provide targeted alternatives to the centralized advocacy approach in which the GSC currently focuses.

Second, the GSC must continue its efforts in connecting the student voice with the decisions taken by the administration. Through the creation of a Subcommittee on Strategic Advocacy under HCA I will institutionalize a preemptive approach to student engagement rooted in the principles that the GSC has the unique ability to determine the needs of the graduate community and can provide valuable recommendations before said decisions are considered. By developing a culture in which data-supported student input is built into a long term strategy and delivered directly to the higher echelons of Institute leadership, student engagement at the early phases of decision making will become the norm, rather than the exception.

Third, as is the case globally, the GSC will have to connect with the world outside MIT and develop a set of measures to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis on graduate students and the Council. To this end I plan to collaborate closely with the Funding Board, carefully analyze our expenditures, objectively reassess the cost-benefit ratio of all current events and initiatives, and develop a systematic approach to reduce inefficiencies in our budget. Furthermore, advocacy efforts focused on student funding and professional development initiatives will be prioritized to address such concerns.

Lastly, we must lay bridges to the future. Preservation of institutional memory and the recruitment of new members are two issues that have limited the potential of the Council for years. Expanding on one of our initiatives within ARC, I will institute an online knowledge management database that will provide detailed information on best practices, ideas, contacts and the decision making process behind all of the Council's new and ongoing projects. This mechanism will allow for a smooth transition between generations of Executive Committee members and representatives, and additionally will allow the GSC to take advantage of enthusiastic and talented volunteers without the need for a long familiarization process. This tool will be part of a broader scheme focused on the recruitment and leadership development of representatives and graduate students in general.

In addition to my overarching vision for the Council, I have a deep understanding of the President's responsibility to ensure the smooth and efficient functioning of the GSC. I have broad knowledge of the structure of the Council and plan to work closely with all of the Executive Committee members to develop individual and innovative strategies while, at the same time, strengthening our traditional events and current initiatives. Furthermore, my

experiences in presiding over a variety of organizations and committees have honed my managerial and organization skills, thus preparing me to excel in the role of President. I have both the ability and the knowledge to sustain and improve the quality of our efforts, while at the same time successfully implementing a coherent vision.

If elected as GSC President, I intend to continue to lead the Council efficiently and effectively, to realize a vision in which the GSC reconnects with the graduate student body and successfully engages with the administration, to create mechanisms to address the effects of the global economic climate on graduate students, and to develop a sense of common purpose to improve the bonds between generations of graduate student leadership. I once again thank you for considering my candidacy and giving me the opportunity to serve MIT graduate students. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Yours truly,

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