

Institute Diversity Summit

January, 2012



Institute Diversity Summit 2012

Executive Summary

On January 27, 2012, MIT held the Institute Diversity Summit 2012, a full-day program focused on the theme of “Diversity and Excellence.” A collaborative effort that drew together faculty, students and staff, the Summit offered a variety of programming, including panels, a keynote lecture, and small breakout sessions, providing participants with multiple opportunities to analyze and discuss the important ways in which diversity and excellence go hand-in-hand, as well as some of the challenges still facing the Institute in the goal of achieving diversity and inclusion.

A total of 286 participants attended. The breakdown was as follows:

- 189 Staff or 66%
- 40 Students or 14%
- 35 Faculty or 12%
- 9 Non-MIT or 3%
- 9 MIT-Affiliate 3%
- 4 Postdoc or 1%

Perspectives and practical strategies for improving the diversity climate were offered from various members of the MIT community as well as leaders beyond MIT. The following pages describe specific themes and recommendations by cohort—faculty, students, and staff. Two common themes that emerged from all three groups were the need for greater leadership and communication.

Faculty, students, and staff look to the administration for leadership on diversity and inclusion. Institutional leadership on diversity and inclusion is essential at all levels. Attention from the top can help ensure momentum and prevent dissipation of efforts. Likewise, faculty, students, and staff all want more communication about this topic—that is, they want more information as well as want more training and opportunities to have fruitful discussions.

Context

MIT has made a concerted effort to advance diversity and inclusion at all levels. The dimensions of diversity include race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, and disability. The organizers of the Institute Diversity Summit 2012 had hoped that we no longer needed to articulate the value of diversity to the MIT community; we have never had a more diverse, selective, or outstanding student body. Nevertheless, the MIT community has a range of views about the alignment of diversity and excellence. The set of editorials and letters about affirmative action

published during late February 2012 in the student newspaper, *The Tech*, make clear that equity and inclusion must be promoted at all levels within MIT.

Faculty members who have been silent observers will be more effective educators if they are informed and equipped to support diversity and excellence. One student respondent to a survey following the Institute Diversity Summit wrote, “MIT is aware of the problems arising from its diversity, but the administration and faculty do not know what to do about it.” Some of the problems are hinted at by another student: “It would help if faculty looked at who’s in their classroom and taught accordingly instead of alienating segments of the population.” Most students have good relationships with faculty yet there is room for improvement. Students look up to faculty as role models, and the evidence shows that improved interaction with faculty correlates with greater student success. Students of color, women and LGBTQ students often mention that they have few opportunities to interact with faculty of similar backgrounds, gender, and/or sexual orientation as themselves.

In one poignant discussion during a morning panel session at the 2012 Institute Diversity Summit, students described the discomfort they feel in facing the elephant (of race, gender, or other differences) in the room, while an emeritus faculty member responded by noting that discomfort is often a precondition for learning; we learn by moving outside our comfort zones. Faculty, too, learn by going beyond what is familiar and comfortable.

The MIT faculty and administration have made it a priority to increase the gender and racial diversity of our graduate student and faculty populations. In 2004, a faculty resolution was passed unanimously calling upon the Institute to double the percentage of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty members and to triple the percentage of URM graduate students within a decade. Every year the Provost reports to the faculty on progress toward these goals. Achieving these goals will require greater efforts by more faculty members.

The following is a summary of the 2012 Institute Diversity Summit organized by cohort: faculty, students, and staff. We have summarized themes and recommendations.

Faculty Perspectives

Summary: A total of 35 faculty members, including 3 school deans and 3 department heads, attended part or all of the Institute Diversity Summit; of these, 37% responded to a survey conducted afterwards. A review of the summit sessions and feedback provided several themes of interest to faculty and administrators seeking guidance on next steps:

1. **Faculty members want to know what MIT is doing to increase faculty diversity.** While the Report of the Faculty Race Initiative was discussed by the faculty panel, the follow-through on this report was not discussed. Current and best practices should be widely communicated.
2. **There are obstacles to achieving true meritocracy.** At the Summit Prof. Lotte Bailyn showed evidence that the presumption of meritocracy—a foundation of MIT’s culture—is fraught with peril. MIT prides itself on being a place where achievement is valued for its own sake. However, data suggest that the premise that our processes foster and recognize merit independently of a person’s background is incorrect and can paradoxically increase bias and decrease meritocracy.
3. **Student stories of their discomfort with racial, ethnic or gender-based tensions are compelling.** Some faculty members are unaware of the social challenges faced by students in their daily lives and the impact that negative experiences have on students. MIT should seek ways of making these stories more widely known within the community.
4. **MIT can provide bold leadership to broaden access to technical fields of national importance.** OCW and MITx reach hundreds of thousands of students. Our alumni network reaches tens of thousands. Leveraging these efforts to contact and encourage female students, underrepresented minorities, disabled and socioeconomically disadvantaged students could significantly increase the flow of talent to MIT and its peers.
5. **Afternoon sessions on implicit bias, imposter syndrome, multiculturalism and transgender experiences provided helpful tips for faculty dealing with these situations.** Presentations of these topics by staff members were very well received.
6. **Faculty members should acknowledge that every member of the MIT community is here because of ability and should challenge statements to the contrary.** The privilege of faculty status brings the responsibility to challenge claims that anyone is at MIT because of their race, gender, or other qualities unrelated to ability. Failure to do so is demeaning to individuals and harmful to the climate for all in the community.
7. **Staff members are important allies in faculty efforts to improve diversity, equity and inclusion.** The Summit was organized and run largely by staff members, who bring enthusiasm and dedication to their passion of creating a better MIT.
8. **More faculty and administrators must become engaged with these issues.** The Summit is a good way to introduce faculty to the mens et manus of diversity and inclusion. More department heads should attend, as they ultimately make important hiring decisions. Attendees want to stop preaching to the choir and want instead to have an impact on the majority.

9. **Staff, faculty, and students look to the administration for leadership on diversity and inclusion.** Institutional leadership on diversity and inclusion is essential at all levels. Attention from the top can help ensure momentum and prevent dissipation of efforts.
10. **The community wants more diversity summits and similar efforts.** The last comparable event was the Diversity Leadership Congress in 2008. The 2012 Summit attendees want annual summits and other activities to maintain the momentum created by the event. Faculty, students and staff are often unaware of the course offerings and programming related to diversity issues, or unaware of the Diversity and Inclusion website (diversity.mit.edu). More concerted efforts should be made to publicize these resources.

Student Perspectives

Summary: A total of 40 students attended the Institute Diversity Summit; of these, 30% responded to a survey conducted afterwards. A review of the summit sessions and feedback provided several themes, which connect with both faculty and staff themes.

1. **Communication about diversity issues needs to be increased.** In addition, communication needs to be varied for a diverse audience with diverse ways of receiving information. Students want to learn the skills and the “language” to be able to talk more about diversity and inclusion. And they want more opportunities to have these discussions in safe spaces. MIT should do more to promote the SHASS subject offerings relating to racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and religious diversity, which offer students such opportunities.
2. **Messaging needs to go beyond race and gender.** There is a need to define excellence and meritocracy in the context of the broader framework of diversity and inclusion.
3. **Students want visible leadership on these matters from MIT senior leaders: President, Provost, Deans, and Department Heads.** They also want active faculty involvement.
4. **MIT needs to acknowledge differences in viewing diversity and inclusion (e.g., generational and international).** How do we engage students and make relevant concepts that resonate with a population who has experienced diversity differently from older generations? How do we engage students with concepts that resonate with a population that has experienced diversity differently in other countries without the U.S. historical context?
5. **Address the tension felt by students from programs that support underrepresented minorities and the greater MIT community.** As one participant put it: “There’s a delicate balance between helping minorities to feel like themselves, offer groups for them to join (e.g., Chocolate City), while also making sure that they are an integrated part of the larger community.”

6. **There are clear challenges to this work.** Students can be uncomfortable asking for help because this goes against the MIT culture of not needing help. Students can also feel uncomfortable approaching faculty.

Staff Perspectives

Summary: A total of 189 staff members attended the Institute Diversity Summit; of these, 50% responded to a survey conducted afterwards. A review of the summit sessions and feedback provided themes and recommended action items for the MIT community.

1. **There is a strong belief that there has not been enough community-wide communication since the Diversity Congress in 2008.** Staff want to see more visibility around this issue—from photos and messaging across campus to more local awareness in the units—there is a hunger for more. It was also felt that the climate could change with more frequent discussions.
2. **Questions about ownership of diversity and inclusion are common.** Staff members wonder whether action on diversity and inclusion should flow from the top or bottom of the organization. Regardless, staff members expect senior leadership to own the topic sufficiently so that it becomes integrated into MIT's culture.
3. **Staff wonder how to respond to diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace.** Staff members want help/training to address difficult conversations. Recommendations about how to address this included doing “Diversity 101” as an Institute-wide seminar and making it mandatory for staff (a la hazardous chemical trainings) and borrowing from Harvard’s “Sustained Dialogues.”
4. **The opportunity to network with those outside of their typical sphere was considered a highlight by many.** Many staff do not get the chance to interact with faculty and students and they want more.
5. **There was a universal feeling that we need to find ways to engage those who did not attend and typically do not attend events like the Summit.** Suggestions included offering more events where small groups are made accessible to others (e.g., a Puerto Rico day).
6. **Many noted they wanted the scope to go beyond race.** Participants want to hear more about privilege, disability, gender identity, and religion.
7. **It was considered important to include the diversity and inclusion lens from the start of an employee's MIT tenure.** Activities related to onboarding/orientation including creating a new employee network and social events; and a reminder to include Lincoln Laboratory in these activities.
8. **We can learn from our other initiatives.** Consider using the Green Ambassador model for mentoring, i.e., Diversity Ambassador.

9. **There was a call for a more formal structure/communication to address hiring practices, e.g., awareness of older applicants and people of color.**

A Sampling of Staff Comments

“I came away realizing that diversity supports excellence – if one defines excellence in an expansive way that embraces divergent, innovative, creative thinking. Diversity is the opposite of narrowness – and all too often a narrow definition of excellence is applied to what we do.”

“We need to engage faculty and staff who were not in the audience. We need to have specific goals and objectives and a timetable to achieve them.”

“MIT’s underrepresented minority students continue to suffer from the misperception that they were admitted because they are minorities, even though they are outstanding. The admissions data should be shared so everyone knows how competitive they are.”

“The relevance of the concept needs to be sold. Some of the things I heard in the conference really struck me...participating in this helped me become aware of things I hadn’t thought of before.”

“This was a needed avenue for purposeful discussions. I really enjoyed being able to bring my perspective to the conversation on diversity and feel confident that my contributions added to the session.”

“The ideal goal in diversity is not necessarily a percentage or number of representation but instead implementing a culture of acceptance, support, and welcome.”

Resources

The Institute Diversity Summit revealed the deep interest of staff in helping to create a climate of inclusion where everyone can achieve their best. More than five times as many staff members as faculty attended the Summit. Staff members seek guidance from the faculty and administration on how best to promote diversity and inclusion, but at the same time they are often an excellent resource themselves for faculty and students seeking guidance on those same issues. Staff members played a crucial role in planning the Summit and in facilitating workshops and breakout sessions. They suggested mandatory diversity training for staff and proposed that students and faculty also receive training and engage in community building efforts. Staff members in every category are

natural allies to the faculty and administration in strengthening MIT, and can be crucial advocates for students.

Because of its decentralized nature, MIT lacks a central resource for information about diversity and inclusion or its best practices. The Committee on Race and Diversity (CRD) and the Council on Staff Diversity and Inclusion (CSDI) are working together to improve coordination and communication of information and efforts. The CRD and CSDI maintain a mailing list for distribution of information about campus events promoting diversity and inclusion. Although there are websites across the Institute that include diversity and inclusion information, there is currently not enough support to maintain MIT's central communications vehicle for this topic, the Inventing our Future website.

Summit attendees stressed the value and importance of continuing conversations about diversity and inclusion. Activities since the Summit have included two lectures [as of 4/4/12], a forum, a conference and just as importantly, opportunities for discussions at the local level.

Future events for the entire community are being planned by the CRD and CSDI and will be announced through the diversity mailing list and websites and the MIT events calendar.

The Committee on Race and Diversity is gathering from the school deans their responses to the Report of the Initiative on Faculty Race and Diversity. Best practices to promote diversity and create a supportive climate where everyone can thrive will be summarized in the Faculty Newsletter. The Deans for Undergraduate, Graduate Education, and the Division of Student Life have created strategic plans with new programs and assessment methods to improve the climate for students. Deans and Department Heads will be informed about these resources and encouraged to discuss them with faculty in their units.

Summary

Our goal must be to build a true meritocracy by valuing and leveraging the diversity of backgrounds, talents and experiences in our community. It is not enough that MIT be top-ranked in the quality of its academic departments; it can and must become the best place to work and study for everyone in our community. We hope that this document not only reflects the pulse of the MIT community, but also a call to action—for the Summit participants and the broader MIT community—with a demonstrated commitment by MIT's senior leadership. Together, our efforts will be worthy of MIT.

APPENDIX

Institute Diversity Summit Program 2012

January 27, 2012 8:45-3:30

Co-sponsored by the Committee on Race and Diversity and the Council on Staff Diversity and Inclusion

Program:

Keynote speaker: Dr. Evelyn Hammonds, Dean of Harvard College.

Faculty panel discussion on Diversity and Excellence, facilitated by Prof. Emma Teng, with Prof. Lotte Bailyn, Prof. Edmund Bertschinger, Chancellor Eric Grimson and Associate Provost Wesley Harris.

Student panel discussion on Diversity and Excellence, facilitated by Bomy Lee Chung with Eric Boyer '13 Alex Evans, 'G (EAPS), Laura Lopez, Postdoctoral Fellow, (Kavli Institute for Astrophysics & Space Research) Sophie Ni, 'G (SOE; Material Science)

Break-Out Sessions

Afternoon Programs

Being a Transgender Ally, Abigail Francis, Division of Student Life

Have you ever heard the term Transgender, GenderQueer, Intersex, or Cisgender? Can you describe the difference between sex, gender, and sexuality? Are you aware that people who identify as transgender and/or gender variant face harassment and discrimination even at "progressive" places like MIT? Please join us for information and a discussion about being inside and outside of the gender binary. Come learn more about the facts, the challenges, and the role you and others can play as an ally and advocate.

Implicit Bias, Robbin Chapman, Associate Provost and Academic Director for Diversity and Inclusion, Wellesley College

Influence on judgment is called "bias." When assumptions and stereotypes influence our attitudes, we may find making a fair judgment about someone difficult. What we believe to be objective action may unduly be influenced by unconscious bias. In this session, we will unpack the causes of bias, check for it, and with practice, minimize its influence on our decisions. Our goal is to heighten awareness of our attitudes, perceptions and feelings as we move throughout a multicultural society. Be prepared for a hands-on thinking and learning experience.

*Cultural awareness for more effective Intercultural Communication at Work,
Bhaskar Pant, Executive Director of MIT Professional Education in the School of Engineering*

At MIT, we work in a culturally diverse, global work environment. Staff, students and faculty come from different corners of the world, and many of us interact also with international partners and clients outside the United States.

In this interactive seminar, Bhaskar Pant, an internationally-experienced instructor in intercultural communication in the global workplace, will make you aware of visible and invisible cultural differences and how they impact both in person and virtual interactions across cultures. You will learn about two primary groups of culture in the world, along with their traits and characteristics, which could allow you to better understand behavioral differences you encounter at work and elsewhere. You will learn about your own “cultural behavior” and how it may be perceived by those from other cultures. You will discover that language and culture are interconnected, and even though we are bonded by a common language at MIT, certain expressions in English don’t travel too well across cultures. Pant will end his presentation by providing tips for more effective intercultural communication.

*The Imposter Syndrome, Sebastian Velez, Assistant Dean of Academic Programs at the Office of
Minority Education at MIT*

Have you ever felt like everybody but you knows what they are doing? Do you fear people finding out you are really not as smart as they think you are? Do you sometimes feel like MIT made a mistake in admitting you? Then you may be suffering from the impostor syndrome.

While it’s common for unskilled people to lack the self-awareness to rate their own incompetence, in academic the opposite is more common: competent, skilled people who underrate their own abilities and who believe that their accomplishments come from a mixture of luck and their ability to fool others, thus making them impostors just faking it.

In this workshop we will explore the roots of the feelings of being an impostor, and ways to mitigate them.