This report provides an overview of the vision, activities, engagement and accomplishments of the MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) for the 2013-2014 academic year. Throughout the course of the year an estimated 200 members of the GSC were actively involved contributing to and improving the quality of graduate student life. The majority the GSC activities focused on programming, advocacy, resource support for student groups, governance and legislation and administrative partnerships. Major accomplishments of the GSC include: active participation and partnership with MIT administration to address long-term graduate housing planning, establishment of a joint fund with the MIT Public Service Center to enable graduate students to make service and outreach an integral part of their graduate experience, initiation of a “Taste of” cultural series that brings the MIT community together to celebrate the cultural heritage and cuisine of our international student body, the launch of a cruise dance party for students to celebrate the end of the academic year, and a rescoping of the GSC budget in response to a $180,000 Fall Career Fair surplus. With everything accomplished this year we are indebted to the continued support of the Office of the Dean of Graduate Education, the Division for Student Life, and all the other administrative bodies that enable the GSC to fulfill its mission in serving the MIT graduate student body.
Overview

The purpose of the MIT Graduate Student Council as stated in its constitution is to: 1) represent the graduate students on all matters pertaining to their general welfare as graduate students, 2) provide for and promote graduate student extra-curricular activities, 3) provide for the welcoming and orientation of new graduate students, and 4) provide a formal means of communication among graduate students. In addition to ensuring that the activities of the GSC were well aligned with its purpose, the 2013-2014 GSC Officer team also made it a priority to: “embrace the special innovative and entrepreneurial culture that defines MIT and identify ways to enable the GSC to empower students to pursue their own desires, interests, and passions,” to “encourage inclusiveness and greater benefit for the maximum number of people, for the smallest possible cost to society and the environment,” to “expand the GSC’s use of social media channels to deliver graduate students the relevant information they need,” and to improve the transparency of the organization and accountability to the graduate student body. In sum, the GSC viewed its role not only as one of unilaterally leading and executing initiatives and solutions top down, but rather as taking a support-based role of providing the resources for students to implement their own ideas and to do so in an inclusive and transparent way.

Over the years the GSC has established a large portfolio of highly successful programs aimed at fulfilling its mission and in general these programs can be broken down into: (1) event programming, (2) advocacy and outreach, and (3) resource support for students and student organizations. In addition, each year the GSC passes legislation to improve its internal operations and structure in response to changing needs and strives to develop and cultivate partnerships with the MIT administration for collaboration on important issues. This year GSC leadership focused on maintaining the high level of success that has been achieved in its existing programs but also looked for ways to improve overall outreach based on the vision of the officer team and in accordance with input and feedback from the Executive Committee, General Council and student body at large. While there remains much that can be improved upon, the Officer Team is pleased with the progress and impact made this year.

Event Programming

In general, event programming activities focused on events in which the GSC could leverage its position to put on large-scale activities and programming that would be difficult and challenging for individual students groups to implement. The major accomplishments of the GSC this year in its own internal event programming consist of (1) the MIT Graduate Orientation put on by the GSC Orientation Committee, (2) professional development activities organized by the GSC Academic Research and Careers Committee, and (3) social activities organized by the GSC Activities Committee.

Orientation (One MIT)

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 two 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, the theme for orientation was “OneMIT.” 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 a fireside chat, 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, and multiple BBQs and outings. In support of its activities the orientation team secured the sponsorship of campus businesses including Grad Rat and the MIT Coop. Grad Rat hosted an unveiling of the new Grad Rat ring that was open to all graduate students while the Coop sponsored orientation with free T-shirts for all incoming students.

![Figure 1. Collogue of MIT graduate orientation activities.](image_url)

**Professional Development**

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 the summer of 2013 and the other was held in spring 2014. 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 at the Media Lab for students and MIT alumni where 20 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 (featuring keynotes by ZIPCar founder Robin Chase), and their spring Empowerment Conference.

One significant improvement ARC made this year was 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 (GECO) 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 expanding the professional development series, ARC also successfully implemented two additional programs: the Faculty Dinner Series and Pitch Your PhD. 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. Pitch your PhD was a new large event aimed at encouraging PhD students to learn how to communicate their PhD work to a non-expert or general audience. Participants were given five minutes to explain their PhD work to an audience of non-experts after which they were provided feedback on how to improve their presentation.

**Social Activities**

The GSC Activities Committee (AC) maintained its focus on providing large-scale activities aimed at bringing together the entire student body. The most significant of the large events were Ski Trip and Grad Gala. Co-organized with MIT Snowriders, the 2014 Ski Trip took place over a three day extended weekend at Jay Peak Resort in Vermont with ~700 attending (similar to the record turnout achieved in 2013). Due to the success of the event, a two year contract was signed with Jay Peak that locked in a low rate for 2015 and 2016. Grad Gala, the MIT graduate formal, was highly popular setting a record this year by selling out all 700 tickets in less than 18 hours.
In addition to AC’s two annual flagship events, multiple smaller events were held, including: Solstice Friday with Froyo ice cream where free childcare for families was provided for a GSC event for the first time, a daylong outing to Six Flags New England, a day trip out to the Boston Harbor islands, volunteering for the Boston Red Sox Green Team and attending a Red Sox game, a trip to the Ringling Brothers Circus, and a Graduate Halloween progressive party.

The GSC Arts Subcommittee was particularly active this year hosting a number of activities for graduate students to engage in the visual arts. Working with Arts@MIT the Arts Subcommittee put on a series of events at the List Visual Arts Center including an exhibit by Chris Marker: Guillaume-en-Egypte with wine and cheese and a band from the Berklee College of Music. The subcommittee also put on three large events, a gala at the Harvard Natural History Museum with over 300 attending, an Art Gala at the Copley Society with over 200 attending, and an MIT Arts Soiree at the Media Lab featuring art from MIT graduate students with almost 400 attending (see Figure 2).

The Activities Committee also broke new ground by starting a series of new events including a graduate coffee hour, ”Tast of” cultural event series, and an inaugural end-of-semester GSC Presidential Cruise. In an effort to provide more opportunities for graduate students to meet and visit informally throughout the week, Coffee Hour was held biweekly at the Forbes Café in the Stata Center and provided coffee, tea and snacks. The series was so successful that it was eventually expanded to a weekly event under the GSC rescoped budget. As part of an effort to bring the MIT community together to celebrate the cultural heritage and cuisine of our international student body, a ”Taste of” series was established providing student cultural groups the opportunity to team
up with AC and host an evening of ethnic food, performances and games (see Figure 3). This year’s “Taste of” events included: Taste of Germany, Taste of Egypt in collaboration with the MIT Egyptian Association, Taste of Greece in collaboration with the Hellenic Student Association, Taste of the Caribbean in collaboration with the Caribbean Club, Taste of the South, Taste of China, Taste of Belgium in collaboration with Belgians@MIT, and Taste of India in collaboration with Sangam. Finally, in response to requests for a school-wide party to celebrate the end of the academic year and all the students graduating and moving on, the GSC threw the inaugural Presidential Cruise (an evening-long dance party on board a cruise ship in Boston Harbor). For a first of its kind event, the cruise attracted 700 students which was similar to the number of students that attended the well-established Grad Gala and the Ski Trip. The cruise featured two dance floors with music being played by MIT’s own graduate student DJ’s, a photo booth with MIT mascot Tim the Beaver, and food and drinks.

**Advocacy and Outreach**

GSC advocacy this year primarily consisted of two kinds: on-campus advocacy working closely with MIT administration and outward advocacy focused on bringing pertinent graduate student issues to 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, increased support for MIT students living at Woods Hole Oceanographic institute, and the Chancellor Search Advisory Cabinet. State and national advocacy focused on visas and paths toward citizenship for international advanced degree holders looking to start companies in the U.S. and graduate student debt.

**Graduate Housing**

With off-campus rents rising significantly in recent years compared to the average graduate stipend increase (see Figure 4), and with significant demand for on-campus housing, the GSC worked closely with the administration to identify graduate housing needs and make recommendations on how those needs could best be addressed.

![Figure 4. Stipend vs. rent increase of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments from 2000-2001 and 2011-2014.](image-url)
Much of the work was conducted in connection with the Graduate Housing Task Force which consisted of student, faculty, administrative, and local area government representatives. The primary recommendation from the task force was for MIT to add 500-600 additional on-campus beds to the graduate housing stock to meet current unmet demand. In addition it was recommended that "swing space" housing be provided to meet housing needs during the renovation of existing graduate and undergraduate dorms and that the swing space should then be transitioned to permanent graduate dorms once renovations have completed. A final report by the task force also revealed a need to focus on the special needs of international students and graduate students with families1. Closely related, the GSC also served on the East Campus Steering Committee that was tasked with developing a recommendation for long-term redevelopment of east campus. The GSC worked closely with residents of the East Campus community and East Campus Steering Committee members to make sure that east campus housing concerns were understood and taken into account in the long-term planning process. Finally, the GSC authored an article in the MIT Faculty Newsletter2 to provide a student perspective of cost of living and housing challenges and to make a case for the recommendation for 500-600 additional housing units made in the Graduate Housing Task Force report.

**Cost of Living and Stipend Increase**

Since 2003, the Graduate Student Council (GSC) 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 not to improve graduate student’s financial position, but rather to maintain existing graduate student standards of living accounting for expenditures and inflation. We determine 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 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. This year we estimate based on the CPI Index and cost of living survey data that the non-housing expense increase was 1.75% and 1.91% for on-campus and off-campus students respectively. From CCD and MIT Off-Campus Housing Office data we estimate the housing cost increase to be 3.5% and 8.7% on average for on and off-campus student respectively. With housing consisting of ~53% of graduate student expenditures on average, the total cost increase is 2.68% for on-campus students and 5.46% for off campus students. The GSC request from MIT Dean' group a 4.47% increase and the actual average increase received was 4%. In addition to the GSC recommendation, we understand the Dean’s Group must also takes 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.

**Transportation**

Related to housing, the GSC was active in addressing transportation challenges faced by students that do not live near regular transportation options. In fall 2013, MIT Transportation and Parking instituted a pilot shuttle program for Somerville in response to research and advocacy by the GSC 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 pilot shuttle ran from September 2013 through January 2014 during which time usage statistics were gathered to gauge effectiveness and impact of the new line. Data obtained revealed interesting results, part of which are given in Figure 5. The existing lines, Cambridge West and Cambridge East (routes in blue and

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red in Figure 5 respectively), had the most overall ridership, however, most riders only took the shuttles to locations closely accessible to campus. In contrast, while ridership on the new Somerville line was lower in absolute terms, the line appeared to me more effective in that a greater number of passengers took the shuttle to stops that were further away from campus and less accessible by other transportation options. A full report on the Somerville shuttle line was delivered to top MIT administration.3

Aside from the Somerville Shuttle, the GSC also continued the support of a shuttle to Costco.

**WHOI Student Support**

Working closely with the Office of the Dean or Graduate Education (ODGE), the GSC helped to address a number of student life challenges faced by MIT students in the MIT/WHOI joint program living permanently at Woods Hole and away from many support resources and student life offerings available on MIT’s main campus. Working with the WHOI Student Association, the GSC identified the need for additional funding to support student life activities and successfully advocated to the Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences for a $2,000 a year annual budget for student life programing. In addition, the GSC supported the ODGE in supplying the WHOI Student Association $10,000 a year from student life fees to enable programming at Woods Hole since many resources that student life fees pay for (such as Daper) are on main campus and unavailable.

**Chancellor Search Advisory Cabinet**

With the transition of Chancellor Eric Grimson to his new role as Chancellor for Academic Advancement, the GSC played a significant role in advising President Reif during his chancellor search. In support of this effort, the Chancellor Search Advisory Cabinet (CSAC), consisting of four graduate students and four undergraduate students, was charged to advice President Reif on qualities and decision factors for selecting the next chancellor. The cabinet conducted an institute-wide survey, interviewed students, faculty and staff, and authored a final report for president Reif including key qualities and priorities to look for in a chancellor. The team had multiple meetings with President Reif to discuss findings and recommendations. After the selection of Professor Synthia Barnhart as chancellor, CSAC was asked to stay on as the Chancellor Transition Advisory Cabinet to assist Chancellor Barnhart in understanding student needs during the transition.

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3 http://gsc.mit.edu/hca/Somerville_Saferide_Shuttle_Assessment.pdf
**Legislative Outreach**

The GSC Legislative Action Subcommittee was 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. 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 federal policy to address exorbitant graduate student debt levels and for immigration reform to address the lack of work 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 offices of senate and house representatives including: Capuano (D-MA7), Clark (D-MA5), Warren (D-MA), Markey (D-MA), Kirk (R-IL), Durbin (D-IL), Klobuchar (D-MN), Franken (D-MN), Bennet (D-Colorado), M. Udall (D-Colorado), T. Udall (D-NM), Heinrich (D-NM), Tsongas (D-MA3) and Tipton (R-CO3). A visit was also made with staff of the House Judiciary Committee to discuss progress in immigration policy. The GSC also for the first time engaged the Washington DC office and laid the groundwork for collaboration on future visits. Finally, and most significantly, the GSC legislative action subcommittee published an op-ed article in the March 21, 2014 issue of Science titled “U.S. Policy Impedes Innovators.”

**Resource Support for Students and Student Groups**

Crucial to this year’s officer team vision of embracing the special innovative and entrepreneurial culture that defines MIT and enabling the GSC to empower students to take ownership of their own student life experience, the GSC made significant strides in providing additional resource support and tools to student groups and the student body at large. Most notably were the new programs and resources established by rescoping the GSC budget in response to a record Fall Career Fair budget surplus and the expansion of GSC marketing capabilities into social media and targeted email advertising.

**Career Fair Surplus and Budget Rescope**

The 2013 Fall Career Fair revenue was originally projected to be $240,000 but ended up coming in around $420k (47% higher than 2012). As a result the GSC budget underwent a substantial rescoping process. 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 general council, email submission, MIT administration (ODGE, DSL) and Facebook. The officers reviewed the ideas submitted with the Executive Committee and the Executive Committee approved the initial rescoped budget. 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). 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

accredance 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.

Out of the rescoped budget the funding board was increased by $40,000 and numerous funds were established including a service fund and sustainability fund. The service fund was created in collaboration with the MIT Public Service Center with the goal of enabling graduate students to make service and outreach an integral part of their graduate experience. The fund provided small grants to student organizations and individual students to carry out local community service and outreach. Initial projects that were funded include: funding for the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) to develop STEM teaching kits and teaching tools to teach math and science at underprivileged Boston Public Schools, funding for the Sidney Pacific Graduate Community to organize cooking events at the Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation shelter (CASPAR), and funding for the MIT Energy Leaders of Tomorrow (MELT) program to host an educational and outreach workshop in collaboration with Teach for America for educating high school students on energy-related challenges.

**Social Media Expansion**

Under the leadership of the GSC Secretary, the GSC launched an extensive social media campaign which included creating a GCS Facebook page, and expanding the use of the GSC Twitter account. By the end of the academic year, Facebook membership topped 1000 followers and all major GSC events were on Twitter. To help with marketing strategy, the Anno was overhauled and moved to an email content management platform that provides data analytics on email campaign effectiveness. From this we learned the Anno has an average readership of 40% which is twice the industry average of 20%. The GSC also published three editions of the Graduate: the Orientation Issue, Rewind and Reflection Issue, and the Health and Wellness Issue.

**Other Resource Support**

In other areas of support, the GSC worked with campus dinning to improve the Muddy Charles Pub. The Muddy Mondays series, a series sponsored at the Muddy where cultural groups can put on cultural activities was expanded where the Muddy matches group contributions to the event 5 to 1. The Muddy Board of Governors also commenced numerous capital improvements including refinishing all its tables and is currently in the midst of a large renovation project to redecorate the pub and redo the flooring. Muddy staff also volunteered for a fundraiser in remembrance of Officer Sean Collier and raised over $3000 to sponsoring a recruit at the Lowell Policy Academy in memory of Officer Collier. Other areas of support for students and student groups include: a membership sharing program for students to shop at Costco, development of a new online platform to manage the funding board and fund allocations, and a complete renovation of the GSC Office creating a team workspace for all members of the GSC to gather and work.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the GSC made significant progress this year in fulfilling the purpose of the GSC as outlined in the constitution and in addressing the officer team’s goals of enabling students to take ownership of their own student life experience by expanding GSC resource support, providing the maximum impact to the greatest number of students, operating in an engaging and transparent way, and growing the GSC’s marketing and social media channels. In addition, the GSC advocated for and worked closely with the MIT administration on a number of issues including long-term

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planning for graduate housing, transportation, collaborating on a fund to encourage community service and providing input on the chancellor search process to name a few. While there remains much that can be improved upon, the 2013-2014 officer team is pleased that at the end of our term the state of the GSC is strong. With unprecedented revenues and surpluses the GSC has never been in better position financially, and, perhaps more importantly, the strength of our relationship with the MIT administration and level have perhaps never been stronger.