

Final Report of the Future of Diversity and Inclusion Working Group

4 April 2018

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) serves to represent graduate students on all matters pertaining to their general welfare. The Future of Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (the Working Group, hereafter), was convened in December 2017 in order to develop proposals to enact the necessary changes so that the GSC can better support sustained engagement on diversity and inclusion (D&I) for many years to come. The recommendations of the Working Group and summaries of its meetings are below.

In delivering this final report to the Council, the Working Group expresses immense appreciation for all leaders and advocates who have previously worked to make the GSC more inclusive and representative of the diverse student body at MIT. All recommendations below are in the spirit of the report from the [2006 GSC Task Force on Diversity](#), which issued the following preamble to its own recommendations (many of which have not been achieved in the past twelve years):

“Diversity characterizes a community. It is not a state or end goal. Cultivating a diverse community includes promoting tolerance and respect, recognizing and embracing the interdependence of individuals and groups, and actively challenging divisive and discriminatory threats. A more diverse MIT community is better able to achieve MIT's mission of advancing knowledge and educating students to best serve the nation and the world.”

All members of the Working Group acknowledge the work that must still be done—on Council, in Committees and Subcommittees, and in all conversations between GSC leadership and other stakeholders on campus—to realize the vision motivating that 2006 report. This intention for a more just, diverse, and inclusive community at MIT will only be realized if we all bring our own energy to bear on the opportunities outlined in both this report and the 2006 Task Force report. The Working Group believes that the GSC can make meaningful action in the very near future to improve the experience of all current and future members of our shared MIT community.

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Recommendations of the Working Group

I. Create a Standing Committee or Board to carry out diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives.

In order to successfully fulfill its mission of representing all graduate students at MIT, the GSC must show firm commitment to D&I in all of its activities, advocacy efforts, and statements. To this effect, the working group strongly commends the work that the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee (DIS) has done since its formation in Spring 2017.

In looking toward the future, the Working Group strongly recommends building on the success of DIS by creating a high-profile, permanent structure within the GSC to continue the progress made in 2017-2018 on D&I. The Working Group strongly recommends explicitly incorporating a commitment to D&I into the Bylaws of the GSC by creating a Standing Committee or Board to carry on the current and evolving mission of DIS.

DIS was formed in April 2017 as a Subcommittee of the Housing and Community Affairs Committee (HCA). HCA members of 2017-2018 have discussed evaluating the structure of the committee at the beginning of the 2018-2019 Council Leadership Year, and the Working Group sees this process as a unique opportunity for DIS to work with HCA to determine how to handle cross-cutting issues in the future (such as housing and stipends as they apply to D&I). We strongly recommend that the future of D&I in GSC is included as a high priority in all of HCA's strategic planning processes. As this dialogue continues, we expect that HCA may choose to change its operating procedures, internal structure, and/or mission; some options are outlined below. Regardless of HCA's final form, ongoing conversations between HCA and DIS should lead to joint determination of the timeline and process for creation of a permanent Standing Committee or Board focused on D&I.

The exact process to create a D&I Committee or Board will depend on the future needs of HCA and DIS. The process may be straightforward (immediate amendment to the GSC Bylaws) or creative (multi-year process ending in splitting HCA into multiple cooperating Boards or other component organizations), and both HCA and DIS will need to actively participate in those deliberations. However, the desire for flexibility in the timeline and form of a permanent D&I structure should not be seen as equivocation: the Working Group **firmly reiterates** the top recommendation of the [2006 GSC Task Force on Diversity](#), to create a Standing Committee or Board to promote D&I.

Next steps:

- Pass [64.gsc.7](#) (Appendix F), introduced March 2018, the resolution appointing the DIS Chair to GSC's Executive Committee (ExComm, hereafter).
 - This is a step in the right direction and the quickest means of getting D&I "at the table" of the highest-level decisions made by GSC.

- This voice on ExComm will help propel the reform process (outlined in these recommendations) to ensure that programs to promote D&I remain a permanent part of the GSC portfolio.
- Note that the Working Group recommends repealing 64.gsc.7 if and only if a reorganization process (such as those outlined below) results in the creation of one or more Committee or Board Chairs whose portfolio consists of D&I initiatives and advocacy.
- HCA should consider early in the 2018-2019 Council Leadership Year whether it wants to pursue reorganization or strategic planning of its structure and portfolio of issues.
 - **If yes:** HCA should seek input from all of its Subcommittees, including DIS, on how to best and explicitly incorporate D&I programs in their reorganization.
 - Any such reorganization should codify D&I programs and initiatives in GSC Bylaws and HCA operating guidelines as a permanent priority and ensure that at least one member representing the new HCA structure on ExComm is a D&I advocate. Possible reforms under this category include:
 - Designating an HCA Chair as a “Diversity & Inclusion HCA Co-Chair” in the HCA operating procedures
 - Other potential designations for Co-Chairs including “Housing”, “Campus/Community Affairs”, “Quality of Life”, etc. with the intention of making Chair recruitment easier with a well-defined portfolio for each Chair.
 - This position would be ended if a separate D&I Committee/Board were created, possibly being replaced by an *ex officio* membership position on HCA.
 - Planning for gradual separation (~1-2 years) of HCA into Boards with separate functions (such as a Housing Board, a Diversity & Inclusion Board, and a Campus Affairs Board) that cooperate on cross-cutting issues.
 - Spin-off DIS as a Standing Committee/Board in the 2018-2019 Council Leadership Year (following the process described in the “if no” section below).
 - **If no:** Create a Diversity & Inclusion Committee or Board during the 2018-2019 Council Leadership Year by amending the GSC Bylaws.
 - The process to seek DIS and Council input on the design (perhaps with a Council Task Force) of this Committee/Board should begin immediately after the decision not to pursue larger reorganization of HCA.
 - The amendment to the GSC Bylaws forming a Committee or Board can be largely modeled off the existing [DIS Bylaws](#), created by the Subcommittee in August 2017.

II. Develop a Community Values Platform and Statement Process.

As the representative voice of all graduate students at MIT, the GSC has the capability & mandate to advocate for the needs of various student communities to a large number of internal (e.g. MIT Administration) and external (e.g. state and federal representatives) parties. In order for GSC's advocacy on D&I to be consistent in time regardless of the beliefs of any single leadership team, the GSC needs to codify an institutional "moral compass" to guide its efforts. The GSC will need to make clear to all MIT graduate students how it advocates for them, and the GSC needs to provide the venue in which the advocacy priorities are created and adjusted in the future.

As part of the GSC's advocacy and communication on D&I, it is important that the GSC has the capability to articulate its values and positions, including by writing statements. To this end, the Working Group recommends that the GSC develop a community values platform and a process for writing and approving related statements. This would facilitate communication of the GSC's support for D&I and articulation of the GSC's positions on relevant policy or events.

The Working Group notes that there has been recent interest across the GSC's Committees and Boards in the ability to release statements that fall within the range of their responsibilities. One model that already exists is the External Affairs Board's (EAB) statement writing process (which involves developing and maintaining the GSC's [Policy Platform](#) and writing statements further articulating GSC positions on specific issues and legislation). While some statements related to D&I have gone through EAB's process this past year, statements on D&I issues do not always fall under the purview of EAB and current policies do not clarify how these statements should move forward in a timely manner. Parallel to this working group, ExComm has met to discuss options for operating procedures that would outline how Committees and Boards can write statements, and ExComm should consult with DIS to understand their needs as thoroughly as possible early in the 2018-2019 Council Leadership Year.

Next steps toward developing a D&I statement approval process:

- We recommend an approach in which DIS initially writes and approves statements and a review process can be initiated by appropriate GSC leadership when additional input is needed.
- The statement approval process should clearly specify:
 - Who makes decisions or votes on statement release and publication.
 - What information about the statement and issue must be provided as part of the approval process.
- We strongly recommend that the statement approval procedure ExComm is currently drafting be extended to DIS.
- ExComm should continue this process in consultation with DIS.

In the current process to make statements through EAB, the General Council has established a Policy Platform that outlines general policy positions and principles of the GSC, which then motivate statements and advocacy on specific external affairs issues. The Policy Platform is

regularly updated, reflecting the evolving priorities and scope of EAB's advocacy efforts. Similarly, a platform (the Community Values Platform, hereafter) for D&I issues would clearly outline both principles and positions of the GSC, providing a basis for D&I statements, and giving the General Council a structured mechanism to provide input. The Community Values Platform should be its own separate document or a section within a larger platform document.

Next steps toward developing a Community Values Platform:

- A Community Values Platform should outline the GSC's values and positions relating to D&I. The Community Values Platform should include two parts: a preamble outlining the values of the GSC and a list of specific policies the GSC does or does not support. In particular, the preamble will serve as the GSC's statement on diversity, which to our knowledge has not been updated or reaffirmed since 2006.
- This platform would be drafted by DIS and then presented as a resolution to Council for approval. The 2006 Task Force Report would be a good starting point (Appendix D).
- The development of this platform should include a process for gathering feedback from the student body on which values, topics, and positions should be included.
- The platform and preamble should be drafted as soon as possible by DIS, with periodic extensive review of the platform (as with the current Policy Platform).

III. Improve Representation on GSC.

Currently, representation on Council is given to departments, interdepartmental degree-granting programs, housing groups, committee chairs, officers, and At-Large members (GSC Constitution III.2.1).

At-Large membership is a mechanism by which the GSC can ensure all student voices are heard, including those whose interests and issues are not necessarily represented by representatives from departments or housing groups. The GSC Constitution explicitly states the number of At-Large membership positions is "5". The "hardcoding" of this number in the Constitution was a mistake, particularly given that the total membership of Council has increased substantially over the years. We strongly encourage striking the number entirely in favor of deciding the number, or formula by which to calculate the number, in the GSC Bylaws.

The current 5 At-Large membership positions are allocated to "Graduate Women At Large", "Graduate Diversity At Large", "Graduate Families At Large", "Thirsty Ear Executive Committee At Large", and "Graduate Student At Large". Council should consider the potential benefits of designating additional At Large positions focused on D&I advocacy, with a future goal (after expansion of the number of positions) of designating positions that reflect all the D&I constituencies of DIS. Currently there are five constituencies: LGBTQ+, Underrepresented Minorities (URM), International, Religious Life, Women (GWAMIT) - each with their own Constituency Representative on DIS, though the number and nature of these constituencies may change in the future. This is one significant way to better ensure student voices are heard

and represented in the GSC, particularly on issues that affect currently underrepresented populations within the graduate student body or on topics that center more on identity-based constituencies rather than department-based or housing-based ones.

In addition to the benefits of D&I-focused At-Large positions, D&I issues pertaining to specific departments can be more effectively raised to the GSC when Council Representatives can receive support and information from students in their own department. Representation for departmental Council Representative seats is better determined by department governments (Bylaws III.C.1) than by self-nominating graduate students (Bylaws III.C.3). Self-nominated representatives face hurdles exchanging information between the department and the GSC without the support of a department government. In recognition of the powerful role of departmental student governments, we strongly support all efforts to strengthen the capabilities of these governments to develop programs and advocacy strategies for their students. Receiving recognition from the Association of Student Activities (ASA) provides student governments with numerous benefits, including room reservations and the ability to receive funding from GSC Funding Board. Therefore, we also strongly encourage departmental student governments to become recognized by ASA.

Recently, delays and procedural hurdles in the ASA recognition process have caused frustration and mistrust on the part of many new departmental student governments (e.g. EAPS, HASTS, and HST). Anecdotal accounts by other non-ASA-recognized departmental student governments (e.g. ChemE) point toward “red tape” and restrictions that make little sense for student governments (even if they are sensible for most other student groups) as reasons for abandoning plans for ASA recognition. The current ASA recognition practices place a significant burden on both long-standing and new departmental student governments who wish to gain the privileges of ASA recognition. Therefore, in order to better serve these key components of departmental representation on Council, the GSC should exercise its powers as a convening group of ASA (along with the Undergraduate Association; UA) to reform recognition of graduate student departmental governments. This could be done either by recommending or mandating changes to ASA recognition procedures, or potentially by creating a new category of student group to meet the specific needs of grad student departmental groups.

Departmental governments are exceedingly important in providing representation to the GSC General Council, but also help arrange for departmental participation in other initiatives, such as the Department and Classroom Inclusion (DCI) Initiative and its Conduit Assembly. These new DIS initiatives have been enormously successful this year. Departmental governments could better support DCI in future years by selecting Conduits in a democratic fashion, exchanging information and reports with Conduits in an organized and productive manner, and supporting any activities within the department that promote D&I.

Next Steps:

- Reallocate some of the At-Large (Constitution III.2.1.3) Council Representative positions to improve the diversity of the voting membership of the Council.

- Reallocation is accomplished through a Council resolution passed by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote (Constitution III.2.1.3).
- The Working Group recognizes that any reallocation of At-Large seats while the Constitutional limit of five seats remains in place necessitates a “zero-sum” discussion: any new designation must replace a current designation. Therefore, until expansion of the number of At-Large positions occurs, we recommend designating the current “Minorities At Large” and unspecified “Graduate Student At Large” positions as “Diversity and Inclusion At-Large” positions.
- Ideally and eventually, there should be an At-Large Council Representative for each of the constituencies represented on DIS. Currently, those are: LGBTQ+, URM (underrepresented minorities), International, Religious Life, Women (GWAMIT).
- Expand the number of At-Large members on Council (Constitution III.2.1.3) to allow for additional Council Representatives dedicated to targeted constituencies as deemed fit by the Council.
 - Pass a constitutional amendment (Constitution Article X) where the number “5” is removed from Constitution III.2.1.3 and instead references the Bylaws for the number (fixed or formulaic) of At-Large positions.
 - As passing a constitutional amendment would be a substantial endeavor, it would make sense to convene a Constitutional Amendment Task Force in the to identify and develop all Constitutional text that should be considered for amendment in any area, not just At-Large membership (and potentially develop corresponding Bylaws updates if needed).
 - More broadly, there are possible benefits to considering changes to the department-based representation model. For example, is it possible to broaden Council membership to include cultural groups supported by Funding Board to bring diversity and additional perspectives to General Council Meetings and to the GSC in general.
- Improve & diversify representation in Council and other GSC activities (e.g. The Conduit Assembly; description in Section IV) by encouraging the formation of department student governments which can hold elections for various kinds of officers and representatives.
 - **Strongly push** ASA to modify group recognition criteria so that graduate student department groups can be recognized more easily, leading to stronger accountability of Council Representatives to their departmental constituents
 - Encourage the UA to join us in the effort - stronger graduate departments benefit undergraduates too.
 - If necessary, the GSC should consider a resolution to amend the GSC Bylaws concerning ASA or a resolution mandating changes in ASA practices. (ASA is a joint Committee of the GSC and UA, and therefore its Bylaws are part of both the GSC and UA Bylaws).

IV. Amplify underrepresented voices in GSC advocacy

GSC should amplify underrepresented voices in its advocacy efforts, especially through collaboration with student groups. The following recommendations outline how the GSC can strengthen connections with student leaders and better represent all graduate student voices.

Next steps:

- Hold roundtable discussions on relevant topics periodically throughout the year that include GSC leadership and student group leaders, so that GSC leadership can assist in raising issues to MIT's Administration.
- Develop better and more sustained relationships with affinity groups on campus by further developing the role of Constituency Representatives (described in Section III) in DIS in terms of communicating with student groups. One key piece will be building best practices for Constituency Representative outreach and accountability. For example, Constituency Representatives can explore their role in assembling student groups relating to their constituency, possibly in collaboration with Institute resources or offices, especially when there is not already a centralized assembly in place.
 - Example 1: GWAMIT currently coordinates with women's groups across departments and selects the women's Constituency Representative.
 - Example 2: the current Religious Life Constituency Representative is working to assemble religious life groups with assistance from the Chaplains.
- Serve as a link between different departments so that students can connect, collaborate, and share best practices on D&I issues.
 - DIS's Conduit Assembly is making great progress; we should ensure that it has sufficient and sustainable financial and volunteer support in the future.
 - Conduit Assembly is an initiative in which D&I-focused representatives from each academic department meet ~2 times a semester to share best practices, common challenges, and advocacy strategies
 - Many decisions related to D&I are made department by department, especially in areas of admissions, funding, and student support resources. Thus, D&I advocacy at the department-level is an important component of furthering D&I efforts Institute-wide.
- See also Section on D&I Representation on Council (subsection relating to ASA and the student group recognition process).

V. Strengthen GSC practices for promoting diversity and inclusion

While it is important that D&I initiatives be spearheaded by DIS or its successor Committee or Board, it is critical that the whole GSC takes up D&I initiatives and implements them in its policies. To help coordinate these efforts across the GSC, two specific actions should be taken:

annual communication coordinating action and monthly D&I initiative updates at the GSC General Council Meetings to inform the greater graduate community.

In addition, there is room for more coordination with the Institute on D&I initiatives. The GSC engages with Institute leadership in many ways, including advocacy with MIT's administration and bringing the graduate student perspective to decisions made on Institute committees. These recommendations are intended to ensure that inclusion and equity are consistently included as key components of the advocacy efforts that the GSC has with MIT administration and faculty leadership.

Next Steps:

- Annually (at the ExComm Retreat or dedicated ExComm Meeting), Committees and D&I should communicate with each other and set up a system for intentional collaboration during the rest of the year.
 - Structures to be discussed include the following possibilities, which should be considered **in addition** to any structural changes described in Section I:
 - Amending the committee operating procedures for *ex officio* D&I voting members on other Committees
 - Informal D&I liaisons who are invited to attend all meeting to identify collaboration opportunities in real time
 - Appointing At-Large positions on Committees/Boards with the intention of increasing the diversity of viewpoints and experiences on the Committee
- Include updates from DIS at General Council Meetings
 - This began in March 2018, and should continue into the future
- Add D&I expertise to the GSC leadership so that D&I issues can be better raised in GSC's communications with MIT's Administration
 - See Section I for recommendations related to D&I Representation on the Executive Committee and formation of a Standing Committee/Board
- Hold assemblies for graduate students serving on [Institute-wide Presidential and Faculty Committees](#) ("Institute Representatives" or "Institute Reps") to gather more diverse perspectives, facilitated by the GSC Vice President (who chairs the Nominations Board that appoints Institute Reps)
 - Allocate funding in next year's budget so that the GSC Vice President can assemble Institute Reps (and possibly additional students) periodically to gather feedback on relevant issues that are being deliberated on Institute Committees

Summarized Working Group Meeting Findings/Research

Included with this report are Appendices that provide additional context for the recommendations made in the report and the main areas of opportunity identified in a series of meetings/interviews from Fall 2017.

Appendix A is an early bullet-point list of the possible recommendations considered by the Working Group. This document was later expanded through the use of narrative-based introductory paragraphs to become the Recommendations section of the report, above. Many of the ideas introduced in Appendix A were further refined or removed from consideration after a round of feedback from Working Group contributors and members of ExComm.

Appendix B is a collection of the distilled meeting summaries from our series of five meetings during IAP, on the following topics related to D&I:

- Advocacy and Statements
- Communication and Community
- Relationships with Student Groups
- Relationships within GSC
- Relationships with MIT Administration

Appendix C is a distilled list of all of the issues and opportunities raised from a series of one-on-one and small group interviews conducted throughout Fall 2017. Arolyn and Michael met with all inaugural members of DIS and members of ExComm interested in advancing D&I projects in the 2017-2018 Council Leadership Year. A full “transcript” of all these meetings will remain available to anyone when permanently transferred from the Working Group Google Drive folder to the GSC Archives (the GSC Secretary, gsc-secretary@mit.edu can assist with access to the Archives).

Appendix D is the 2006 Final Report from the GSC Task Force on Diversity, which is referenced in this report.

Appendix E contains the resolutions introduced following delivery of the 2006 GSC Task Force on Diversity Final Report, and supporting materials from meetings of the Council:

- 53.gsc.1.2: Creation of Ad Hoc Diversity Committee
- 2006-2007 Diversity Committee One-Year Plan
- 53.gsc.8.2: Creation of a Diversity Committee (Bylaws Amendment)
- Council meeting minutes for discussion of 53.gsc.8.2, in which the 53.gsc.8.2 was defeated following a motion for a secret/non-recorded vote

Appendix F is Resolution 64.gsc.7 to Appoint the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee Chair to the Executive Committee, introduced in March 2018