The accomplishments of the Graduate Student Council during the 2017-2018 session can be broadly broken down into the themes of 1) advocacy, 2) improving quality of life, and 3) professional development. Every achievement of the GSC has been a team effort - none of this work would have been possible without the dedication of our Executive Committee members, Council members, and countless volunteers and contributors who helped to make our initiatives and events successful.

Key Accomplishments

Advocacy
- Graduate Student Housing
  - The GSC conducted a preliminary survey of graduate student housing needs and worked with the Office of the Chancellor and Office of the Vice Chancellor to establish the Graduate Housing Working Group, which met extensively throughout the 2017-2018 academic year.
  - The Working Group administered and analyzed the results of a conjoint survey, which refined the results of the preliminary survey and assessed the importance of factors such as cost, location, and amenities to current graduate students.
  - The Working Group secured a commitment from MIT’s administration to build a new graduate residence hall with at least 500 beds and to apply for a building permit by the end of 2020. Additionally, 200 graduate beds will be added to the current stock by converting existing beds or establishing new beds on MIT’s existing dorms. These commitments were made in conjunction with MIT’s Volpe zoning petition.
- Cost of living assessment and stipend recommendation
  - The GSC administered a cost of living survey to graduate students and worked with faculty members on the Stipend Recommendation Working group to secure a 3% stipend increase for graduate students in the upcoming year.
  - This year’s cost of living analysis highlighted inequity between departments, including departments that offer only half-stipends. Together with the Office of the Chancellor and Office of the Vice Chancellor, we began the process of understanding how we can work towards stipend equity for next year’s stipend recommendation, instead of simply raising every department’s stipend by the same amount.
- Tax Cuts and Jobs Act
  - The GSC advocated against the repeal of Qualified Tuition Reduction in section 1204 of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. We held two phone banks, making over 300 calls that reached over 100 offices.
  - The GSC interviewed with NPR, WGBH, Bloomberg, and Time magazine about the impact this provision would have on graduate students.
  - Four graduate students traveled to DC to meet with legislative offices about the impact of this provision on graduate students.
- Other external advocacy
  - The GSC External Affairs Board ran two additional trips to DC to meet with legislative offices about topics relevant to graduate students including sexual misconduct on college campuses, protecting our DACA students, graduate student finances, and the importance of federal research funding.
At the state level, the GSC helped organize a rally at the Statehouse in support of two bills addressing sexual misconduct on college campuses. The GSC External Affairs Board also ran two visits to the Statehouse to discuss topics related to graduate student life, including bicycle and transportation safety.

Quality of Life

- **On-demand shuttles**
  - The GSC and the Undergraduate Association worked with the MIT Government and Community Relations Office and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to establish an on-demand shuttle system that encompasses a wider range of off-campus locations.

- **Diversity and Inclusion**
  - The Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee (DIS) of the Housing and Community Affairs committee was new this year. DIS established a system of conduits in each department who meet regularly to discuss diversity and inclusion issues across the Institute.
  - The Future of Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, consisting of graduate students within and outside the GSC, developed a proposal to enact necessary changes for the GSC to support sustained engagement on diversity and inclusion issues for years to come. The recommendations fell under five main themes: 1) create a standing Committee or Board for diversity programs and initiatives, 2) create a Community Values Platform and statements, 3) improve representation on the GSC, 4) amplify underrepresented voices in/through GSC advocacy, and 5) strengthen GSC practices for promoting diversity and inclusion.

- **Student funding reorganization**
  - The GSC worked with the Division of Student Life and the Student Funding Working Group (including the UA, Senior Class Council, and Society of Women Engineers) to redistribute funds from Career Fair to establish greater equity among grads and undergrads in terms of funds available for student life.

- **Paid parental leave**
  - After a multi-year advocacy effort spearheaded by GWAMIT (Graduate Women at MIT), MIT’s administration has adopted an Institute-wide policy on gender-neutral paid parental leave for graduate students, in which a birth parent can take three months of paid parental leave and a non-birth parent can take one month of paid parental leave.

- **Creating a food-secure campus**
  - The GSC worked with the Division of Student Life to publicize a family food grant program, a SwipeShare program initiated by the Undergraduate Association, and Rebecca’s Cafe - a new late-night dining option on campus.

Professional Development

- **Career-related programming**
  - The GSC’s Academics, Research, and Careers committee held two event series related to professional development. Profs-on-Tap allowed students to interact with professors and professionals in an informal setting to learn more about not only their careers but also their lives. In the Growing Up in Science series, professors talked about their journey in academia and the learning experiences they encountered along the way.

- **Professional Development Working Group**
A working group consisting of graduate students, Office for Graduate Education staff, Global Education and Career Development staff, and faculty met throughout the 2017-2018 academic year to compile existing resources relating to graduate student professional development (PD), determine the resources that are lacking, and prepare a survey for departments regarding the availability of PD resources.

- Career Exploration Working Group
  - The GSC worked with the Office of the Vice Chancellor and the Undergraduate Association to establish the Career Exploration Working Group, which began in the spring of 2018. The group is examining mechanisms of career exploration apart from Career Fair and is working to make Career Fair a valuable experience for both graduate and undergraduate students in each department.

- Collaboration with the MIT Alumni Association
  - The GSC has built a strong relationship with the MITAA, including working with the Graduate Alumni Council to better connect grad students to alumni.

Awards

Compton Award – GSC Officers
Golden Beaver Award – Visiting Student Association (VISTA)
Stewart Award – Visiting Student Association (VISTA)

Looking forward

After looking back on our work this year, much remains to be done to improve the quality of life of graduate students at MIT. There were several topics and projects that got off the ground towards the end of the 2017-2018 year that we would like to see move forward in the future, including:

- Financial security across departments – Some graduate students only receive half-stipends and some have unstable funding during the summer. Can next year’s stipend recommendation process account for the fact that a stipend increase across the board for all graduate students will not address the inequality in stipends across the Institute?
- Improving grad student orientation – Orientation contains a plethora of information, and spreading out the onboarding process by beginning to deliver information over the summer could result in an improved experience for students.
- Low-cost grocery store – The Division of Student Life is planning to open a low cost grocery store in the fall of 2018; we are enthusiastic about contributing to this effort and helping to make sure that grad students are being served in the best way possible.
- Childcare – Graduate students with children find the childcare provided at MIT to be costly and inaccessible. GWAMIT (Graduate Women and MIT) has been and will be continuing to push forward the issue of affordable childcare for graduate students.

Thank you again to all of the GSC contributors who made this work possible!