This meeting consisted of a discussion of the 2021 GSC Stipend Working Group’s approach to the work so far. This was not a formal proposal, but a discussion of the framework and principles. Jonathan Behrens and Nick Allen were there as GSC-HCA leaders and made a presentation.

This year’s Stipend Working Group will continue on the tradition of the past two years of recommending a base stipend increase alongside targeted changes to funding structures to address financial pains and inequities.

We addressed first the idea of implementing the Yellow Ribbon Program for veterans in all graduate programs at MIT. Prior investigations into the matter led by the OVC determined that it would presently apply to only a small number of students since participants need to be utilizing 100% of GI Bill benefits, and that many of the eligible students are Sloan master’s students (Sloan already participates in the program). However, there’s broad agreement that we should fully implement the program due to its benefits for participants. Finally, it may serve to make MIT more attractive to veterans.

We further discussed the graduate stipend framework of “cost of living plus a buffer” and agreed that we should not make any proclamations about what graduate students’ discretionary money is meant to be used for. It’s worth considering eliminating the “threshold - 10%” option for SM/PhD stipends (but not necessarily for terminal master’s programs).

We also discussed MIT’s financial responsibility to graduate students’ dependent spouses and children. As with our peer institutions, MIT graduate student stipends have previously been designed to support a single adult; does MIT have a financial obligation to dependent spouses who cannot work? Should it?

Finally, we discussed the issue of rising housing costs in terms of the strategic threat it poses to MIT. Graduate schools in the Boston area, like those in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, exist in housing markets being eaten alive by the rising demands of industry combined with very little new construction. Some grad students can find housing options more to their liking further “out of town,” i.e. in Medford, but others for occupational reasons really need to live close to campus. Within that context, grad student leaders are worried that if the new grad residence on Vassar is priced such that only rooms in 4-beds are accessible to grad students, and the off-campus market looks similar, we may lose promising admitted students to other universities in the top 10 in their fields where the housing market gives grad students more options.