Advancing a Respectful and Caring Community: Learning by Doing at MIT

Ed Bertschinger
Institute Community and Equity Officer
“One of my goals as president is to cultivate a caring community focused on MIT’s shared values of excellence, meritocracy, openness, integrity and mutual respect.”

L. Rafael Reif
How does this “caring community” relate to graduate students?
Figure 2. Community satisfaction at MIT, by group.


Notes: Percentage of responses “somewhat satisfied”, “generally satisfied”, “satisfied”, “very satisfied” (varies according to survey) to the question asking how satisfied the respondent is being a student/postdoc/employee at MIT. For staff in 2001, the percentage is those who agree or strongly agree with “I am satisfied with my job at MIT.” Over a decade, the overall satisfaction rates increased by 14%, 5%, 19%, 13% for graduating seniors, postdocs, staff, and faculty, respectively, to the current values of 88%, 88%, 90%, and 92%. The satisfaction rate for graduate students in 2012–2013 was 89%. No staff surveys were conducted during the period 2008–2010, and graduate students were not asked about overall satisfaction before 2011.
Impediments to the MIT mission

1. Unconscious bias and micro-inequities
2. Discrimination and harassment
3. Abrasive conduct
4. Sexual assault
5. Excessive stress

These are not specific to any subgroup. They impact all groups, some more than others.
Impediments to your success

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ICEO Mission

The ICEO Mission is to advance a respectful and caring community that embraces diversity and empowers everyone to learn and do their best at MIT.
How can the ICEO help the GSC?

1. Talk with faculty, department by department
2. Organize community conversations about MIT values and aspirations
3. Advance community goals with Grad Community Fellows
4. Committee on Race and Diversity
5. Support efforts to improve work/life balance
6. Diversity Summit and other collaborative events
Talk with faculty, department by department

Organize faculty discussions about graduate student concerns, promote Best Practices in Graduate Student Advising

**Example:** AeroAstro faculty lunch June 3, 2015 – with input from GA^3 (Grad. Assoc. of AeroAstro)

**Concerns GA^3 has raised with me:**

1. Pace and pressure
2. Mental health and wellness
3. Setting clear expectations
Organize community conversations about MIT values and aspirations

What are our values?
What do we aspire to as a community?
What do we expect of each other as community members?

Let’s talk about it!

in Dorms, Labs, Departments
Recommendation C1: MIT Compact

Assemble a representative working group to write a brief statement of what we aspire to as a community and what we expect of each other as MIT community members.

1. Convene a highly diverse community-wide Task Force on the MIT Compact representing all groups in the MIT community.
2. This will be the first time such a broad group has ever been established at MIT.
3. Charge it to write a ≤300-word statement considering core values, community aspirations, and norms.
4. Gather input from all stakeholders
5. Ratification process: President, Corporation Chair.
6. The process is as important as the outcome
Bystander Intervention Video Competition

Launch a campaign to educate all community members in the use of bystander interventions to advance a respectful and caring community. Develop a set of video skits illustrating effective methods of speaking up to prevent harm.

1. Teams of students, staff, postdocs and/or faculty, across all Departments, Labs, and Centers, submit YouTube skits, with winning entries posted monthly at diversity.mit.edu and winners receiving prizes.

2. See http://diversity.mit.edu/bystander-videos/ for examples
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How the GSC can help the ICEO

Appoint a graduate student to join a design/plan team for the MIT Compact

Be available to meet several hours/month, August-December