

Alex Hamilton Chan
Statement of Candidacy for Graduate Student Council President

I am both very honored and excited to accept the nomination for GSC President for the 2009-2010 term. I have considered very carefully the responsibilities of the office and I am very determined to serve the GSC as its President. My experiences from advocacy and lobbying to event organization have prepared me with the right skills, mindset, experiences, goodwill and qualities to bring positive change as GSC President. I believe I can bring the GSC to new horizons.

My current involvement with the GSC as Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) Committee co-Chair, Task Force for Housing and Graduate Residential Life co-Chair, and Task Force for Community Engagement Vice Chair among others gives me a broad knowledge of MIT – its institutional structure, its people, and its culture. This involvement has allowed me to learn about how to get things done at MIT and where the opportunities lie. As HCA co-Chair, I learned a lot about the advocacy issues that the GSC addresses (from dental, housing, health, transportation to taxation, families and stipends) and got to know a great deal about the diverse body of students from single to partnered, from on-campus to off-campus. Our great team at the HCA performed its previously existing functions successfully while introducing several innovative projects (e.g. Graduate Vaccination Day at Sidney Pacific). And my participation in other the other committees from organizing the biggest event during orientation (iFest) to initiating collaboration with the other universities in the Greater Boston Area (the First Ever BU-MIT Party and many more to come!) gave me a sense of the broad range of contributions that the GSC can make and its great impact on the MIT graduate student body. I am very proud of what our team has done this year and I am very eager to further contribute to the betterment of this community.

Furthermore, my work with the HCA team has allowed me to interact with a wide set of deans and senior administrators at MIT through our advocacy work. In doing so, I have built a strong relationship with many senior administrators, especially with the Dean of Student Life and the Dean for Graduate Education. More importantly, in my interactions with the administration I have made it very clear to them that I am very adamant about defending graduate student welfare and that I will not let the administration forget about the rights of those whose numbers are few in the graduate community.

My other activities in MIT include co-organizing the International Development Night during spring 2008 and the International Development Fair during fall 2008. Both events featured the most outstanding projects and programs at MIT that tackle global poverty, environmental issues, and other development issues. The latter of these two events was part of the launch of the Campaign for Students (MIT's major fundraising campaign which aims to raise 500 million dollars) as a showcase of great work that demonstrates MIT's social responsibility. I was also involved in international student issues at MIT and I have interacted closely with the amazing staff members at the International Students Office. I am an active member of the international student community and was involved in international student events (e.g. iCruise), the international welcome reception, and

just giving friendly advice to international students. I am a good representative and a strong advocate for the international students (which make up 39.1% of the graduate student body). I am also a director of the Harvard/MIT COOP and I sit on the University Relations Committee which makes decisions on corporate giving and donations from the COOP corporation. This role has already allowed me to help the GSC and other groups secure sponsorship for events. This experience has also given me a familiarity with how corporate sponsorship works, a familiarity which will be useful in helping the GSC secure alternative funding sources.

The following is a list of my goals for the next academic year:

First, like many of my predecessors, I see the benefits of increased student engagement with an emphasis on constructive interactions. It is not just about putting another student in another committee but also about making sure the interactions between the students and the administration will happen in a constructive manner, in which productive outcomes can be achieved. My objective with student engagement is to make sure that more student voices will be heard, not just because we are loud but because of the recognition by the administration that student input has tremendous value. I will fiercely but rationally make sure that the Institute's administrative decisions have sufficient transparency.

Second, in face of the budget cuts across the Institute, I will work to ensure that the current programs and policies that benefit graduate students will not be weakened. Budget cuts are occurring Institute-wide in the foreseeable future, and it is especially important to be vigilant so that the graduate student body will not be adversely affected. The programs and policies that ensure graduate student welfare will not be compromised under my administration; neither will the welfare of any particular group within the graduate student body, be it families, singles, internationals, locals, off-campus, on-campus or any minority group.

Third, as president I will work to strengthen MIT's ties with other universities. I have lobbied on behalf of the GSC in Washington DC and attended graduate student government conferences. Through these venues, I learned about the value of learning from and working with other universities. We initiated the Boston Graduate Leadership Organization (BGLO) which brings all the graduate student leadership in the greater Boston area together. Under my team's leadership, the GSC will continue sharing best practices, co-organizing events and pooling our voices together to advocate for issues that impact graduate students across different universities (e.g. Student Visa issues).

Fourth, the entire team of the Graduate Student Council – the representatives as well as the Executive Committee - will take on a more involved role. Just as we engaged and utilized the amazing human resource of the representatives this year in our work on stipend negotiations, I am similarly prepared to get the representatives more involved in shaping the GSC in its many advocacy initiatives, activities, and general policy positions. Along these lines, making sure that all the Institute Committees are filled by our able representatives will be a high priority for me. These representatives will be directly

involved in decision-making across almost all key issues at MIT. Also, in collaboration with the Vice President, I would strive to provide all the representatives from departmental to off-campus student representatives with the support and information that would allow them to effectively engage their constituencies. This would both empower the representatives to play a more significant role while still creating more opportunities for non-representative students to have their voices heard. An extremely important action item for me as President will be to maintain constant close contact and work closely with all representatives in the Council, as well as representatives on Institute Committees and those on the Budgetary Task Forces.

Finally, a critical responsibility of the President is to make sure that the GSC functions smoothly and efficiently. Our meetings will be run smoothly and efficiently. I will work closely with the committee chairs, GSN editors and the webmaster so that they can all pursue goals that will enhance graduate student life and ensure the well-functioning of the GSC. I also intend to stay involved with the HCA such that my knowledge will be passed down to the incoming committee. Thus, through close interactions, I will ensure the well functioning of the GSC through working closely with the team as a leader and a loyal team member. I will also make sure publicity for the GSC will be well-executed so that all graduate students will be aware of the GSC as resource when they face problems with their graduate experience. In addition, we will have more leadership development programs (in collaboration with the Vice President, and potentially a leadership chair) and enhanced recruitment efforts to make sure that the GSC will get the best leaders in the MIT community. Furthermore, I see the role of the GSC President as both rigorously making sure that the GSC works AND constantly making certain that the GSC will work even better. Thus, the goal regarding dental will not be to just do what my HCA teammates and I had previously accomplished but also to collect data and think hard to help improve services and lobby for a more comprehensive dental plan for graduate students. The goal regarding families issues will not just be making sure that the current families' situation is not deteriorating but also to start taking on the much tougher issues like providing affordable and convenient childcare services. The goal for activities during orientation and throughout the year is not just to make it as good as last year but to make them better and more fun. The goal for sponsorship is not just to get funding again from our current sponsors but also to explore a wider range of fundraising opportunities.

The GSC President should be someone who is willing to stick his neck out for graduate students' welfare. The GSC President should be someone who has confidence and lots of direct experience in using data and other forms of persuasion effectively in advocacy. The president should be someone who is interested and experienced in not just some but every aspect of the GSC, from organizing representatives to work on advocacy and policy, to organizing large scale social events, to organizing and creating new events for orientation. The GSC President should be someone whom every student is comfortable talking to and expressing their opinion with, while still being someone respected by the administration as competent and reliable because of an established track record. I believe I am qualified and ready to be the next President of the GSC.

Even in bad economic times, I promise to not just maintain the level of graduate student life at MIT but to bring it to an entirely different level. I will innovate and create to bring MIT graduate student life to new heights, and I will make the GSC transparent, respected and even stronger as an organization.

I appreciate all the suggestions, advice and support that many of the Council members and other members of the community have given me. I look forward to working with this great team for another year, and hope that together we will bring graduate student life to new heights. I thank you all for your consideration and support of my candidacy. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any suggestions and questions.

Cordially yours,
Alex Hamilton Chan