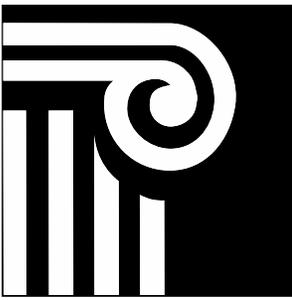


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PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## Options to Improve the Conduct of GSC External Affairs

Report of the Presidential Task Force on External Affairs to the  
General Council of the  
Graduate Student Council of the  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Presented to the General Council on  
December 2nd, 2015



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Presidential Task Force on External Affairs was created in August 2015 by Resolution 62.gsc.2.1 to “assess the manners in which the GSC currently interfaces with governments and external programs, and recommend changes to the way the GSC handles its external affairs”. The Task Force was further charged to report “all potential forms of action that receive support from at least one-half of the committee.” This report presents several options to potentially improve the conduct of GSC external affairs and satisfies that charge.

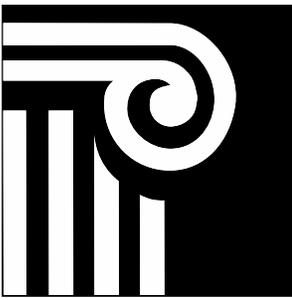
Options presented in this report have been divided into organizational changes and independent actions which may be implemented by council without re-organization of the GSC. The options for independent action considered by this Task Force include:

- Creation of an Advocacy Platform to describe the generally agreed-upon positions of the General Council, including positions on issues not directly related to the government.
- Creation and maintenance of a set of GSC Identity Documents, which may take on multiple formats and which may be easily shared with outside organizations.
- Creation of guidelines on how to carry out external communications, which would apply to all GSC officers, spokespeople, representatives, and other contributors.
- Formation of explicit partnerships, alliances, or liaison positions between the Executive Committee or the General Council and relevant Institute offices and other student organizations.

There is a wide range of options to create new organizations within the GSC or modify existing organizations to improve the conduct of GSC external affairs. This report does not describe the full implementation details of most options. The Task Force has, instead, categorized the options into “Option Classes” based on the type of organization that would result and some key constraints on implementation (e.g. amending the GSC Constitution). There are many specific options within each Class. The Classes described in this report include:

- Creation of a new officer position to manage GSC external affairs.
- Creation of an External Affairs Board (EAB), which might be managed either by a new officer, the President, a Special Advisor to the President, or an External Affairs Chair. An EAB might be implemented with internal structure and governing documents similar to the Muddy Charles Board.
- Creation of an External Affairs Committee (EAC). An EAC would operate much like the other standing committees and would be managed by 2 co-chairs.
- Creation of an External Affairs Subcommittee (EASC). An EASC could be housed by the Committee on Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) or by the Executive Committee (ExComm).

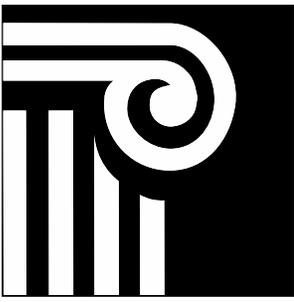
The Task Force recommends that the General Council consider all of the independent actions presented and identify at least one organizational change option for possible implementation in the spring semester.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Mission of the GSC**

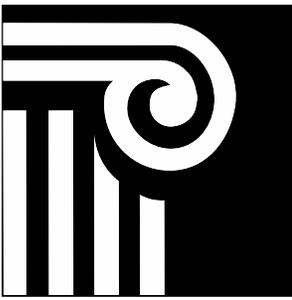
The GSC exists to enhance the overall graduate experience at MIT by promoting the general welfare and concerns of the graduate student body, creating new programs and initiatives to provide opportunities for growth and interaction, and communicating with the MIT Administration and Faculty on behalf of graduate students. Appendix B contains a more exhaustive discussion of the GSC's mission and operations.

### **Structure of the GSC**

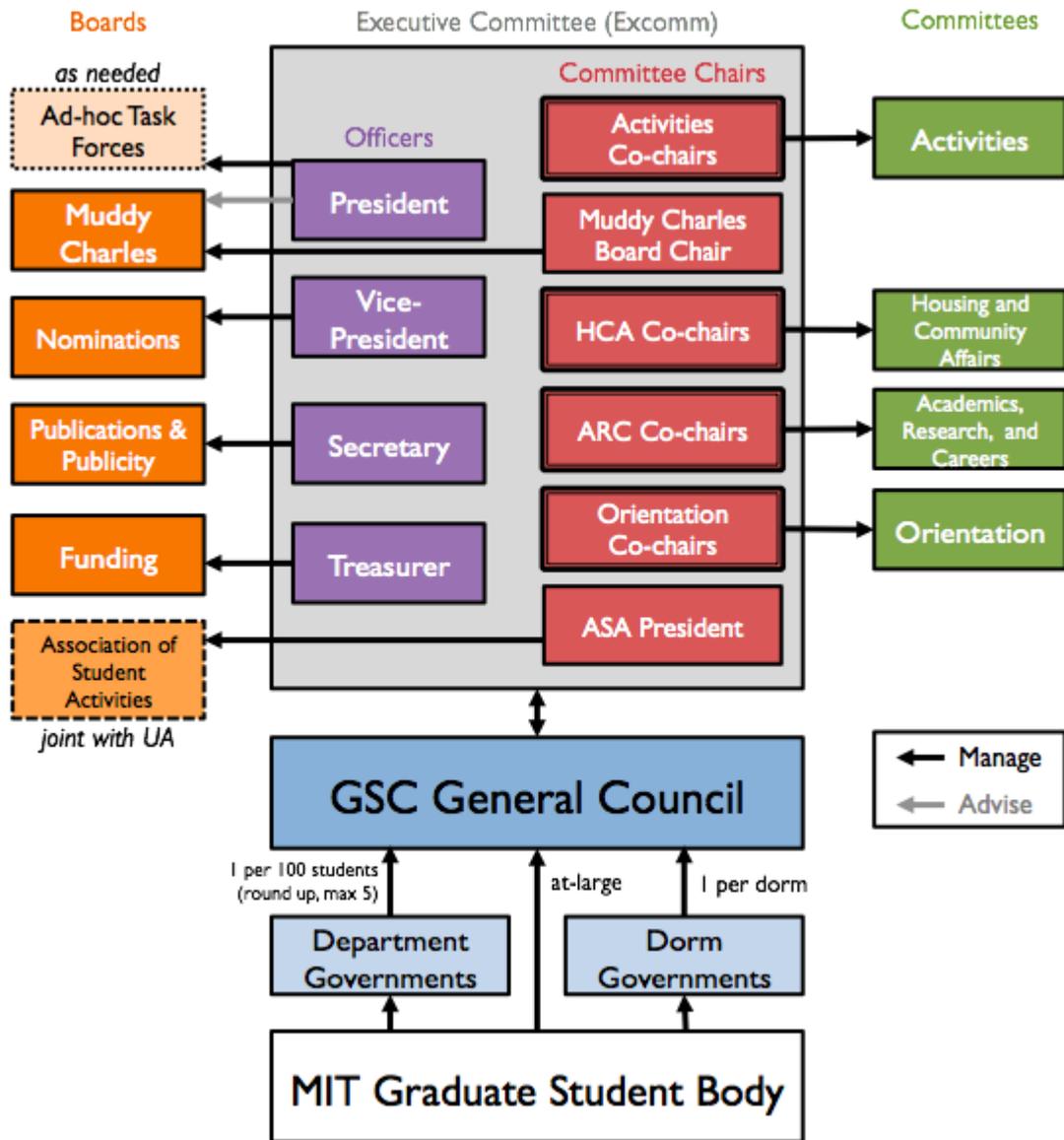
The GSC's main constituent bodies are the General Council and the Executive Committee. The General Council is the legislative and representative body of the GSC. Representatives on the GSC General Council are elected by several organizations within the Institute, including the graduate student populations or governments of each academic program and housing facility. There are a total of 82 General Council representative positions available, although not all of them are filled at all times. All affairs of the GSC are governed by a Constitution, Bylaws, and Resolutions introduced, considered, and approved by the General Council.

The GSC is administered by an Executive Committee (ExComm) which consists of the Officers and Chairs of standing committees, and most business is carried out by a set of committees, subcommittees, boards, and executive officers. There are currently 4 standing committees, 5 boards, and at least 12 subcommittees. Membership in all standing committees and subcommittees is open to any interested MIT graduate student. The membership of each board is specified in the GSC Bylaws.

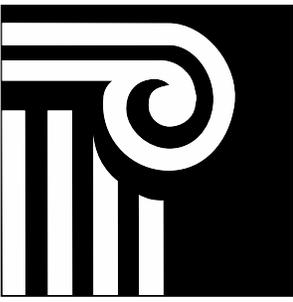
Figure 1 shows the current organizational structure of the GSC. More details on the constituent organizations can be found in the Representatives' Handbook recently distributed to all council representatives.



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**Figure 1.** Organizational chart of the core operations of the Graduate Student Council



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### **Definition of External Affairs**

External Affairs is broadly defined as any activity involving resources, including graduate student time and effort, directed outside the Institute. Under this definition, the potential scope of External Affairs includes:

- Relationships with relevant national associations, graduate student governments and associations at other universities, the scientific and academic community, the business community, and other organizations operating primarily or entirely outside the Institute;
- Political advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels of government through GSC activities or through partnerships with outside organizations;
- Community outreach, education, and service;
- Raising awareness about and encouraging participation in external affairs within the GSC and the general graduate student body;
- Public statements made by the GSC directly to relevant policymakers or organizations, in the media, or elsewhere.

### **External Affairs and the GSC Mission**

External affairs activities and capabilities are consistent with the stated purpose of the GSC. As an example, external affairs activities could contribute to accomplishing the first two missions laid out for GSC in Article II of the Constitution:

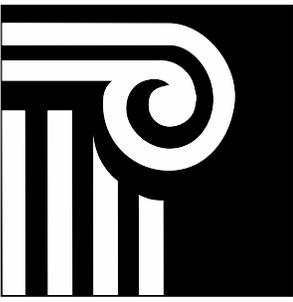
- To represent the graduate students on all matters pertaining to their general welfare as graduate students.
- To provide for and promote graduate student extra-curricular activities.

### **Statement on the Scope of Action Options**

The External Affairs Task Force was tasked to examine all feasible options that would consolidate, codify, or otherwise improve the external relationships, partnerships, and activities (“External Affairs,” as defined above) of the GSC. This report describes all options for action and re-organization that were considered and received support from at least one-half of the Task Force, regardless of whether these options partially or completely conflict with each other.

It is up to the Council, therefore, to determine a course of implementation that will include options presented in this report such that fundamental conflicts (e.g. modifying the charge to a committee or subcommittee that does not exist, or assigning the same responsibility to two different organizations) are avoided.

The options considered are divided into two broad categories: Organizational Changes, and Independent Actions without Organizational Changes.



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## **INDEPENDENT ACTIONS WITHOUT ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES**

### **Independent Option #1: *Advocacy Platform***

The General Council could develop and consider a resolution creating an "Advocacy Platform" to describe the generally agreed-upon positions of the General Council. An Advocacy Platform could take the form of a separate resolution and serve as a companion to the Legislative Platform to govern some non-legislative external activities. In this case, this platform would focus on issues pertaining to organizations other than governments. It could also be implemented as a reformatting and expansion of the Legislative Platform to express GSC positions on all topics of interest in a single resolution. In either case, such a platform might describe our positions on:

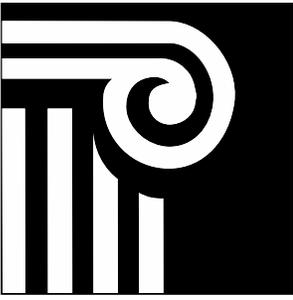
- The rights and working conditions of students at MIT and/or other universities.
- Protecting students at MIT and/or other universities from discrimination or other forms of mistreatment.
- Student debt, tuition, and other financial concerns.
- Diversity at universities and/or other organizations and institutions.
- Exercise of rights to free speech at universities and/or other organizations and institutions.
- Practices in business and organizational governance.
- Practices in research and technology development.
- Intellectual property.
- Hiring practices.
- Admissions practices at MIT and/or other universities.

### **Independent Option #2: *GSC Identity Documents***

The Executive Committee and members of the General Council could develop and maintain a small set of GSC "Identity Documents" that can be given to outside organizations as a way to introduce them to GSC. There might be different versions, like a one-page infographic and a longer report-format version. These documents might include the number and demographics of MIT grad students, vital statistics about the Institute, information about our academic programs and fields of study, information about GSC organization and activities, and information about GSC positions on various issues of public importance. The newly-released "GSC Council Representative Handbook" could serve as a starting point for these documents.

### **Independent Option #3: *GSC External Communications Guidelines***

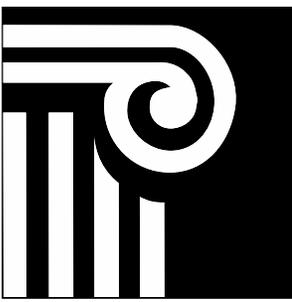
The General Council could develop and consider a resolution creating guidelines on how to carry out external communications, which would apply to all GSC officers, spokespeople, representatives, and other contributors. These guidelines might include standards of quality and recommendations on style for different types of communications. They might also indicate which GSC officers and contributors have primary responsibility for communications of particular types or regarding particular topics and might specify under which circumstances a GSC officer or contributor could speak for their organization within GSC, for the General Council, or for the MIT graduate student body.



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**Independent Option #4: *Build Partnerships from Within***

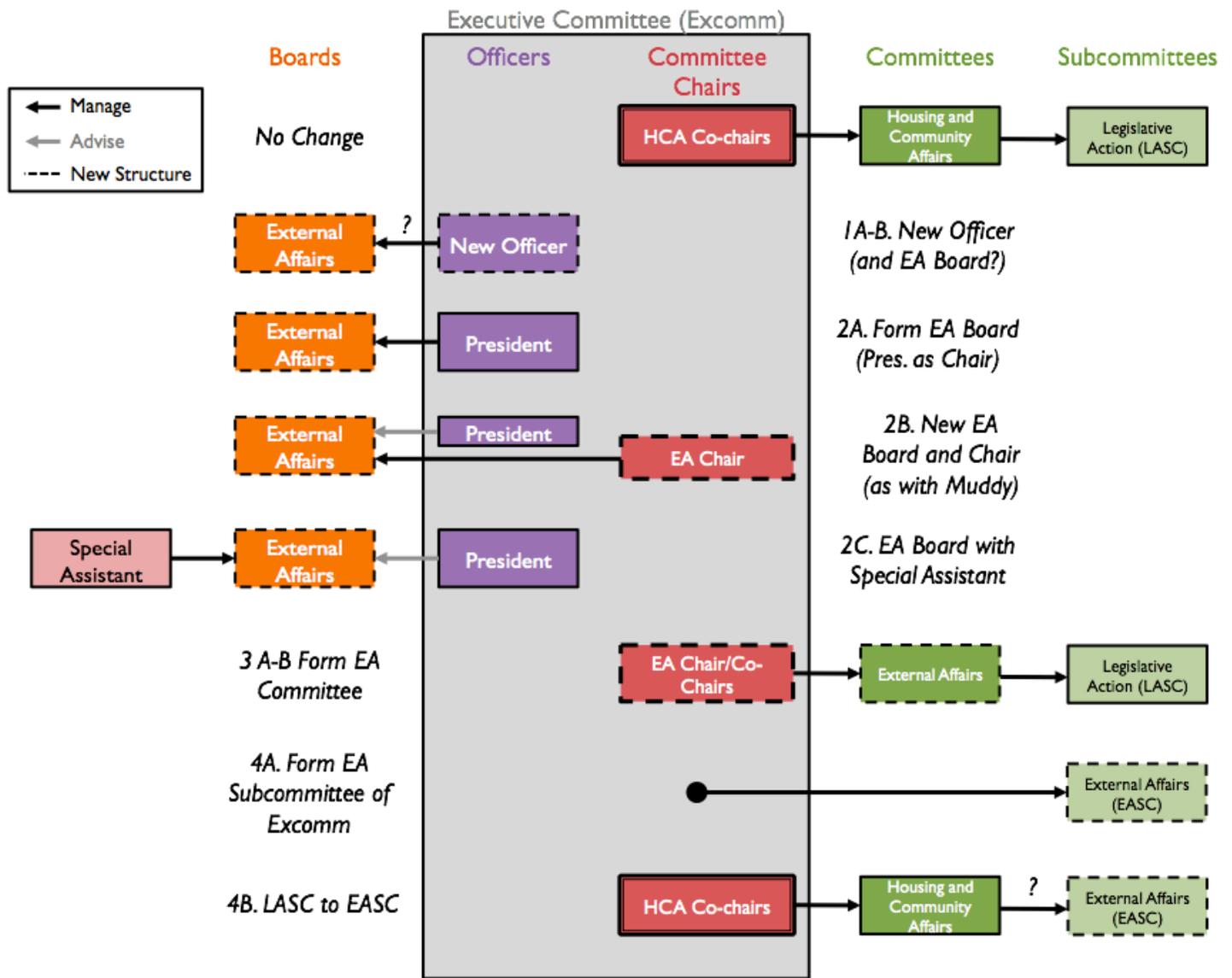
The Executive Committee or the General Council could form explicit partnerships, alliances, or liaison positions with relevant Institute offices and other student organizations. These connections could improve awareness on issues and activities for both the GSC and the partner organization and could help create opportunities for joint action and events.



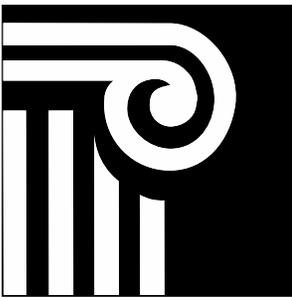
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**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES**

The Task Force was charged with reporting all potential forms of action that receive support from at least one-half of the members, even if those options conflict with each other. The Task Force has organized particular options that would implement similar organizational structures into Option Classes. Each particular Implementation Option should be read and considered separately. Implementation details like resolution text and mission statement text would require further deliberation and are not presented in this report. See Appendix C for examples of potential text that might be used to implement certain Organizational Change options.



**Figure 2.** Proposed changes to the GSC organizational chart as discussed in this report

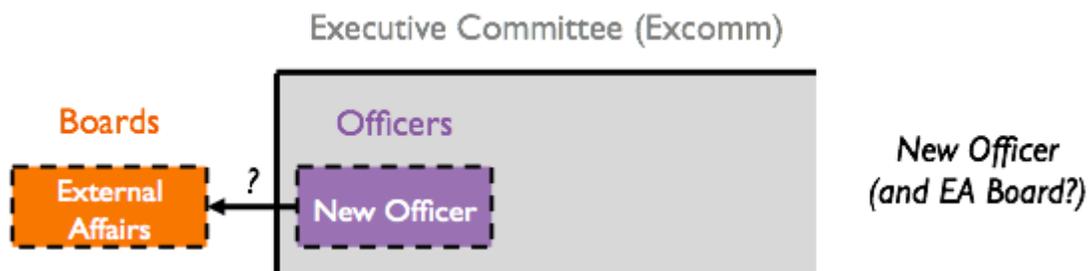


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**Option Class #1 - New Constitutional Officer**

Options within this class would all result in the creation of a new executive officer whose duties would include managing the external affairs of GSC; some implementation options would give this officer substantial additional responsibilities. Some of these options would additionally result in the creation of an External Affairs Board to be managed by the new officer.

All options within this Option Class would require an amendment to the GSC Constitution, which requires the passage of a General Council resolution with a ¾ vote and passage of a graduate student body referendum with a simple majority of votes. All options in this class would additionally require changes to the GSC Bylaws, which require the passage of a General Council resolution with a ⅔ vote. Holding a referendum and associated events and activities to inform the graduate student body about the nature of the proposed amendment could be logistically very demanding. The Task Force is not aware that any amendments to the GSC Constitution have been made since 1985.



**Figure OC-1.** Organization chart segment for Option Class #1

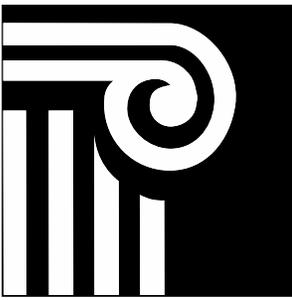
Implementation Option 1A: Stand-alone Office

This is the simplest of this class of options: create a new office without any associated board, committee, or other organizational structure. Note that the office title, “Foreign Minister”, which appears in various proposed text, is a placeholder, as the Task Force has not concluded what the best title for this office should actually be.

*Option 1A Implementation Actions*

1. Create an Office to manage External Affairs.
  - a. Amendment to the Constitution
    - i. Council Resolution, ¾ majority
    - ii. Referendum, simple majority of grad students voting in the referendum
  - b. Council Resolution, Bylaws change, ⅔ majority

See Appendix C for an example of possible text for changes to governing documents implementing this option.



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*Implementation Option 1B: New Officer Manages an External Affairs Board*

See further discussion on the properties and implementation options of an External Affairs Board (EAB) in Option Class #2 below.

*Option 1B Implementation Actions*

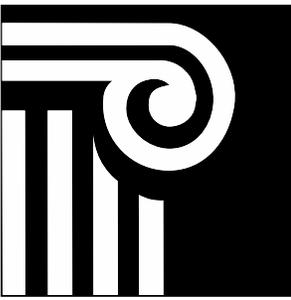
1. Create an Office to manage External Affairs and an External Affairs Board (EAB).
  - a. Amendment to the Constitution
    - i. Council Resolution,  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority
    - ii. Referendum, simple majority of votes cast
  - b. Council Resolution, Bylaws change,  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority
2. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs.
3. Consider creating a new LASC under the new EAB
  - a. Administrative action by the Foreign Minister.
4. Consider creating subcommittees reporting to the EAB.
  - a. Might include subcommittees on Federal Affairs, State and Local Issues, Political Events, Community Service, Media Relations, National Associations, or other topics.
  - b. Administrative action by the Foreign Minister.
5. Consider an update to the Legislative Platform removing or updating the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority

**Option Class #2 - External Affairs Board**

An External Affairs Board (EAB) would have some of the qualities of a standing committee and some of the qualities of the GSC boards, including the Muddy Charles Governing Board. It would have a managing officer or chair and a defined set of members, potentially including ex-officio members from other organizations within GSC or from other relevant student organizations. It might have provisions for open membership by any interested graduate students or semi-open membership by any interested council representatives. GSC boards are able to create subcommittees and appoint chairs for those subcommittees in the same way that standing committees do.

All options within this Option Class would require changes to the GSC Bylaws, which requires the passage of a General Council resolution with a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote. No options within this class would require an amendment to the Constitution.

It is possible that the missions assigned to an EAB would overlap with missions assigned to the Committee on Housing and Community Affairs (HCA), particularly in the areas of off-campus housing and local community advocacy. The mission statements of either the EAB or HCA could be written in a way that establishes a clear division of responsibilities. As an alternative, EAB and HCA could be given missions that deliberately overlap in these areas and they could coordinate their activities by making the HCA chairs ex-officio members of the EAB.



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Implementation Option 2A: President manages an External Affairs Board

The simplest way to create an EAB would establish the President as the sole managing officer of the board. This is consistent with the tradition in many types of organizations that the top official (President) has an “outward looking” role, while other officials (Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer) focus on business internal to the organization.



**Figure OC-2A.** Organization chart segment for EAB Option 2A

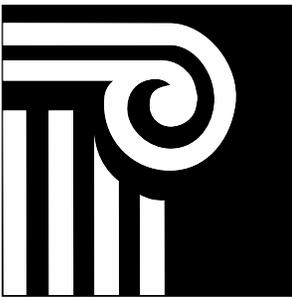
*Option 2A Implementation Actions*

1. Create an External Affairs Board (EAB).
  - a. Council Resolution, Bylaws change, 2/3 majority
2. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs.
3. Consider creating a new LASC under the new EAB
  - a. Administrative action by the President.
4. Consider creating subcommittees reporting to the EAB.
  - a. Might include subcommittees on Federal Affairs, State and Local Issues, Political Events, Community Service, Media Relations, National Associations, or other topics.
  - b. Administrative action by the President.
5. Consider an update to the Legislative Platform removing or updating the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority

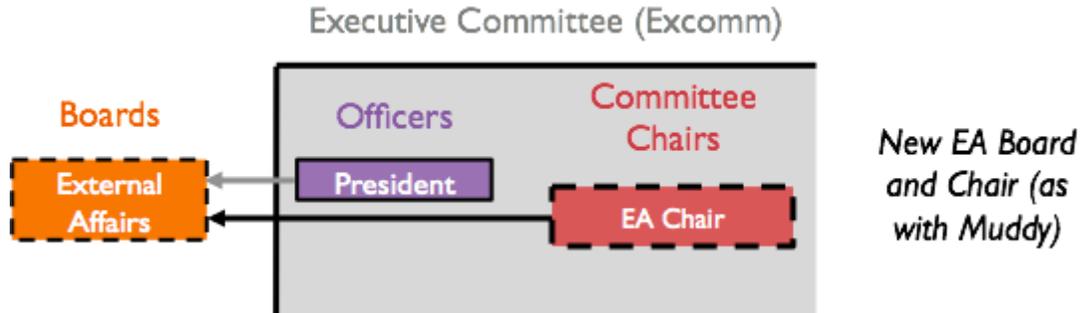
See Appendix C for an example of possible text amending the Bylaws and creating an External Affairs Board.

Implementation Option 2B: New ExComm Chair manages an EAB with the President

Under this option, a new Chair position would be created to manage the EAB jointly with the President. This Chair would be a voting member of ExComm. This leadership structure is deliberately analogous to the structure used by the Governing Board of the Muddy Charles Pub.



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**Figure OC-2B.** Organization chart segment for EAB Option 2B

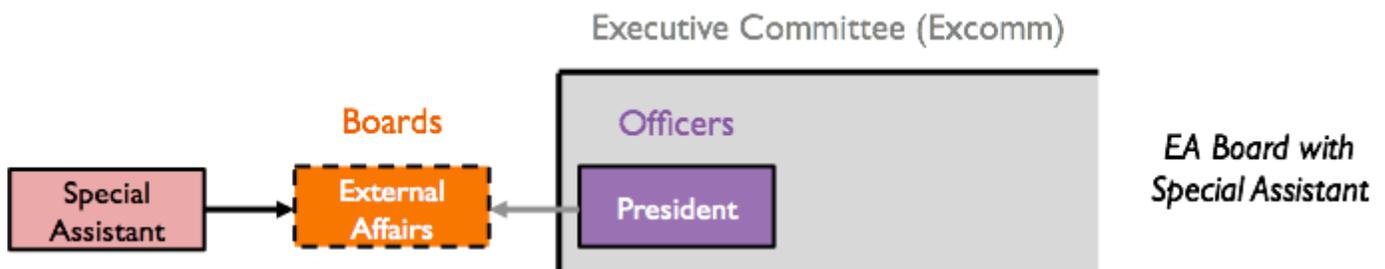
*Option 2B Implementation Actions*

1. Create an External Affairs Board (EAB) and External Affairs Chair.
  - a. Council Resolution, Bylaws change, 2/3 majority
2. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs.
3. Consider creating a new LASC under the new EAB.
  - a. Administrative action by the President or External Affairs Chair.
4. Consider creating additional subcommittees reporting to the EAB.
  - a. Administrative action by the President or External Affairs Chair.
5. Consider an update to the Legislative Platform removing or updating the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority

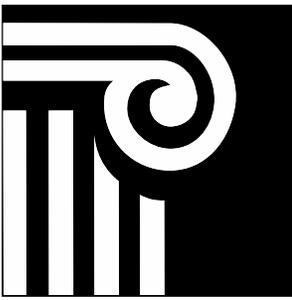
See Appendix C for an example of possible text for an amendment to the Bylaws creating an External Affairs Board (the Appendix C example is tailored to implement this option, 2B, with joint leadership by the President and an External Affairs Chair).

*Implementation Option 2C: Special Assistant manages an EAB with the President*

Under this option, the President would exercise the existing authority to create Special Assistant positions and would direct such a Special Assistant to help manage the EAB. Special Assistant positions created according to Bylaws I.A. would not hold a vote in either the General Council or on the Executive Committee.



**Figure OC-2C.** Organization chart segment for EAB Option 2C



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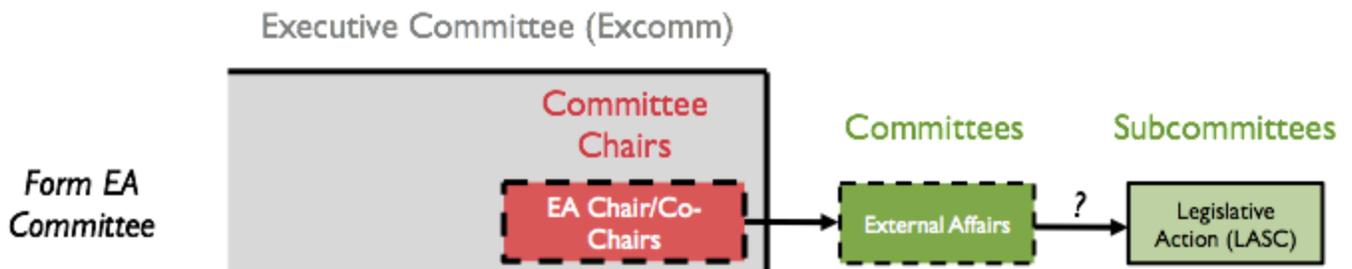
If this option were to be pursued, the President and General Council would be advised to consider explicitly granting the Special Assistant in Charge of the EAB the administrative authorities necessary to manage a board, such as the administrative authority to create and disband EAB subcommittees.

*Option 2C Implementation Actions*

1. Create an External Affairs Board (EAB).
  - a. Council Resolution, Bylaws change, 2/3 majority
2. Create a Special Assistant position directed to manage the EAB.
  - a. Administrative Action by the President
  - b. Council Resolution, simple majority
3. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs.
4. Consider creating a new LASC under the new EAB.
  - a. Administrative action by the President or Special Assistant.
5. Consider creating additional subcommittees reporting to the EAB.
  - a. Administrative action by the President or Special Assistant.
6. Consider an update to the Legislative Platform removing or updating the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority

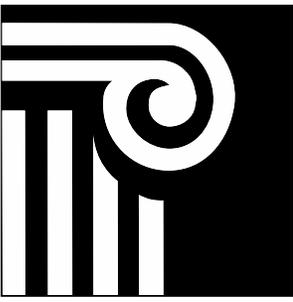
**Option Class #3 - External Affairs Committee**

An External Affairs Committee (EAC) would be a standing committee equivalent in structure and powers to the other four standing committees. It would follow the standard practice of the other committees in being led by 2 chairs, who would be elected by members of the committee each year. These chairs would be voting members of the Executive Committee.



**Figure OC-3.** Organization chart segment for Option Class #3

It is possible that the missions assigned to an EAC would overlap with missions assigned to HCA. The mission statements of either the EAC or HCA could be amended to establish a clear division of responsibilities. There is no current precedent for committees to explicitly share responsibility for particular missions, for chairs of one committee to be ex-officio members of another (indeed, there is no precedent for committees to have ex-officio members at all), or for committees to have shared subcommittees. Therefore, the Task Force proposes two



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resolutions to the question of mission overlap: Restrict EAC to advocacy activities not already undertaken by HCA, or reduce the scope of HCA activities to remove most of that committee's local advocacy responsibilities.

*Implementation Option 3A*

This option would limit EAC to only those local advocacy activities that are not already undertaken by HCA. This option could further include text in the EAC mission statement obligating the EAC chairs to consult with the HCA chairs to stay up-to-date on HCA local advocacy activities and defer to HCA on such activities.

*Option 3A Implementation Actions*

1. Create an External Affairs Committee.
  - a. Council Resolution, Bylaws change,  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority
2. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs.
3. Consider creating a new LASC under the new EAC
  - a. Administrative action by new EAC chairs.
4. Consider an update to the Legislative Platform removing or updating the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority

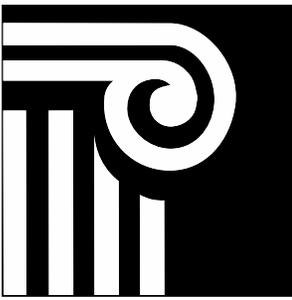
*Implementation Option 3B*

This option would reduce the scope of HCA off-campus advocacy responsibilities to issues concerning off-campus housing and transportation only. This reduction in scope could be reflected in a change in the name of the committee to Committee on Housing and Campus Affairs (HCA).

*Option 3B Implementation Actions*

1. Create an External Affairs Committee.
  - a. All same as Option 3A above
2. Amend the description of the Housing and Community Affairs Committee
  - a. Change the title to "Housing and Campus Affairs"
3. Amend the mission description to focus on housing and campus affairs with a small number of exceptions.
  - a. Carve out transportation, and possibly a couple other responsibilities that aren't technically on campus, to remain HCA responsibilities.
  - b. Council Resolution, Bylaws change,  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority

See Appendix C for example modifications to governing documents for this Option Class.



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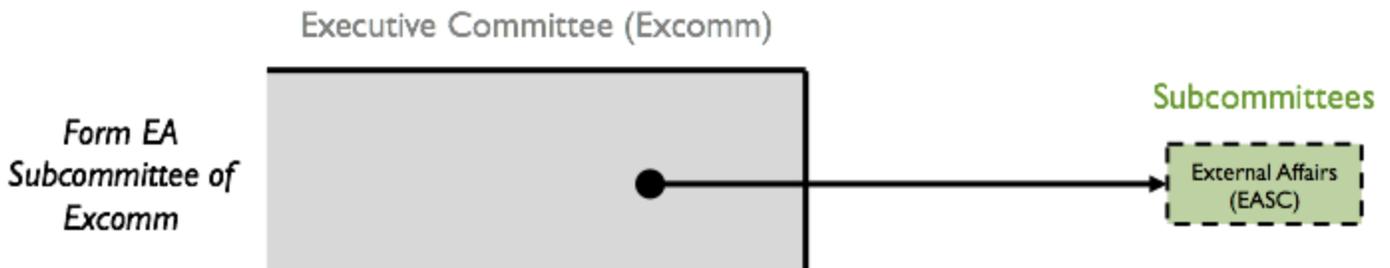
**Option Class #4 - External Affairs Subcommittee**

An External Affairs Subcommittee (EASC) would be created according to Bylaws Article II, Section B. The creation of a subcommittee is an administrative action carried out by the chair(s) of a standing committee or board that will oversee the subcommittee, unless otherwise specified in the bylaws, and the subcommittee technically ceases to exist at the end of the term of the chair(s) that created it. The purpose of a subcommittee may or may not be documented when it is created at the discretion of the chair(s).

The Legislative Action Subcommittee (LASC) is unique in being the only subcommittee with its name and mission statement defined in a General Council resolution (the Legislative Platform, most recently updated by 61.gsc.8.1 passed in February 2015). The Legislative Platform does not specify which standing committee should oversee LASC, although it does require that LASC must exist (2nd “Whereas” clause of 61.gsc.8.1) and specifies that LASC “actively promotes the interests of graduate students”.

Implementation Option 4A

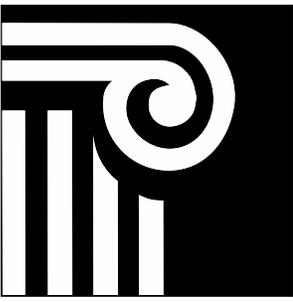
This option would dissolve the current LASC housed by HCA and re-form EASC as a subcommittee of ExComm. EASC would have a broader external affairs mission and more specific authorities to speak publicly on behalf of the GSC and the graduate student body, which might be defined either in a new EASC mission statement or in some combination of an Advocacy Platform and GSC Communication Guidelines (see the section on Independent Actions above). In this case, EASC would report primarily to the President (as the chair of ExComm).



**Figure OC-4A.** Organization chart segment for EASC Option 4A

*Option 4A Implementation Actions*

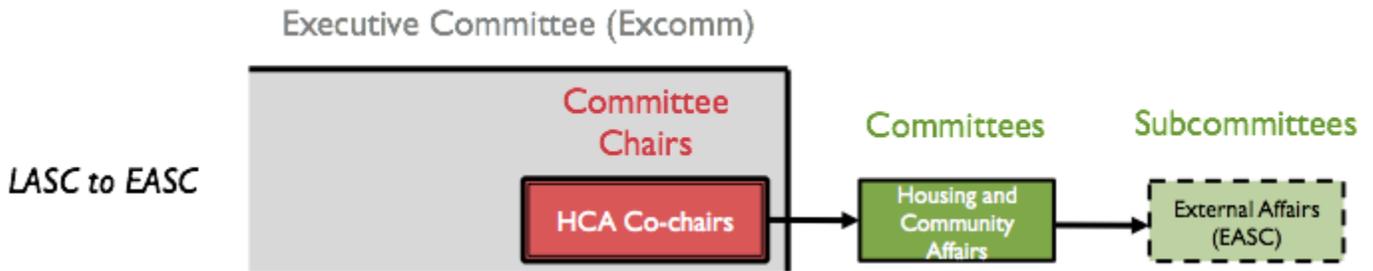
1. Create an EASC housed by ExComm and reporting to the President.
  - a. Administrative action by the President
2. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs
3. Update the Legislative Platform to remove the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority
4. Define a mission statement for EASC in General Council.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority



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Implementation Option 4B

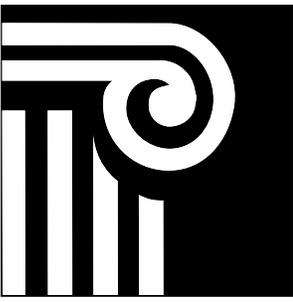
This option would rename and rescope LASC to form an EASC. EASC would have a broader external affairs mission and more specific authorities to speak publicly on behalf of the GSC and the graduate student body, but its structure would be the same as LASC.



**Figure OC-4B.** Organization chart segment for EASC Option 4B

*Option 4B* Implementation Actions

1. Disband the current LASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs
2. Form the new EASC.
  - a. Administrative action by the HCA chairs
3. Update the Legislative Platform to remove the LASC mission statement.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority
4. Define a mission statement for EASC in General Council.
  - a. Council Resolution, simple majority



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## EVALUATION METRICS

When evaluating the options proposed in this Report, the Council may consider:

### **Voice of the GSC and the graduate student body**

- Who can speak on behalf of the GSC or the wider graduate student body?
- Enabling a fast response to developments outside the Institute while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability.
- Structural changes that would promote close ties between all parties that may speak on behalf of the GSC (potentially including the Officers, ExComm, and the group(s) carrying out External Affairs).

### **Optimal allocation of resources**

- Manpower: Would an expansion in scope draw new GSC members or reorganize existing GSC members?
- If recruitment is a concern, should we prioritize GSC activities that reflect the current interest of participants, long-standing GSC initiatives, or some other measure of value to the graduate student body?
- Budget: How would any changes affect GSC budget allocations?

### **Optimal operation and structure**

- How do the changes affect the GSC's primary mission of graduate student welfare?
- Efficiency: Defining clear responsibilities of entities within the GSC can help avoid redundancy or ambiguity.
- How can the structure of external affairs promote interactions with other parts of the GSC (ExComm, Officers, HCA)?
- How would the addition of one or more members to ExComm affect other GSC operations? What would be the ideal role of an additional member of the Officer team or of ExComm?
- Long-term impact: Many of these options would involve changes to the GSC Bylaws. Will changes made now still benefit the GSC in 10 years?

## CONCLUSION

The Task Force recommends that the General Council consider all of the independent actions presented and identify at least one organizational change option for possible implementation in the spring semester.

The Task Force would like to thank all of the Institute officers, current and past GSC contributors, and student leaders outside MIT that provided their thoughts and feedback.

Council members interested to draft resolutions implementing any of the options presented in this report are strongly advised to read the current Legislative Platform, the GSC Constitution and Bylaws, and the Appendices to this report.