ABSTRACT
This non-exhaustive summary highlights numerous projects, events, and achievements accomplished by dedicated and passionate graduate students seeking to improve the graduate body’s experience.

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I. Introduction: Graduate Student Council (GSC)

The GSC exists to enhance the overall graduate experience by promoting the general welfare and concerns of the graduate student body across all five schools, creating new programs and initiatives to provide opportunities for growth and interaction, and communicating with the MIT administration and Faculty on behalf of graduate students. These goals are accomplished through a structure of elected student representatives, standing committees and their subcommittees, and officers. The Graduate Student Council is supported by two ODGE support staff employees.

II. Theme One: Supporting Educational Innovation and Excellence

The Graduate Student Council’s Academics, Research and Careers (ARC) committee provides substantial programming for MIT graduate students in the area of educational excellence; these efforts are described fully under Theme Four: Holistic Graduate Student Experience, below.

A. Support for Interdisciplinary Initiatives

In addition to supporting these initiatives, the ODGE supports new collaborations. The graduate experience can sometimes be isolating. The GSC continues to strive for increased engagement of graduate students across campus and departments, labs, and centers. President Reif’s inaugural speech around one MIT, expansion of department engagement for graduate students to attend orientation, and preliminary discussions between ODGE, GSC, Sloan, and various student groups lead to gathering student representation from all five schools. A plan and structure was formulated over the past academic year by the GSC’s school representatives and support approved by Council which created the OneMIT Board housed under the GSC. The general meetings are open, like all GSC standing committees and subcommittees, and happen at least once a semester. The funding meetings are closed due to discussion and approval of funds for ideas and events. The allocation process occurs on the same cycle as Funding Board. A soft launch and pilot events have occurred, with the Institute-wide launch occurring during summer and fall of 2015.

III. Theme Two: Competitiveness in Graduate Funding

A. Cost of Living

Since 2003, the GSC Housing and Committee Affairs Committee (HCA) has partnered with the Office of the Dean for Graduate Education to analyze graduate student living costs. The guiding principle behind the GSC stipend recommendation is to maintain graduate student standards of living accounting for expenditures and inflation. HCA determines the expenditures using a cost of living survey conducted in collaboration with the MIT Office of Institutional Research in the Office of the Provost. Aggregate non-housing inflation is determined using regional inflation rates for non-housing expenditures (Food, Transportation, Utilities, Medical Care, Childcare, etc.) as given by the U.S. Consumer Price Index. Housing inflation is estimated using MIT Off-Campus Housing Office and Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) data on average asking rents in the micro-regions in Cambridge and Somerville where most graduate students reside (shown in Figure 1).
In addition to the GSC recommendation, we understand the Dean’s Group must also take into consideration future funding source availability, equity with faculty, staff, and post-doc wage increases, and MIT’s ability to compete for top talent with peer institutions.

This year, HCA’s estimate based on the CPI Indexes and cost of living survey data that the baseline expense increase was 2.25% and 2.84% for on-campus and off-campus students respectively. The percentages are weighted based on the number of graduate students on and off campus to get the GSC’s baseline recommendation of 2.63% to maintain a 2013 standard of living. Off campus housing prices still continue to increase faster than on campus, and from CCD and MIT Off-Campus Housing Office data the housing cost increase was estimated to be 3.5% and 4.47% on average for on and off-campus student respectively.

IV. Theme Three: Administrative and Policy

A. GSC Advocacy for Graduate Students

GSC advocacy primarily consisted of two kinds: on-campus advocacy working closely with MIT administration and outward advocacy focused on bringing pertinent graduate student issues to local, state, and national attention. The primary on-campus advocacy topics included long-term graduate housing planning, graduate cost of living analysis and stipend increase recommendation, transportation options for graduate students, and student privacy. Local, state, and national advocacy focused on increased funding for graduate students, open data policies, graduate student debit, and visas and paths toward citizenship for international advanced degree holders looking to start U.S. based companies.

1. Graduate Housing (Institute Controlled Housing)

A comprehensive look at graduate housing was done by HCA to help answer some of the unanswered questions of the 2014 Graduate Housing Taskforce and expand the exploration of housing options and timelines that could be utilized by MIT. A review of past institute reports and meetings with the various people that serve on the several committees related to acquisition of property, campus planning and development, and project implementation was done. This gave enough insight to characterize the current graduate housing status, understand any Institute space constraints, explore project funding options, and compare with peer institutions that have similar issues, demographics, and/or constraints. Figure 2 is one of several graphics in the GSC report that are analyze the past, show concern for the
future, and offer suggestions on improvements. The general findings tend to point that solving graduate housing concerns first could help with the housing concerns of undergraduates, postdocs, and faculty (especially attracting junior faculty), and there are a diverse set of approaches that have been and can be unsubsidized and financially sustainable models. This report is archived in the GSC archives, and can be found online at the GSC website.

Figure 2: Historical and future projections of MIT built housing for graduate students. If the institute proceeds down a pathway toward institute controlled housing, then the percentage of graduate students housed could greatly increase over a short period.

2. Transportation
The GSC continues to be active in addressing transportation challenges faced by students that do not live near regular transportation options. The GSC with the UA continue support for the Costco and Target Shuttle. From 2013-2014, the MIT Transportation and Parking instituted a pilot shuttle program for Somerville in response to research and advocacy by the GSC HCA Transportation Subcommittee that found that a significant number of MIT graduate students living in Somerville do not have access to safe transportation options at night. The data and report on the Somerville shuttle line was delivered to top MIT administration and the MIT Transportation and Parking office. The Somerville Shuttle was seen as successful and the methodology of the work was used to improve the Saferide shuttle routes shown in Figure 3.

1 http://thetech.com/news/59279/saferide-v134-n31
2 http://thetech.com/news/59766/saferide-v134-n57
3. Student Privacy
The personal information of students has been posted in the MIT directory since the paper era. The directory previously included, when applicable, each student’s name, course, year, email address, MIT office address, MIT office phone number, permanent home address, term phone number, and term address as the default. MIT students could submit a request for repression to the registrar if they did not want certain pieces of this information displayed, but it was time consuming and cumbersome. A survey was conducted and there was a large concern around listing personal information and its misuse. The GSC worked with Committee on Student Information Policy for MIT to retain the student given personal information, but publicly suppress by default the MIT students’ permanent home addresses, term phone numbers, and term addresses.³

B. GSC Resourcing and Information
The GSC empowers students to take ownership of their own student life experience and professional development to hone needed skills outside the department, lab, and center. Significant strides continue to be made in providing additional resource support and tools to majority graduate student groups and the graduate student body at large. The major financial improvements come from rescoping the GSC budget, improved accurate predictions of all variable funding, and a record Fall Career Fair budget surplus.

1. Career Fair
Since 1999, the MIT Fall Career Fair (CF) has been organized by the three partner organizations (the graduating undergraduate seniors (Class of “X”), Society of Women Engineers (SWE), and the Graduate Student Council (GSC)) and continues to increase benefits for students (graduate and undergraduate). It is typically held the third full week of classes in the fall semester and has scheduled dates 10 years in advance. The GSC’s portion of the profits is a significant portion of the GSC budget and goes directly back to current graduate students.

The CF agreement had changes and clarifications made that delayed the signing with witnesses from all Partners. Until the agreement is unanimously signed, no distribution of the CF profits is dispersed. The Partner expectations that had been internally transitioned within a partner organization were solidified in the agreement with a clear understanding of the responsibilities and the accountability of all Partners.

This solidification was already in line with GSC practices because it justifies each year what the CF money was spent towards and impact, the GSC Bylaws has a 3 year CF profit projection, transparent budget process (multi-stage budget proposal, 2 month legislative process (discussion then vote by Council), and budget posting online for transparency to any graduate student), and line item accountability. The GSC received a percentage increase and SWE and GSC partnered to accomplish increased support for diversity events. The CF goals in order of priority were reiterated to the Director Team:

1. To offer a diverse and expansive venue of career opportunities to all MIT students under a unified banner and recognized brand.
2. To offer MIT students hands-on opportunities to gain leadership and professional skills.
3. To give MIT students the wherewithal to take initiative and ownership of their student life experience by raising much of the revenue that supports all MIT student’s life (student clubs, events, and other student life oriented programming).

The Partners continue to maintain the view that points 1 and 2 be weighted the heaviest and to maintain the current level (inflation adjusted) of profit back to the Partners. As things were improved for the long term, other insights and questions emerged.

There were unanswered questions, discussions, compromises. One question for receiving CF money is historical financial transparency, though this can be difficult for some of the Partners. For example, the structure of the Class of “X” is setup as a SAO approve student group that is removed/transferred after 4 years. This means that Class of “X” cannot see Class of “Y” finances though both sign an agreement for financial transparency to receive CF money. Another question was the Partner representation and how it understands the needs of the student body it serves. The old adage is that “it takes one to know one.” The Partners theoretical Venn diagram shows representation for all seniors (Class of “X”), all women (SWE), and all graduate students (GSC). The last major question was what guidelines and factors should be considered when negotiating a change in the distribution ratio. Discussion occurred for these and other questions, but difficulty in making progress tabled a final answer or outcome. The GSC advocates for transparency where possible, and the other partners did not agree to release the percentage breakdowns. The GSC compromised this year by continuing to not release the distribution ratio, but still maintains its Constitutional required transparency to graduate students by reporting the proceeds received.

From 2012-2014 the Fall Career Fair has increased in student job opportunities and proceeds back to student groups. The 3 year long term view and process changes put in place during the 2012 Fall Career Fair has successfully achieved its long term goal of improved impact and efficiency. The 2014 Fall Career Fair revenue was originally projected to be $318,872 but ended up coming in around $408,000.

The CF Director Team and Partners continue to improve by making long and short term changes that benefit the entire student body. The effect of groundwork three years before is being seen, and look forward to the positive outcomes that may become transparent three years from now.

2. Budget Rescope

The GSC budget underwent a rescaling process at the mid year point because of improved projections of variable income and the Fall Career Fair proceeds. The surplus allocation was conducted under the principles that: the surplus is owned by the MIT graduate student body and ideas should be solicited by the entire student body, the decision making and allocation process should be transparent, and focus should be on creating the maximum impact for greatest number of students. In general, considerations were made on how best to expand underfunded programs and to explore new funding opportunities
with an emphasis on ideas that would have lasting impact. Funding ideas were submitted to the GSC via the general council, Anno, email submission, MIT administration (ODGE, DSL), and last year’s ideas. The Executive Committee reviewed the ideas and approved the initial rescoped budget proposal. The ideas were evaluated based on the criteria of leadership bandwidth to carry out an idea, timeframe feasibility on whether the activity was something that could happen during the current physical year, and whether the idea was something that a longer term fund could be established for (e.g. similar to the backup childcare program fund passed in 2012-2013, GSC-PSC public service fund passed in 2013-2014). A comprehensive report of all ideas submitted and the decision making process was delivered to General Council. Final allocation decisions were made by the General Council in accordance with GSC bylaws. All ideas that for whatever reason were not funded were passed on to the 2014-2015 Executive Committee for consideration for funding for the upcoming year. The rescoped budget increased support for Funding Board (which goes directly to student groups with majority graduate students), created a new initiatives fund to allow for large ideas to come before council, and a new initiatives line item for small ideas to come before Excomm. There have been several proposals funded and the Institute has provided free labor and maintenance on the capital equipment purchase such as water fountains for sustainability. These process and oversight of the rescope and New Initiatives is highlighted in the passed legislation.

3. Social Media
Under the leadership of the GSC Secretary, the GSC laid the groundwork for an improve user and mobile friendly website. The extensive social media including a GSC Facebook page, Twitter account, and Anno were maintained and increased in followers. The Graduate, a newsletter by graduate students for graduate students, was evaluated on its effectiveness and determined that it was now longer effective and other platforms existed for engagement. The Orientation Issue of The Graduate was published as the last issue, though the Orientation website was the main channel of updates and communication. The Anno still maintains around 30-50% readership which is twice the industry average of 20%. The GSC is using the Tech, MIT News Office, Faculty News Letter, and Anno as resources for communication depending on the intended audience.

4. Institution-Wide Reducing and Easing Friction and Stress (iREFS)
The ground work for the iREFS program was laid last year and continued to completion this year. The peer to peer program has the goal of helping graduate students address topics, issues, and problems that may arise. The idea was started in a few departments such as Chemistry and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and has become successful as a graduate student resource. The GSC hearing the need from Council representatives of various departments undertook creating a program that graduate students from one department could help graduate students in other departments. Those interested receive training and many go on to take the overprescribed and valuable Conflict Management class.

5. Other Resource Support
In other areas of support, the GSC Muddy Board of Governors worked with campus dinning to improve the Muddy Charles Pub. The Muddy Monday’s series, a series sponsored at the Muddy where cultural groups can put on cultural activities was continued where the Muddy matches group contributions to the event 5 to 1. The Muddy Board also commenced numerous capital improvements including renovating the floors, repainting the walls, changing the curtains, and replacing and adding additional wall outlets, sound proofing, wall lights, ceiling fans, and tv’s.
Other areas of support for students and student groups include the UA partnering with the GSC to share Costco memberships with all students, development of a new online platform to manage the funding board and fund allocations, and minor improvements to the GSC Office to improve the team workspace for all members of the GSC and graduate community to gather and work.

C. GSC Internal Structure, Operations, and Governing Documents

The overall internal structure and operations of the GSC remained mostly unchanged. A Presidential Taskforce on review and update where necessary the GSC Constitution and Bylaws was created. The GSC Constitution remained unchanged, but there were several improvements and clarifications made to the Bylaws. Figure 4 shows the GSC Structure.

In addition numerous subcommittees carry out specific focuses within the committees. These include Graduate Women at MIT (GWAMIT), Legislative Action, Grad Gala, Ski Trip, Arts, Coffee Hour, Grad Rat, Housing, Transportation, Families, Off-Campus, and Sustainability.

The GSC also focused on working closely with the MIT administration on a number of key committees. The Nominations Board received a large number of applicants and recommended more graduate students than spots for some committees per a request from the Chair of the Faculty. This pilot process was evaluated to compare it to the previous method of the exact number of potential representatives to spots. Soliciting input from all the faculty committee chairs and random selection of the graduate institute representatives it is clear that the GSC will return back to the original process of recommending individuals for the exact number of slots available.

Figure 4: This is latest revision of the GSC organizational structure as of March 2015.
D. GSC Legislative Outreach
The GSC Legislative Action Subcommittee continues to be very active. This year drafting and passing a new legislative platform for the GSC in the general council and reaching out on significant state and national issues that impact graduate students. The new legislative action platform addressed student’s rights and diversity, higher education funding, research and development funding, international student issues and promoting science. There is increasing interest in some issues at the local level that fall outside of the scope of HCA. The GSC took part in two trips to Washington D.C. as part of the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students’ Legislative Action Days program. During these trips the GSC advocated for domestic renewal of visas, open data policies, and citizenship pathways for advanced degree graduates looking to start companies in the U.S. upon graduation. Outreach in Washington D.C. included visits with the 20 offices from senate and house representatives. The GSC continued the engagement with the Washington DC office and sought collaboration on future visits. Finally, and most significantly, the GSC legislative action subcommittee published additional op-ed articles.

V. Theme Four: Diversity and Climate
A. ICEO and Graduate Student Perspective
The Institute Community Equity Officer was created over the last academic year. As one of the first actions of the office a comprehensive report was conducted with an open period for the community to comment. The graduate student body is the largest single entity in the MIT community. The GSC worked with the ICEO to develop the report, voice concerns of graduate students, and engaged faculty. A perspective piece was written for the faculty newsletter, and highlighted the representation for the MIT Compact, uniform medical, health, and wellness resources across the MIT community, and leveraging the utilization of existing channels.  

VI. Theme Five: Holistic Graduate Student Experience
A. Orientation and Mentorship
The GSC Orientation Committee (OC) built on the success of the GSC in recent years in putting together one of the largest student organized graduate orientations in the country. Spanning a period of three weeks, orientation consisted of over 60 events offering incoming students the opportunity to get acclimated to MIT, understand the resources that are available for support, make friends and have fun. Following the vision President Reif set forth in his inaugural speech for MIT to be a place open and supportive for all members of the community, an institute wide BBQ for the first year incoming class was successfully accomplished. This event gave value lessons learned for bring the campus closer together and laid the insight into restructures of Grad School 101, 102, Presidential Welcome, and Info Booth. Primary orientation events consisted of Grad School 101 and Grad School 102 which provided information on graduate life at MIT, the Presidential Address in which President Reif welcomed the incoming class and participated in answering live twitter questions, a Boston Harbor dance party cruise, a family carnival for graduate students with children, an international student mixer, a banquet by TechLink to enable cross disciplinary engagement, GSC funded dorm events, and multiple BBQs and outings. In support of its activities the orientation team secured the sponsorship of campus businesses including Grad Rat, MIT Coop, and the MIT FCU. The Coop sponsored orientation with free T-shirts for all incoming students. The MIT FCU sponsored thumb drives with relevant information that use to be in paper form at the information booth.

4 http://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/274/nowocin.html
B. Support for Graduate Women
The GSC continues strong support and engagement of graduate women. The GSC continued to provide additional funding for programing organized by the Graduate Women at MIT (GWAMIT), a subcommittee of ARC. GWAMIT is working towards better integration into the GSC structure. More information of ARC and GWAMIT are in the GSC Programs section.

C. GSC Programs
The GSC Academic, Research and Careers Committee (ARC) led numerous events aimed at supporting students in their academic and research work at MIT and helping students prepare for future careers. ARC’s activities included two ‘Dissertation Boot Camps” in collaboration with MIT libraries. One boot camp was held in the summer and the other was held in the spring. The boot camps provided quite areas and snacks for students over a two-week period to allow them to make significant uninterrupted progress on their dissertations. ARC also partnered with the MIT Alumni Association hosting a Tech Reunion for students and MIT alumni where 25 graduate students presented current research topics. The Graduate Women at MIT subcommittee (GWAMIT) continued to be very active carrying out the Orientation Women’s Welcome Lunch, Leadership Conference, and the spring Empowerment Conference.

ARC continued the expansion of their professional development series. Events over the course of the year included: a panel discussion on how to find a good postdoc, a panel discussion on how to publish in peer reviewed journals, an information session in collaboration with the Global Education and Career Development office (GECD) on how to manage one’s online social media presence (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.), a biotechnology career panel, a data scientists career panel, a panel by recent MIT alumni working in consulting on moving from PhD graduate work to business, a panel on transferrable skills needed to be successful in academia, an information session on how to write a science blog, a panel on how to find a job in academia, and a panel on how to move from a PhD to doing a startup. Most of the events in the series reported attendance of roughly 100 students.

In addition to continuing the professional development series, ARC also successfully implemented two additional programs: the Faculty Dinner Series. The Faculty Dinner Series was implemented in response to student feedback and quality of life survey data that revealed a desire by students to have more personal interaction and mentorship by MIT professors. The Faculty Dinner Series brought together small groups of students (~10-12) to have dinner with a distinguished member of the MIT faculty to talk about life and career.

D. Childcare for Graduate Students
With the support of the ODGE, MIT Work Life Center, and Provost, the GSC helped push the next step for increased sport for graduate student families. In 2014, the pilot backup childcare was a success and the program was adopted as a permanent line in the ODGE budget. A proposal for a needs based family grant that is institute funded or endowed was recommended for this year. The ODGE, Chancellor Grimson, and Provost are exploring the funding options. The funds of the proposal would be overseen and administered by Student Financial Services. In addition, options with the MIT FCU were explored.
E. ODGE Support for Student Group Activities
The GSC is the main financial support tool of graduate student programmatic life at MIT through its constitutionally mandated Funding Board operation that is charged with distributing student fees to student groups in a fair, democratic, and transparent manner. This year, the GSC Funding board dispersed the entire portion of student life fees from the ODGE ($112,541) and matched it dollar for dollar plus an additional $40,000 with Career Fair proceeds ($152,959) for a total of $265,500 through standard student group allocations. This brings the range of application funding percentages to 50-70%. As the graduate population has increased the absolute funds (not percentage) that the GSC has received from student life fees has remained the same. In addition to the funding provided through Funding Board, the GSC Academics, Research & Careers (ARC) committee provided an additional $4,000 to total $27,000 in travel grants for graduate students to attend conferences around the world.

VII. Conclusion:
This past year numerous projects and events spanned the space of continuing the “tried and true”, implementing the final solution after many years of work, advancing the next chapter in a multiyear endeavor, or starting the next multiyear challenge. The many devoted volunteers, institute and council representatives, subcommittee and committee members, and a very effective executive committee that were passionate on various projects and topics made this possible. To these role models, I hold you in high regard and thank you for your efforts in improving the graduate experience.